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Fairley Le Moal

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**Around the dinner table. Constructing  
commensality within the family.**

*An ethnographic approach of the conditions, forms and  
effects of everyday mealtimes in Lyon and Adelaide.*

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Université Lumière Lyon 2 – *Ecole Doctorale 483*  
Flinders University – *College of Nursing and Health Sciences*

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## **Around the dinner table: constructing commensality within the family**

An ethnographic approach of the conditions, forms and effects of  
everyday mealtimes in Lyon and Adelaide

---

**Fairley Le Moal**

*Thesis submitted to*

Université Lumière Lyon 2 for the degree of  
Doctor of Sociology

Flinders University for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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*Publicly presented and defended on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 2022*



# Summary of thesis

Everyday family mealtimes are promoted by public health authorities, the media and private organisations (in France and in many Anglo-Saxon countries, such as in Australia) for various health, wellbeing and social benefits. Parents and especially mothers also commonly describe eating together regularly as a norm they try to live up to.

Nevertheless, we know little about the various dimensions according to which everyday family mealtimes unfold. Most of the research is based on interviews and mainly on the voice of mothers. In some studies, French family practices are compared to those in Anglo-Saxon cultures, but this is mainly with households in North America. This thesis is based on in-person ethnography with 10 families in Lyon (France) and a digital ethnography with 4 families in Adelaide (Australia). The participating households were mostly situated in middle class positions, with some upper class families and had from 1 to 5 children aged 4 to 12 years. The results came from observations of 42 mealtimes, 33 of which were in person. Semi-directive interviews were also conducted with the fathers and mothers and with most of the children.

The family mealtimes observed unfolded according to various health norms, which related to the satisfaction of satiety and the control of the eating rhythm. Parents strived to socialise children to the sharing of a healthy and varied diet, in a synchronised manner. The health equation of commensality depended on children's age, their needs and eating capacities as well as it varied according to socially differentiated apprehensions of children's taste.

These preoccupations around health identified at mealtimes stretched out to the conversations taking place, which revolved around various family norms. The parents tried to get children to talk about their daytime activities to make sure their lifestyle away from home was adequately healthy (in dietary terms but also concerning children's wellbeing, educational development and social life). The parents were witnessed trying to create a collective conscience of the family by recalling past activities and sharing their individual experiences, as well as talking about future family projects (Berger and Kellner 1964). As with food socialisation, the children were seen showing resistance by engaging in conversations on their own terms and temporality, sometimes even refusing to engage (Goffman 1981). The mealtimes examined in this study also tended to reproduce conjugal and generational hierarchical relationships. The way communication unfolded reinforced the fathers as custodians of parental authority and the mothers as guardians of egalitarian relationships between siblings and of family cohesion (Singly 1996).

Conviviality appeared as another imperative during the observed mealtimes – in Lyon and in Adelaide – and was associated with a significant amount of 'emotion work' based on multiple 'feeling rules' (Hochschild 1983) produced by parents and children. While most of the fathers occupied a central role by performing humour, the mothers were mostly in charge of repairing the emotional atmosphere when 'interferences' arose, such as the demonstration of negative and intense emotions. Performing conviviality, in the context of this fieldwork, sometimes contradicted other central dimensions relating to children's food socialisation to healthy diets and was also reported and observed in Adelaide.

The results compel us to rethink larger scale research on commensality and the importance given to information collected through indirect methods rather than through direct observation. Further research should also investigate practices of lower socio-economic groups as well as develop a deeper cultural comparison perspective.

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# Summarised table of contents

Introduction	18
1. Overlooking family mealtimes	18
2. A black box hidden in plain sight	19
3. Overview of the methodology	22
4. Manuscript structure	22
Chapter 1. Addressing everyday commensality within the family: literature review, theoretical frameworks and research problem	24
1. Introduction	24
2. Literature review	24
2.1. Methods of the literature review	24
2.2. Deconstructing the object	25
2.3. Results from the literature review	32
2.4. Gaps in the literature	38
3. Epistemology and theoretical perspective	42
3.1. Socialisation theories	43
4. A research object overlapping several sociological fields	45
4.1. Sociology of food and eating	45
4.2. Sociology of family life	45
4.3. Sociology of emotions	47
5. A two-fold questioning: unfolding everyday commensal performances, in relation to family life, gender, social position and cultural origins.	49
Chapter 2. Observing family meals: ethical issues, methodological choices and practical adjustments	52
1. Introduction	52
2. Finding a way to ethnography: an access to fieldwork repetitively hindered	52
2.1. The methodological approach of ethnography	52
2.2. Legitimising the ethnographic approach as a scientific method	53
2.3. The COVID-19 pandemic: delay in the fieldwork access and impossible in-person fieldwork in Adelaide	57
3. Recruiting households for a burdensome study	62
3.1. Different ways of accessing to families: recruitment process	62

3.2.	Obtaining participants' consent and assent: between a bureaucratised process and informal interactions	67
3.3.	Participating families	72
4.	Organisation of the ethnography and the different methods used	76
4.1.	Various types of observational methods	76
4.2.	Interviews	82
4.3.	Digital reporting of food practices	83
4.4.	Arriving in families' homes	84
4.5.	Leaving families' homes	84
4.6.	Ending fieldwork	85
4.7.	Summary of the different materials constructed	87
5.	The analytical process	88
5.1.	Instant fieldwork analysis	88
5.2.	Transcription	88
5.3.	Coding	90
5.4.	Analysing through writing	92
5.5.	Reflexivity	92
6.	Conclusion	94
Chapter 3.	Family portraits and social life rhythms	96
1.	Introduction	96
2.	'Disclosing their private life without revealing their identities'	97
3.	Families from Lyon	98
3.1.	The Bourdon, a rich family with high cultural capital	98
3.2.	The Imbert family, a socio-economic ascension from a working-class background	104
3.3.	The Franquet family, an established upper middle class household accommodating their son's illness	107
3.4.	The Comescu family, a relatively high economic capital and Eastern European cultural origins	109
3.5.	The Ferret family, maintaining an upper class position while developing a career	110
3.6.	The Obecanov family, an intermediary middle class family with Eastern European cultural origins	111
3.7.	The Lebrun family, a new couple and a large family of intermediary social class	112
3.8.	The Nimaga family, a multicultural, socially mixed and reconstituted household	118
3.9.	The Rizzo family, maintaining an established intermediary middle-class position as a single father	118
3.10.	The André family, a lower middle class household with interrupted professional careers	119
4.	Families from Adelaide	119

4.1.	The Bennet family, happy at work, extensive sports practice and traditional parental roles	119
4.2.	The Brown family, happy at work and rather traditional parental roles	120
4.3.	The Chapman family, demanding jobs, many organised leisure activities, and bringing up children with large age differences	121
4.4.	The Davies, over worked, exhausted and caring parents	122
5.	The everyday family rhythms and routines	123
5.1.	Cultural and social differences in the children's bedtime hours	124
5.2.	Differences in the social life rhythms between Lyon and Adelaide	130
5.3.	Later and longer family dinners in Lyon than in Adelaide	134
5.4.	Priority of children's extracurricular activities over mealtimes	137
5.5.	Homework and bathing temporalities were inverted between Lyon and Adelaide	138
6.	Conclusion	141
Chapter 4. The unequal circumstances behind family mealtimes: pressure and pleasure in the kitchen		143
1.	Introduction	143
2.	The rationales for providing family meals	146
2.1.	Time scarcity and stress	146
2.2.	The healthy meal imperative	147
2.3.	The weight of individual preferences and dietary restrictions	153
3.	Anticipation and improvisation in the organisation of food work	160
3.1.	Anticipation strategies	160
3.2.	Ad hoc approaches	173
4.	Repetition and creation in the experience of food work	183
4.1.	Food work care as a burden	184
4.2.	Cooking as pleasurable and relaxing activity	192
5.	Conclusion	210
Chapter 5. The boundaries of family mealtimes		215
1.	Spatial delimitations	219
1.1.	From the dining table to the lounge room	219
1.2.	Sitting together and its interruptions	237
2.	Temporal structures	248
2.1.	Setting the table for the family, clearing for oneself	248
2.2.	Not eating before the mealtime: exceptions to the rule	250
2.3.	Waiting till everybody is served to begin to eat	253
2.4.	Separating together	256

2.5. When commensality crumbled	257
3. Conclusion	263
Chapter 6. The health equation of commensality	267
1. Introduction	267
2. From the satisfaction of physiological needs to sustaining healthy bodies	270
3. Sharing food	272
3.1. Socialising to taste: from the display to the ingestion of new food	273
3.2. Contradictory apprehensions of the socialisation to taste process between parents and children	281
3.3. Sharing equals quantities as a moral value and a way to control the diet	284
4. Sharing time	286
4.1. Controlling food ingestion through multiple courses	287
4.2. Unsynchronised rhythms: when children eat too quickly and are in a haste to leave	288
4.3. Unsynchronised rhythms: when children want to stay longer at the table and parents are anxious to leave	290
4.4. The unity of time and content crumbles at the desert	295
5. Conclusion	296
Chapter 7. Creating the family through mealtime conversations	299
1. Introduction	299
2. A traditionally privileged scene for conversations	302
2.1. Representations of commensality as a communication facilitator	302
2.2. Shifts in commensal practices: when other times and spaces exist for family communication	305
2.3. When screens support mealtime communication	308
3. The centrality of conversations in the creation of a family unity	309
3.1. The family is constructed through children and what is important in their life	310
3.2. Getting children to talk about their day: checking their health is sustained outside the household	312
3.3. Creating a common world and defining its boundaries	318
4. Hierarchies and tensions in the creation of a family unity	323
4.1. Generational and gendered hierarchies in the creation of the family unity	323
4.2. Tensions between individual singularities and the collective	329
5. ‘Hush, let Mum finish speaking’: gendered mealtime interactions	339
5.1. Gendered differences in the valorisation of mealtime conversations	339
5.2. Fathers distribute conversations turns and keep it for themselves	343
6. Conclusion	345

Chapter 8. Mealtime conviviality, a maternal responsibility	347
1. Introduction	347
2. The management of discontent and conflict at the table	351
2.1. Isolating behaviours	352
2.2. Antagonising demeanours	354
2.3. Gendered management of mealtime interferences	359
3. The maternal praise of conviviality	363
4. The work of being happy together at the table	366
4.1. Pleasant and affectionate mealtimes	366
5. The meaning of having fun at the table	368
5.1. Conjugal mocking interactions	370
5.2. Intergenerational teasing	376
5.3. Socialisation to humour through children's ages	387
6. The effects of prioritising conviviality over other commensal dimensions	392
7. Conclusion	396
Conclusion	400
1. Summary and discussion of the main findings	400
1.1. Emotion work and the maternal imperative of conviviality	400
1.2. The centrality of mealtime conversations in the creation of the family	402
1.3. Social variation in the health equation of commensality	403
1.4. At the boundaries of family mealtimes and the subversion of commensal norms	404
1.5. The unequal experiences of the production of family meals	405
1.6. Family mealtimes compete with other work, family and health imperatives	407
2. Transversal findings	407
2.1. The role and experiences of fathers in family meals	407
2.2. Putting into perspective French family mealtimes with Australian practices	409
2.3. Commensality and its articulation with the making of the family and health	409
3. Reflecting on the in-person observation of everyday family mealtimes	410
4. Strengths, perspectives and implications	411
4.1. Strengths: being accepted into families' home and recording the observations	411
4.2. Perspectives and implications	412
Résumé de la thèse	416



# Note to the reader

A few elements require the attention of the reader, before beginning the reading of this manuscript.

I have translated all the verbatim from the French participants into English. Following each translated verbatim extract within the chapters, the reader will also find the original French version. This version appears in lighter, grey writing and in a paragraph indented further to the right.

The reader should also be warned that many if not most of the verbatim extracts are significantly long.

Finally, below each verbatim extract and picture derived from the observations, the following elements will be indicated:

- 'dinner or lunch [number]', which stands for the in-person visits
- 'dinner or lunch [number], family produced video', which stands for the family produced videos
- 'dinner or lunch [number], video conf.', which stands for the visio, online observations
- 'food diary': written description or pictures sent by a family member

The dinner were classified in numerical order corresponding to the orders of the visit, regardless of the type of method. For instance, a mention indicating 'video conf. dinner 2' stands for the second visit at the household concerned, and not necessarily the second video conference observation done at that particular household.

An absence of mention of an origin means the verbatim extract came from an interview. Each family member was interviewed once. At times, there will be a mention of "dinner [number]" for a verbatim coming from an observation that happened before or after the mealtime. This will then be indicated in the text.

The reader can refer to *Table 1. Participating households from Lyon* and *Table 2. Participating households from Adelaide, pages 16 and 17 of this manuscript* for basic information about the participants' characteristics (names, social class, city, age of children).

The age of the children will be mentioned as such: Marius (8). The social class position will be indicated after the participant's name. This mention will not appear at each time, to avoid repetition but it will appear regularly throughout the manuscript (when the reminder is deemed to be needed for the reader). There will be the following mentions:

- (up. class) for an upper class family
- (up. mid. class) for an upper middle class family
- (int. mid. class) for an intermediary middle class family
- (low. mid. class) for a lower middle class family





# Glossary

*The analysis developed in this manuscript required mobilising many specific terms regarding domestic food practices. A few of these are defined here to facilitate the reading of the manuscript, although each of them is also described and discussed in the following chapters.*

## **Domestic food work**

Refers to all the activities, the organisation and the mental load required in the process of feeding the members of the household. The food work spans from the provisioning to the cleaning and includes some aspects of mealtimes. It contains practical, cognitive and emotional dimensions (DeVault 1991; Bove and Sobal 2006; Wright, Maher, and Tanner 2015; Middleton et al. 2022)

## **Mental load**

Cognitive and often invisibilised efforts required for activities and social relations. Usually associated to burdensome efforts (Haicault 1984).

## **Food work organisation**

Strategies developed in the taking care of the provisioning, food preparation, clearing and cleaning. The food work organisation is a significant mental load.

## **Planning**

Refers to the anticipation of the meal composition, whether through advanced provisioning, menus, food preparation or cooking. Usually, planning is done for several days of the week.

## **Meal plan**

Specifically refers to the advanced planning of the menus (knowing what to cook).

## **Menus**

Refers to the composition of the meal, whether there is one or several course. Also refers, in France, to the anticipated planning of these mealtime compositions for several days of the week.

## **Batch cooking**

Cooking in advance large quantities of food that will be directly (or quickly) ready to serve at the different mealtimes.

## **Provisioning**

Act of purchasing (doing groceries) or obtaining food by any other means (from a family garden, for instance). Does not necessarily imply leaving the household (i.e., home delivery or picking fruit or vegetables from the garden).

## **Food preparation**

Includes cooking but not exclusive to it: washing and cutting up vegetables in advances, and then storing them back into the fridge is not considered cooking but is part of the food preparation.

## **Cooking**

Refers to the food preparation process to get food ready to eat.

## **Family meal**

Refers to the activities of producing meals that will be eaten together as a family as well as the eating moment and practices.

## **Family mealtime**

Moment and activity of all or part of the family members present of a household, gathering to eat together. In this manuscript, a family meal is considered different from a family mealtime. Family

meals englobe family mealtimes. When talking about mealtimes, I am referring only to the gathering and eating moment.

### **Domestic or family commensality**

Same as family mealtime, although it covers a more theoretical aspect (C. Grignon 2001; Jönsson, Michaud, and Neuman 2021)

### **Emotion work**

Working on one's own emotions in order to correspond to the required emotional state or/and induce an expected emotional state in others. (Hochschild 1983b) Emotion work implies that feelings are manageable, that the degree or type of feeling, of oneself or of others, can be worked on. Emotion work constitute the efforts, not the outcome (which is not always successful). Emotion work can be evocative (trying to feel a certain way) or suppressive (trying not to feel a certain way) (Hochschild 1983b). Emotion work can also be avoided, which means putting oneself in a situation where one does not have to produce emotion work (Le Bihan and Mallon 2017). Emotion work has been observed during family mealtimes.

### **Feeling rule**

An emotional norm or rule that dictates how one should feel in a certain context, at a certain time. Many feelings rules dictate behaviour during family mealtimes and in family life in general (Hochschild 1983b)

### **Dinner table**

Considered as the table where the family members mostly ate.

### **Table preparation**

Clearing the table (of any non-commensal objects), setting the table.

### **Clearing**

Removing from the table all or some of the commensal items and bringing them to the kitchen or even putting them into the dishwasher.

### **Cleaning**

Covers cleaning the eating and the food preparation areas. Clearing and cleaning can be dissociated steps.

### **Feeding the family**

All of the above: the entire process of domestic food work, including feeding (during mealtimes) although the expression does not necessarily lead to eating together (DeVault 1991).

# Participating households

Table 1. Participating households from Lyon

Households from Lyon								
Family	Social class	Mother	Father	Children (age)	Children (age)	Children (age)	Children (age)	Children (age)
<b>Bourdon</b>	Upper class	Marie- Cécile	Benoit	Marius (8)	Lucie (6)			
<b>Imbert</b>	Upper class	Magali	Stéphane	Louise (8)	Rose (5)			
<b>Franquet</b>	Upper middle class	Nathalie	Lucas	Jules (12)	Marco (10)			
<b>Comescu</b>	Upper middle class	Irina	Laurent	Hugo (10)	Lea (7)			
<b>Ferret</b>	Upper middle class	Céline	Jérôme	Noémie (7)				
<b>Obecanov</b>	Intermediary middle class	Sophie	Viktor	Elisa (6)				
<b>Lebrun</b>	Intermediary middle class	Laëtitia	Pierre	Nathan (11)	Lena (10)	Malone (9)	Chloë (8)	Léo (6)
<b>Nimaga</b>	Intermediary middle class	Ana	Issa	Naya (12)	Lilia (5)			
<b>Rizzo</b>	Intermediary middle class		Guillaume	Zoé (10)				
<b>André</b>	Lower middle class	Angélique	Pascal	Lucas (8)	Enzo (6)	Céleste (4)		
<b>Armand</b>	Intermediary or upper middle class (?)	Bianca		(11)	(8)			
<b>Cellier</b>	Intermediary or upper middle class (?)		Sébastien	(8)	(6)			

Table 2. Participating households from Adelaide

Adelaide						
Family	Social class	Mother	Father	Children (age)	Children (age)	Children (age)
<b>Bennet</b>	Upper middle class	Vanessa	Craig	Henry (7)	Charlie (3)	
<b>Brown</b>	Upper middle class	Alison	Luke	Ivy (8)	Liam (6)	
<b>Chapman</b>	Upper middle class	Amy	Glen	Hannah (7)	Jacob (5)	Isla (1)
<b>Davies</b>	Intermediary middle class	Sally	Adam	Lily (7)	Abigail (5)	Oliver (5)

# Introduction

## 1. Overlooking family mealtimes

There is nothing original about the topic of family meals. Everybody eats and most people have already experienced family meals, whether on an everyday basis, much more exceptionally or else in the past. I grew up in a household where eating meant eating together and family meals were unquestionable cornerstones of family life. Whenever I explained to somebody this doctoral research, my interlocutor would easily understand and relate to the topic, though in various manners according to the person: many would directly assume I was only examining the food served and eaten. Some people would react lamenting a decline of families eating together. Other would find it to be a very mundane, even trivial matter, wondering why a thesis had to be done on that matter (and who would pay for such work).

Although I had previously studied food practices, I had never touched upon family meals and my first non-informed, naive thoughts were that it must have been a rather overstudied and obsolete topic. I quickly became passionate about family meals as a sociological object, and particularly to better understand and deconstruct the notions of family and health. However, my first preconceived ideas about family meals led me to navigate around them in the construction of my research object. It took me a while to properly grasp the topic and sit down at the dinner table, both intellectually and in practice, as I did not get to observe family meals until May 2020, about a year and a half after my thesis began, in February 2019.

This insight into the way I grasped the topic actually relates to the current research on family meals and partially explains the way this thesis was constructed here. I was initially contacted by the Institut Paul Bocuse Research Centre with a first thesis proposal, titled 'Does eating together as a family improve the quality and variety of food, improve family psychosocial relationships, and increase family wellbeing?', with a cultural comparison perspective between France and Australia. I began working on this thesis topic by conducting two distinct literature reviews, in parallel. I developed a broad narrative review of the literature in social sciences on domestic food work and family meals (Le Moal et al. 2021) and took part as well in a systematic literature review in nutrition and public health sciences (Middleton et al. 2020). I had soon realised that family meals had been studied extensively, from a health sciences perspective, and most studies were constructed around the notion that shared mealtimes were beneficial for family members. From a social sciences perspective, the literature indicated that the food work surrounding family meals had also been studied in depth, in various

countries. Part of the literature in sociology also criticised studies from health sciences, which aimed at promoting family mealtimes, on the basis that some of these promotions were morally biased.

Overall, family meals and family mealtimes had been studied extensively but there still appeared to be central gaps in the literature. Many of the studies identified navigated around family meals rather than addressing the topic of *family members eating together per se*. This also meant that there exists a form of vagueness in the expression of family meals that even permeates the research fields tackling it. Family meals were often mobilised to designate the preparation of family mealtimes. This confusion comes from the polysemy of the word meal, or “repas” in French. A meal is indeed both the content that is to say the food prepared and served as well as the time dedicated to eat the food and its associated practices

I have used several expressions distinctively in the following chapters to clarify these ambiguities: family meal (or dinner), family mealtime (or dinnertime) as well family or domestic commensality. A family meal broadly refers to the entire process that family members carry out to be able to eat together, from the provisioning, cooking, preparing the eating area and cleaning up, from the organisation and mental load (Haicault 1984) of these activities to the sharing of food in itself. A family mealtime or dinnertime is part of the family meal process, implying that family meals exceed mealtimes, in terms of spatiality, temporality, practices and mental load. Family mealtimes are family meals minus their backstage. They can be defined rather generically as the moment and actions when family members come together to eat, in a broad and vague sense as there exists flexibility in the multiple aspects of the togetherness of mealtime. Family commensality refers to family mealtimes, but encapsulates a more theoretical aspect of the expression (C. Grignon 2001; Sobal, Bove, and Rauschenbach 2002). There exists everyday domestic commensality, referred to as routine shared mealtimes between close family members and exceptional commensality which indicates an extraordinary occasion, usually with a larger commensal circle, a more elaborate or exceptional menu or a meal taken at a different location (C. Grignon 2001). This thesis is about *everyday family mealtimes*, although I have also looked at some exceptional commensal occasions within the participating households (such as having guests over, a birthday party, a picnic). I analysed them as well by investigating their backstages and the necessary efforts to get them ready.

## **2. A black box hidden in plain sight**

Outside of academia, everyday and exceptional domestic commensality are usually portrayed in two different, antagonistic manners. On the one hand, exceptional family mealtimes are represented in

popular cinema in a rather dramatic view<sup>1</sup>, with family conflicts erupting and being settled (see the French movie *Le Prénom*), where family secrets are revealed, threatening the existence of the family unity in itself, or at least the family as a space of affection, security and growth (see the Danish movie *Festen*). Overall, there are many representations of extraordinary domestic commensality that put forward the struggles that eating together can pose. Everyday routine family mealtimes (other than breakfast) are more rarely portrayed in cinema (although see the American movie *Little Miss Sunshine*, for example).

On the other hand, everyday family meals are commonly pictured in the media as being inherently positive and rather easy, all while lamenting the alleged decline of eating together. While previously the discourses were usually about the rise of so-called ‘individualized eating habits’ that would “threaten the very idea of being able to eat together<sup>2</sup>, there are more nuanced discourses about the family meal today according to which “the injunction to eat together is completely unfounded”<sup>3</sup>. However, more specialised media communication, targeted to parents and more specifically mothers, still encourages the benefits that family mealtimes supposedly provide. Some acknowledged the difficulties people were faced with when tasked with organising and arranging the meal, but the overarching message was that “it’s worth the effort”, because of the beneficial outcomes in terms of dietary health, positive communication<sup>4</sup>, and school success families stand to gain from it<sup>5</sup>. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these messages were emphasised, with the diffusion of media discourses about family mealtimes arguing that lockdown episodes and work from home arrangements supposedly constituted unique “comforting” occasions for families to eat together more often and better<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2020/12/02/sept-films-savoureux-sur-des-repas-de-famille-explosifs-a-revoir-avant-noel\\_6061839\\_3476.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2020/12/02/sept-films-savoureux-sur-des-repas-de-famille-explosifs-a-revoir-avant-noel_6061839_3476.html) (accessed in December 2020)

<sup>2</sup> Le Repas (1/5): Manger Ensemble. Available online: <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/pas-la-peine-de-crier/le-repas-15-manger-ensemble> (accessed in November 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Partager un repas en famille, est-ce essentiel? Available online: <https://www.franceinter.fr/emissions/idees-recues/idees-recues-23-juillet-2017> (accessed in November 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Le plaisir de manger en famille. Available online: <https://www.mamanpourlavie.com/alimentation/repas--lunchs-et-collations/1285-le-plaisir-de-manger-en-famille.thtml> (accessed on 20 November 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Quels Sont Les Avantages Des Repas En Famille ?—Être Parents. Available online: <https://etreparents.com/quels-sont-les-avantages-des-repas-en-famille/> (accessed in November 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Confinement: «L'alimentation prend une place bien plus importante que dans la vie normale». Available online : [https://www.lemonde.fr/m-perso/2020/03/31/confinement-l-alimentation-prend-une-place-bien-plus-importante-que-dans-la-vie-normale\\_6035076\\_4497916.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/m-perso/2020/03/31/confinement-l-alimentation-prend-une-place-bien-plus-importante-que-dans-la-vie-normale_6035076_4497916.html) (accessed on 17 March 2021).

À table! Ça va refroidir! Available online: <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/radiographies-du-coronavirus/a-table-ca-va-refroidir> (accessed on 20 November 2020).

«Les Enfants, à Table!»: Leçons Alimentaires En Confinement. Available online: <http://theconversation.com/les-enfants-a-table-lecons-alimentaires-en-confinement-136579> (accessed on 20 November 2020). Confinement et alimentation: «Il faut réapprendre à manger ensemble tout le temps». Available online: <https://www.ouest-france.fr/sante/virus/coronavirus/entretien-confinement-et-alimentation-il-faut-reapprendre-manger-ensemble-tout-le-temps-6804697> (accessed on 20 November 2020).



In France, everyday family mealtimes were also advertised in the latest dietary public health program as a way of achieving a better diet and reducing the risk of obesity<sup>7</sup> (Dallacker, Hertwig, and Mata 2017; Hammons and Fiese 2011). It is notable, though, that the studies included in these meta-analyses were most commonly conducted in the United States; few of them were conducted in Europe and none in France. The French National Nutrition and Health Programme website states the following: “people who regularly eat meals together as a family would have a better diet than others and less risk of obesity”, and family meals are a “proven way to fight obesity”<sup>8</sup>. Here, the meal is targeted as a medium for dietary and weight normalisation. Family members are also urged to have regular meals together as they are “convivial” occasions<sup>9</sup>. Similar promotion is observed in the United States (Bowen, Brenton, and Elliott 2019), the United Kingdom (Murcott 2012; Jackson 2009a) and Australia (Lindsay et al. 2019a; Dagkas 2016). Intervention programs also exist that aim at increasing the frequency of eating together within households, promoting its alleged benefits. The American non-profit and non-government health program called The Family Dinner Project is an example of this<sup>10</sup> (Lindsay et al. 2019a). In Australia, domestic commensality is also encouraged through education programs (Dagkas 2016) or via organisation such as the Healthy Kids Association. The latter, that seeks to support and influence healthy food choices for children, states the following on their website: “research shows that families who eat together regularly (that’s more than three times a week) have shown to have more positive outcomes when it comes to health, family relationships and social development”<sup>11</sup>. They also acknowledged that it was “next to impossible” to eat together as a family because of long working hours and children’s activities but that families should endeavour to do so anyway.

This type of promotion of family mealtimes is misleading as, so far, only correlational associations have been shown between domestic commensality and positive health and wellbeing outcomes (Dwyer et al. 2015; Dallacker, Hertwig, and Mata 2017; Middleton et al. 2020). Most of all, we were lacking research looking into the various dimensions of mealtimes that could be beneficial, as most of the previous studies have focused on the frequency of mealtimes or the food work of providing family meals. Family mealtimes are thus apparent to a black box, but which would be hidden in plain sight. Family members are faced with many injunctions in terms of how to eat and feed the family and this family mealtime imperative relates to central concerns about the health and wellbeing of family

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<sup>7</sup> Ministère des solidarités et de la santé. *Programme National Nutrition Santé 2019–2023*; Ministère des solidarités et de la santé: Paris, France, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Pourquoi est-il important de se réunir autour de repas réguliers? | Manger Bouger. Available online: <https://www.mangerbouger.fr/Manger-mieux/Que-veut-dire-bien-manger/Pourquoi-est-il-important-de-se-reunir-autour-de-repas-reguliers> (accessed in November 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Pourquoi est-il important de se réunir autour de repas réguliers? | Manger Bouger. Available online: <https://www.mangerbouger.fr/Manger-mieux/Que-veut-dire-bien-manger/Pourquoi-est-il-important-de-se-reunir-autour-de-repas-reguliers> (accessed in November 2020).

<sup>10</sup> The Family Dinner Project. Available online: <https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/> (accessed in November 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Family Meals: Why Do They Matter?—Healthy Kids. Available online: <https://healthy-kids.com.au/parents/developing-positive-eating-behaviours/family-meals/> (accessed in 21 November 2020).

members. There is much debate in research about family meals, yet paradoxically, we knew little about the actual unfolding of family mealtimes in an everyday context. Before trying to figure out whether family mealtimes could be beneficial for family members, as the initial research proposal was aimed for, there was a need to further understand first *how everyday domestic commensality unfolded*.

It also appeared central to put into perspective family mealtimes in France, with commensal practices in an Anglo-Saxon country. This approach appeared promising to investigate such highly routinised dimensions of family life, cultural distance providing additional insight for the analysis of rather unconscious practices like mealtime interactions and emotions. Additionally, the normative family meal imperative presented above is often based on studies emanating from Anglo-Saxon jurisdictions; nevertheless, such promotion is similar regardless of cultural contexts.

### **3. Overview of the methodology**

This thesis is based on in-person fieldwork with ten families in Lyon (France), and on a digital ethnography with four families in Adelaide (Australia). The households were mostly situated in middle class positions, with some lower middle class and upper class families. The results came from observations of 42 mealtimes, 33 of which in person. Fifty semi-directive interviews were also conducted with 15 fathers, 14 mothers and 21 children aged four to 12 years.

### **4. Manuscript structure**

The analysis of family mealtimes unfolds in eight chapters. Each chapter is meant to overlap just enough with one another to create a guiding thread but not so much as to provoke repetition. The first two chapters present the theoretical and methodological construction of the research object. Chapter 1 addresses everyday family meals and mealtimes in light of the literature review and the chosen theoretical perspectives, leading to the definition of the research problem. Chapter 2 presents the methodological approach, the construction of the fieldwork and materials collected. In a zooming in process, I then move to describe the circumstances in which the family mealtimes observed took place, depicting portraits of the participating families in Chapter 3 and analysing the backstages of mealtimes in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 focuses on the boundaries of mealtimes, constituting a transitional stage in the manuscript between the examination of the conditions of production of family meals and the forms of mealtimes. From Chapter 6 to 8, I focus more properly on the forms as well as the effects of everyday commensality. In the general conclusion of this manuscript, I zoom out, taking perspective and discussing the results of this thesis.



# **Chapter 1. Addressing everyday commensality within the family: literature review, theoretical frameworks and research problem**

## **1. Introduction**

This chapter tackles everyday family meals by reviewing the existing literature and developing the theoretical frameworks that enabled me to address the gaps in our knowledge of everyday domestic commensality. The first aim of the literature review was to deconstruct the pervasive normative family meal representation presented previously and compare it with everyday experiences and performances of family meals, as reported by qualitative studies. The second aim was to identify the current limits and gaps in the research on family mealtimes. Following the identification of these gaps, I develop on the theoretical perspectives and their related epistemology that appeared the most suited to address these gaps. All these steps of the research – literature review, research gaps, epistemology and theoretical perspective, situation of the research with the various sociological fields – have informed and led to the construction of the research problem of this thesis.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. *Methods of the literature review***

I have adopted a narrative approach for the literature review of qualitative studies and opinion papers about family meals. This type of literature overview is commonly used in social sciences (Hart 1998). It was a suitable method that could provide a broad enough scope to deconstruct the normative family meal promotion and identify the following key areas of interests (Cronin, Ryan, and Coughlan 2008; Rother 2007): the premises and limitations of the normative family meal promotion, evidence (or counter-evidence) of declining family meals, family members' representations and practices of family meals and the variations according to social classes and gender status as well as potential methodological biases in the study of family meals.

The scope of this review included several types of papers published in English and in French: peer reviewed journal articles, book chapters, media articles and public health dietary guidelines. The initial search was very large: I first aimed at placing the family meals in the broad context of family food consumption. I identified the major and most recent publications in sociology and anthropology of

food (Régnier, Lhuissier, and Gojard 2006; Albala 2012; Murcott, Belasco, and Jackson 2013; Poulain 2013; Klein and Watson 2019; Julien and Diasio 2019; Cardon, Depecker, and Plessz 2019). This enabled me to identify previous publications on the topic of family food practices in general and family meals in particular. From then on, I also searched for databases with a large spectrum of key words that would enable me to find articles relating to the family meal as a social event (*Table 3. Keywords used for the databases searches*):

*Table 3. Keywords used for the databases searches*

<b>Databases Search Keywords</b>	
English	“family meal”, “family mealtime”, “family dinner”, “shared meal”, “commensality”, “domestic commensality”, “eat together”, “eating together”, “family food practices”, “family food work”
French	‘ repas de famille ’, ‘ repas en famille ’, ‘ commensalité ’, ‘ commensalité domestique ’, ‘ commensalité familiale ’, ‘ manger ensemble ’, ‘ manger en famille ’, ‘ pratiques alimentaires familiales ’

The following databases were used to conduct a wide search of articles from the social sciences: Sage Journals, Jstor, Taylor and Francis Online, Semantic Scholars, Springer Link, Wiley Online Library, Science Direct, NCBI, Pubmed, Cairn, HAL and Persée. Google search engine was also mobilised to identify media articles referring to family meals. The search process was also done by reviewing the references lists of the selected documents according to the topics of interests and research questions, thus providing further papers to review. As this is a narrative review, the searches were not systematic nor exhaustive but I navigated through these databases in an iterative process, keeping in mind my research questions, topics of interests and inclusion criteria.

This review is based on qualitative papers, but I included some quantitative studies as well to identify data on the frequency of family meals. To be included in the review, the qualitative studies had to be based on semi-guided interviews, focus groups, video and photo elicitation, in-person observations or ethnography. I defined “family” as a household with at least one parent and at least one child between the ages of 0 and 18 years.

## **2.2. Deconstructing the object**

In the following section, I deconstruct the normative family meal promotion by identifying its premises and limitations (*see Table 4. The normative family meal promotion: assumptions, premises and limitations*).

Table 4. The normative family meal promotion: assumptions, premises and limitations

<b>Premise</b>	<b>Families Do Not Eat Together Enough or Properly</b>	<b>Family Meals Provide Health Benefits</b>	<b>Family Meals are Always Convivial</b>
<b>Associations</b>	<p>Critique of the individualisation of food practices</p> <p>Critique of the introduction of technological devices during domestic commensality</p>	<p>Critique of eating alone (supposedly unhealthy, socially stigmatised)</p>	<p>Confusion between commensality and conviviality</p>
<b>Origins of these premises and associations</b>	<p>This lament is not new: it already existed at the end of the 19th century (France) and at the beginning of the 20th (UK)</p> <p>Fear of the dismantlement of the family</p>	<p>Healthification process of food practices (preventive approach)</p> <p>Parents are solely responsible for their health and that of their children</p>	<p>Representation of the family as a peaceful and non-hierarchical unit</p>
<b>Issues identified</b>	<p>Families are still eating together</p> <p>Perhaps families did not used to eat together before as much as imagined</p>	<p>There is limited evidence that family meals provide health and wellbeing benefits</p> <p>The preventive health approach to food is socially situated</p> <p>Such paradigm ignores structural inequalities</p>	<p>Conflicts are inherent to families</p> <p>The family does not pre-exist in itself, it is constructed and maintained through practices such as shared meals</p>

### 2.2.1. The Strength of the Normative Model of Family Meals

Many discourses of family members point to aspirations that are similar to the representation of a family meal as a positive experience and a necessity (Murcott 1997; Middleton et al. 2020). The way the meal was discussed refers more or less directly to an idealised and normative version of family life, that has the ability to make parents feel like they are not doing things correctly if they are not done according to this ideal (DeVault 1991). The sociologist DeVault's study of family food practices of a diverse group of American households sheds light on the work of feeding the family and the potential oppressiveness it can have for mothers. One mother in her study compared her practices with her childhood memories:

'My mom was home. And it really makes a world of difference. She always had good meals on the table... It was more of a family thing [...]. Now it's like helter skelter routine. If we're all home fine, if we're not then we just work around it [...]. There are a few times when I really regret it. I regret not having a family routine. It feels like, you know, your kids are being shuffled around, and you're being shuffled around. And there are times when I get this real craving to stay home, stay home and play housewife. But then you know there is no way in hell that you could afford it. It's a matter of economics. You have to do it in order to survive' (1991, 48)

Bowen and colleagues remind us that the promotion of the family meal in the United States began during the industrial area, when the nuclear family was constructed as a safeguard against dangers associated to the public realm (Bowen, Brenton, and Elliott 2019). However, usually only affluent households could achieve such a norm, generally by externalising other care and housework activities or with mothers staying at home.

In France, the family meal has also been constructed, during the nineteenth century, as bulwark against the dislocation of a certain type of family that would be threatened by modern life (Marenco 1992). There is a representation of a contemporary pattern of eating referring to three meals a day, according to regular schedules, in 'appropriate' places, usually sitting down at a particular table and with a certain number of courses at the meal. The French still refer to this strict pattern even if they do not comply with it in a rigorous manner, in particular in the structure of the meal (C. Grignon and Grignon 2009). As the sociologists Grignon and Grignon remind us, this was probably always the case, as 'the pattern of meals is an example to be followed, a kind of template, an ideal, too, to which one can approach but one can never wholly realize' (2009, 253). This pattern is also commonly associated with home cooked meals and a convivial atmosphere (Marenco 1992). What is indeed remarkable, even today, is that this model of regular family meals is strongly valued, even though evolutions of contemporary life make its practice difficult, if not impossible, on a daily basis (Cardon 2017; Middleton et al. 2020).

Surprisingly enough, as Marengo notes about the pattern of regular family meals, ‘the absence of reference of this model has an exceptional character: it leaves room for no other’ (1992, 6)

### 2.2.2. The Durability of a Nostalgic Approach to Family Meals

The lament of declining domestic commensality in Western societies (Murcott 2012; 1997) implies that families do not eat together enough or they do so in improper forms, with the presence of technological devices (such as TV and phones) for example (Ferdous et al. 2016; Masclat 2018). This discourse is associated with critiques of individualised food preferences and other practices commonly attributed to contemporary life such as eating out, mothers working full time outside of the home and children’s extracurricular activities. It also suggests that some potentially positive aspects of domestic commensality, such as communication opportunities or conviviality, cannot be reproduced elsewhere throughout family life. However, as the sociologist Fischler argues, the question of whether family relationships are dissolving with the decline of the family meal is subject to ideological and moral biases:

‘The reason is probably that the deepest issues at stake are of essential social significance and carry fundamentally moral undertones. After all, the sharing of food involves the very structure of social organization, no less than the division and allocation of resources’ (2011, 529).

Additionally, there is evidence that many households still have regular family meals, contrary to general belief (see *Table 5. Prevalence of family meals* below). Researchers have shown that this promotion of an ideal family meal families should endeavour to achieve existed in the Edwardian period in Britain (Murcott 2012; Jackson 2009a). This suggests that the promotion of a normative family meal, and fears of families not achieving it, are not new.

### 2.2.3. Searching for Health Benefits of Family Meals: A Preventive Approach

The normative representation of the family meal is linked to the belief that eating alone within the family household or worse, each member of the family eating separately, leads to unhealthy food behaviours (Kwon et al. 2018; Tani et al. 2015). It represents a form of ‘gastro-anomie’, according to Fischler (1979), where food norms are unstructured. This is connected with a wider lament of increased individualisation processes and of the reconfiguring of food sharing norms. The stigmatisation of eating alone could be associated with the belief that commensality helps regulate food intake (Kwon et al. 2018). Moreover, eating alone is often associated with eating in front of screens, such as phones, computers, televisions and electronic tablets, indicative of the negative image of eating alone, as if using technological devices during meals necessarily implies isolation and is altogether detrimental to the experience of the ideal meal (Ferdous et al. 2016). Having regular family meals has been linked with numerous positive health and wellbeing outcomes (Middleton et al. 2020), particularly in terms



of dietary and health benefits for children, including body weight (Dallacker, Hertwig, and Mata 2017; J. A. Fulkerson et al. 2014).

Some studies have reported a protective relationship between family meals and adolescent risk behaviours (Goldfarb et al. 2015) and disordered eating behaviours (Harrison et al. 2015) However, most of the research that seeks to provide evidence on the benefits of family meals is correlational, meaning a causal relationship cannot be determined. A recent systematic review of intervention studies that targeted family meal behaviours and measured family meal outcomes demonstrated that a causal relationship between family meals and health and wellbeing outcomes has yet to be proven (Middleton et al. 2020) Middleton and colleagues' review also reported that there is a scarcity of intervention studies specifically targeting the family meal, and a lack of consistent tools to measure family meal outcomes, thus preventing a proper critical examination of the impact these interventions may have on improving or changing family meals. Additionally, there is no evidence as to which component of the family meal—the frequency, the meal environment (the general mood of the eating together occasion, who is present, if technological devices are used during the meal, for example) or the food served—would be responsible for positive health outcomes.

Positioning mundane family meals simply as a healthy practice is a rather simplistic way of addressing a phenomenon that is complex and highly dependent on social and cultural norms and discourses, and that is not achievable nor desirable for many. The association of food and health is not new, and it has garnered the attention of anthropologists for a long time. There are inherent ambivalences in human food consumption. One of these is the complexity of the relationship between health and food, because the latter is an indispensable source of energy, nutrients and health but also a potential cause for illnesses and even death (Poulain 2013). What is notable with the normative family meal promotion is that it is not only the content of the meal that is supported for health reasons but also the form of eating, in particular how often and with whom, which is linked to the continuous extension of the notion of health, until it's definition by the World Health Organization as being characterised in term of physical, mental, wellbeing and social health. This association is also linked to the medicalisation of society, where more and more aspects of life are covered by a preventive health approach (Aïach and Delanoë 1998). Although it may not be a medicalisation of domestic commensality in the strict sense of the term, it corresponds to a healthification process, where each practice is examined in relation to its health benefits or dangers.

The health meanings that individuals adopt are varied and intimate and may not overlap with the construction of the family meal as a healthy practice (Crawford 2006). Encouraging domestic commensality through a preventive discourse implies that the association of food practices and health

is evident. This disregards the possibility that eating together can have a variation of meanings for people, depending on their gender, age, employment status, social class and culture. Public health dietary guidelines can be interpreted differently according to socio-economic positions (Fielding-Singh 2017b; Régnier and Masullo 2009; Wills et al. 2011a). Depending on different social positions and stages of life, the link between food practices and preventive health are not necessarily adopted or perhaps even known. The sociologists Régnier and Massulo explain that for families in France with higher socio-economic backgrounds, food is generally perceived in terms of its long-term health prevention possibilities. Conversely for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, food is used as a curative means more temporarily, in the case of a disease such as a diagnosis of diabetes that would lead to a change in food consumption and the adoption of a new diet (2009).

The way that domestic commensality is presented as a healthy practice can be associated with the manner it was constructed, during the nineteenth century, as a central role in the institution of the family (Marenco 1992). Families have been coming together to eat for centuries. However, the historian Marenco argues that ‘the novelty is that this meal taken together now eludes the category of daily practices of which nothing is to say, for which there is no model, to be explicitly assigned a central role in the domestic sphere and the functioning of the family’ as a “model of manners” (1992, 113). Some authors argue indeed that the medicalisation of food practices is linked to the weakening of the family and religious institutions (Poulain 2013) and preventive health practices becoming the norm (Aiach and Delanoë 1998).

#### 2.2.4. Domestic Commensality is Not Conviviality

Even before family mealtimes began to be associated with measurable health and wellbeing benefits, they were simply encouraged because they are supposed to be convivial. Commensality is even said to transform the perception of the food to such point that pleasure from eating could only happen in this context (Fischler and Masson 2014). However, if eating together can produce conviviality, it is not always the case nor does it necessarily happen throughout the whole meal (C. Grignon 2001). In its etymological origin, commensality is associated with commensalism, which means the fact of feeding on a host (animal, plant, mushroom) without prejudicing it, but the host does not benefit from this relationship either<sup>12</sup>. The term was coined quite recently (XIXth Century) and is used in biology, but it has the merit of separating the idea of eating together from the notion of reciprocal benefits, which is often suggested by the confusion of commensality and conviviality.

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<sup>12</sup><https://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/commensal> (accessed on 12 March 2021).

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/commensal> (accessed on 5 November 2021)

There are few studies that question what conviviality actually means in the context of family meals (Phull 2015; 2019; de la Torre-Moral et al. 2021). It is usually thought of in rather simplistic terms as the pleasure of being together while eating. For a meal to be convivial, all the family members have to adhere to the same collective desire of friendliness, shared love, harmonious communication and equality. This common association of family meals with conviviality is linked to the representation that the family is necessarily conciliatory and peaceful; however, domestic violence and the many conflicts and tensions that exist in family life are proof of the contrary. Conviviality during a meal depends on who is present, but also on the pre-existing social and cultural conditions of the ‘convives’ (a French term for those who share a meal together). Conviviality is not a static aspect of sociality but an ongoing process that can be intertwined with forms of tensions. For the philosopher Illich’s, in his critic of the industrial society, conviviality requires a certain level of non-hierarchy between individuals (Illich, Giard, and Bardet 1973). Yet as the anthropologist Heil argues, conviviality can be a fragile balance between cooperation and conflictual situations (Heil 2013). Conviviality is a pervading and ancient theme in the discourse about family meals and there is nothing new about approaching family meals with the perspective. Research from across the food studies reveal that commensal conviviality is both highly praised by parents across social classes (Le Moal et al. 2021; Middleton et al. 2020) and also a privilege that families with high cultural and economic capital perform more easily (Wilk 2010; Phull 2015). Yet family mealtime conviviality has seldomly been investigated in detail, through a grounded approach, to understand what lies behind the generic terms of ‘convivial’, ‘agreeable’ ‘shared pleasure’ or ‘quality time’ (although see Phull 2019). I approach conviviality as a social and gendered construction – and a performance, as social construction necessarily has a form of historical depth that is re-enacted and displaced through performance –, that also varies according to the status in the family and cultural origins.

#### 2.2.5. Ignoring the Impact of Systemic Inequalities on Family Food Practices

The family meal imperative builds on the premise that parents—and more specifically mothers—are entirely responsible for the choices they make for themselves and their children regarding health. It is expected that individuals should adapt their food consumption towards preventive practices in order to reach individual autonomy and become moral and virtuous citizens (Coveney 2006; B. Beagan et al. 2008a). However, positioning parents as solely responsible for their children’s food practices incorrectly places the consequences of systemic inequalities on the backs of caregivers. In doing so, this representation of parenting obscures the multiple structural inequities that shape the conditions within which parents make daily choices (Fielding-Singh 2017a; Lareau 2011). These are especially inherent to gender positions, socio-economic and parental status. Bowen and colleagues argue that the numerous recommendations that Americans receive in terms of food, notably that of making home

cooked meals, draw on ‘popular notions about individual responsibility and hard work that resonate with the belief that the United States is a meritocracy’ (2019, 222). They advocate for an alternative way of thinking about family food practices:

‘Trying to solve the environmental and social ills of our food system by demanding that we return to our kitchen *en masse* is unrealistic. At best, it is a weight of responsibility that will most likely be felt by women who tend to occupy this space already. We need to change the way we think about food, family meals and inequality’ (Bowen, Brenton, and Elliott 2019, 222).

DeVault has previously highlighted the way families struggle and try to make do with the impact of enduring social problems on home dynamics: ‘individuals find solutions to these problems of everyday life—some relatively easily and some at great cost. But individual adjustments do not solve enduring social problems’ (1991, 3). As the anthropologist Wilk reminds us in his argument about the idealisation of the ‘happy family meal’, this individualisation of social problems constitutes a paradigm inherent to neoliberal policies:

‘[It] renders the failure of policy and law invisible and denies the importance of inequality and social discrimination. It turns legitimate social problems into personal moral issues, which are addressed through exhortation and preaching, often glossed as “education”’ (Wilk 2010, 413).

Such a paradigm also ignores the influence of the food industry on consumption practices and food preferences of families.

### **2.3. Results from the literature review**

#### **2.3.1. Families Still Eat Together**

There is evidence that many families across Western societies are still eating together (see *Table 5. Prevalence of family meals* below). In France, for example, families still mainly eat together in the evening, with six or eight people out of ten having dinner with their family (Michaud et al. 2004; Pettinger, Holdsworth, and Gerber 2006; Riou et al. 2015a). Dinner is the meal in France that family members share the most often. The normative pattern is that it usually happens at home on weekdays, at about 7 PM (but later in Paris) and lasts about forty minutes (C. Grignon and Grignon 2009, 345). There is also evidence that families in Australia are still having regular meals together with six adolescents out of ten declaring their previous dinner was a family meal (Gallegos et al. 2011). Surveys about the frequency of family meals in Nordic countries indicate similar results, varying between five to six adults out of ten declaring having a family meal in the past twenty-four hours (Kjærnes 2001). In the US, 53% of families declare eating together seven or more times per week (Sobal and Hanson 2011), while in the UK, that rate is down to 51% of respondents eating together on a daily basis (Pettinger, Holdsworth, and Gerber 2006). Of course, this evidence needs to be compared with previous results to define an evolution but considering the many barriers to having regular family

meals (see *Table 6. Key findings from qualitative studies of family meals* below), we can still argue with confidence that discourses regretting the disappearance of domestic commensality are usually at odds with the reality. However, most of these results are not recent and it is difficult to compare them as there are sometime great variations in the methods used (see *Table 5. Prevalence of family meals*). There is also rarely a clear and common definition of what family meals are. This may be because forms of domestic commensality vary and therefore make the analysis of its frequency more difficult to grasp and also because of the transformations to the rhythm of work and rest. It is often the frequency of eating occasions that are taken into account and the duration of meals, but there is a lack of recent evidence about the people who take part in the meals. Indeed, a high level of synchronisation of mealtimes (family members eating at the same time) within households does not mean that family members are actually eating together at the same place within the home.

Table 5. Prevalence of family meals

Authors	Year	Country (City)	Method	Sample	Results and Limits
Michaud et al.	2004	France	Phone survey (+/- 30min) 24h recall of food consumption Monday to Sunday	3153 12 to 75 years old 1 person per household Representative sample	86.2% of respondents who live with family members "have dinner with the family" ➤ No definition of "have dinner with the family" ➤ What proportion of respondents live with family?
Pettinger et al.	2006	France (Montpellier)	Self-administered questionnaires	766 64% ≥ 36 years old 40%, education ≥ 3 years 5,3% unemployed 13% retired 12% students	64.5% "eat together as a household on a daily basis" Eat together as a household daily (age): 18-35 year-old: 59%; 36-50: 66%; 51-65: 71% ➤ No definition of "eat together as a household" ➤ Family composition of respondents?
Riou et al.	2015	France (Paris)	Face to face questionnaires during home visits	2994 Representative sample	23% of sample: 3 meals (89%), mostly at home (89%), with the family (61.7% share meal with the family more than 75% of the time). Pattern associated with a higher income, a nuclear family (couples with or without children) and an almost non-existent sense of loneliness.
Gallegos et al.	2010	Australia (Perth)	Online and paper-based survey (+/- 15min) Part of school curriculum 24h recall	625 15 year old adolescents 77% dual headed household Representative sample	61% indicated the previous night's meal was "eaten at the same time and place as everyone else in the family". Other definitions of family meals: "meal was cooked at home", "meal included meat and vegetables", "television was off" ➤ Day of survey?
Pettinger et al.	2006	England (Nottingham)	Self-administered questionnaires	826 72% ≥ 35 years old 26% ≥ 3 years education 4% unemployed 10% retired 3% students	51% reported eating together as a household on a daily basis 18-35 year-old: 47%; 36-50: 46%; 51-65: 71% ➤ No definition of "eat together as a household" ➤ Family composition of respondents?
Kjærnes (ed.)	2001	Nordic countries	Phone survey 24h recall of eating events (+/- 15min) Monday to Sunday	Representative samples (≥15 years old) Denmark: 1202 Finland: 1200 Norway: 1177 Sweden: 1244	Households: couple with child(ren) Family meal: meal eaten at home with the entire household, the food eaten is hot Denmark: 66%; Finland: 51%; Norway: 60%; Sweden: 57% ➤ Restrictive definition of the family meal
Sobal and Hanson	2011	US	Phone survey "In a typical week, how often do you eat a meal together with the family members who currently live with you?"	882 adults living with family members Women: 53% White: 79% Married: 70% Children in household: 43% Many years of education: 15% Employed full time: 47%	53%: family meals seven or more times per week 8%: eat one or two family meals per week 7%: never eat together ➤ Difficult to define a "typical week"

### 2.3.2. Barriers to Having Regular Family Dinners

Many households face barriers in the daily orchestration of family meals, such as scheduling conflicts and lack of time, limited resources, scarcity of help, tiredness, lack of skills or confidence (Middleton et al. 2020; Bowen, Brenton, and Elliott 2019; Malhotra et al. 2013; Martinasek et al. 2010; Berge et al. 2013; Trofholz, Schulte, and Berge 2018; Jarrett, Bahar, and Kersh 2016) (see *Table 6. Key findings from qualitative studies of family meals*). The existence of these barriers is what differentiates everyday domestic commensality from exceptional commensality because it can be affected by external constraints (although these constraints can also impact, of course, extraordinary commensality). Even for families who regularly manage to eat together, they can still face challenges once the food is on the table and the family members gathered.

### 2.3.3. Challenges during Family Mealtimes

The debate about family meals should not concern only their recurrence, the quality of the meal environment needs to be taken into consideration as well. Shared meals are often the site of difficulties experienced by family members and can be unpleasant occasions (Wilk 2010; Middleton et al. 2020) (see *Table 6. Key findings from qualitative studies of family meals*). Conflict can arise from the food served at the meal, as a result of difference in taste preferences, eating disorders or disordered eating behaviours, or from children confronting parental authority through food refusal and resistance of mealtime rules (J. Fulkerson et al. 2008; Bowen, Brenton, and Elliott 2019; Grieshaber 1997; Middleton et al. 2020). Conflict can result from children's disruptive behaviour at the meal, such as being messy, distracted, not sitting 'properly' and fighting with siblings (Middleton et al. 2020). Grieshaber's 1997 Australian ethnographic study of family mealtimes found that children's resistance and negotiation of parental authority and rules were 'integral parts of daily interaction and practice' (Grieshaber 1997, 664). Expression of family hierarchies, pressure and control over children are also common aspects of family meals (Lindsay et al. 2019b; Phull, Wills, and Dickinson 2015; Wilk 2010; Murcott 1997; Kerr, Charles, and Kerr 1988). These hierarchies also exacerbate power relations at the heart of the domestic space between children, women, and men (Cardon 2017). The family meal can be loaded with so many expectations, argue Bowen and colleagues, that 'the more the family meal becomes a symbol of good parenting and proper family life, the more dinner feels like a pressure cooker' (2019, 75).

### 2.3.4. Social Variations in the Practices of Family Meals

Just as food preferences and habits are socially constructed, the relationship to forms and functions of domestic commensality vary according to the family members' social positions. While previous research has explored the social diversity of food consumption, in particular food preferences

(Fielding-Singh 2017a; Régnier, Lhuissier, and Gojard 2006; Wright, Maher, and Tanner 2015), there are fewer studies that investigate the social differentiation in the form and function of eating. DeVault has described some differences between middle and working class families in their relationship to eating together, in her study of a diverse group of American households (1991). Middle class women who are working professionally outside of home put effort into the conversations with children during the meal, while discussion was more an issue of contention between husbands and wives for some working class households (DeVault 1991; Morgenstern et al. 2015a). DeVault also reported that some working class women shared the middle class notion that meals should be occasions for family communications, but that these aspirations usually resulted in conflict during meals, as they would not necessarily correspond to the partner's expectations of family meals.

There also exists social differentiation in the organisation of meals in families in France: while higher class families value that all the family members eat the same food during the meals, leaving less room for negotiations with children, children from lower classes have more agency in the choice of the food they eat (Maurice 2015; Wills et al. 2011b).

### 2.3.5. Gendered Aspects of Family Meals

An exploration into family meals must inevitably include a discussion about gender inequalities. Women have been reported to continue to do the majority of food work in many countries, such as in France (Cardon, Depecker, and Plessz 2019), Australia (Tanner, Petersen, and Fraser 2014), Nordic countries (Aarseth and Olsen 2008; Anving and Thorsted 2010), Canada (B. Beagan et al. 2008b; B. L. Beagan et al. 2015) and in the United States (DeVault 1991; Sharif et al. 2017). The disproportionate division of work is partly based on implicit gender norms that structure family life. Women are expected to maintain the health and wellbeing of family members as part of the accomplishment of motherhood, as a means of developing moral identities as good mothers (Kerr, Charles, and Kerr 1988; Anving and Thorsted 2010; B. Beagan et al. 2008b; Drummond and Drummond 2015). They are also expected to carry the mental load of food work and implement healthy diets as an expression of femininity, which has been observed in Australia as well as in France (Drummond and Drummond 2015; Cardon, Depecker, and Plessz 2019). Mothers' role about food at home is also often connected to family cohesion and conviviality (Phull, Wills, and Dickinson 2015)



Table 6. Key findings from qualitative studies of family meals

Key Results	Example of Empirical Evidence	References	
<b>The practices of family meals are socially situated</b>	Conversations	Middle classes: emphasis on family mealtime conversations and particularly with children De Vault 1991 (US) Morgensten et al. 2015, (France)	
		Working class: conversations seem less important De Vault 1991 (US)	
	Negotiation of food choices	Higher classes: important that all family members eat the same food during the meals, leaving less room for negotiations with children (control over children's diet)	Maurice 2015 (France) Wright et al. 2015 (Australia)
		Lower classes: children have more agency in the choice of the food they eat	Maurice 2015 (France) Wills et al. 2008 (Scotland)
	Conviviality	Middle classes: • meals are expected to be a convivial moment • conviviality as social distinction	Phull et al. 2015 (France)
<b>Barriers to having regular family meals</b>	Scheduling conflicts: school, extracurricular activities and adult work	Middleton et al. 2019 (international review)	
	Lack of time because of household chores that are done while children eat	Jarrett 2016 (US)	
	Scarcity of help for the meal preparation	Malhotra 2013 (US)	
	Limited resources (money and space to have family meals)	Bowen et al. 2019 (US)	
	Parent(s) being too tired to eat with the children	Martinasek et al. 2010 (US)	
	Lack of ideas or confidence	Berge et al. 2013 (US)	
	Children characterised by parents as "picky eater"	Trofholz et al. 2018 (US)	
	Other activities are prioritised over family meals (sports, etc.)	Backett-Millburn et al. 2010 (Scotland) Gallegos et al. 2011	
<b>Challenges during family meals</b>	Children's physical behaviour characterised as "disruptive" by parents (i.e., not sitting "properly", being "messy", "improper" use of utensils)	Wilk 2010 (US)	
	Children characterised by parents as "picky eaters", food refusal (also linked to resistance of parental authority)	Malhotra 2013 (US)	
	Children's behaviours characterised as difficult by parents: fighting or playing between sibling	Berge et al. 2018, US, Trofholz et al. 2018 (US)	
	Improper discussion or not enough discussion	(US)	
	Mealtime synchronisation: family member eating too quickly or too slowly	DeVault 1991 (US)	
	Family members being too tired (which implies having family mealtimes as a certain burdensome mental load to it) and strategic efforts to prevent usual conflicts become difficult	Berg et al. 2018 (US)	
<b>Family mealtimes are gendered events</b>	Middle class women: emphasis on conversations with children during meals and some women from working class also strive to construct the meal as family communication occasion, which constituted source of conflict with husbands	De Vault 1991, US	
	Link between mothers' domestic food role with family cohesion and conviviality	Phull et al. 2015 Fournier et al. 2015 Kinser 2017	

However, mothers who carry the bulk of the family food work tend to experience feelings of guilt and anxiety, because the ideals of healthy eating connected with good mothering are difficult to achieve (Phull, Wills, and Dickinson 2015; Blake et al. 2009). This results in food work having the potential to be oppressive for women. These feelings are stronger for mothers situated in middle and higher classes than for mothers of lower classes, since the latter face other imperatives than those of preventive health practices, such as providing enough food for the children (Fielding-Singh 2017a). However, it should be noted that these are counterbalanced by a sense of reward when the ideals are achieved (DeVault 1991). Studies have reported that fathers can also feel rushed and stressed when having to cope with food work, but they very rarely express guilt and anxiety as mothers do (Blake et al. 2009). This discrepancy in the experience of family food work is linked to a normative dimension of mothers' identity, which is not the case for fathers.

Urging families to come together regularly to eat may only reinforce gender inequalities already experienced by mothers (Kinser 2017; Bowen, Brenton, and Elliott 2019, 82). Not only does the normative family meal promotion need to be analysed in light of gender inequalities, we also need to take into account social variations in the relationship to shared family meals. The normative aspiration of family meals as a convivial event, with harmonious family communication falls on mothers as well (Phull, Wills, and Dickinson 2015; Kinser 2017) and being able to reach these aspirations when we know there exist many challenges before and during mealtimes can be emotionally challenging.

## **2.4. Gaps in the literature**

The results from the literature review have also revealed some methodological and conceptual limitations in the current approach of family meals.

### **2.4.1. Including Fathers**

The differences in food work practices between mothers and fathers go beyond disparities in time use. The literature available on fathers reports that they are less committed to healthy eating and are more interested in choosing food for pleasure (Fielding-Singh 2017b; Dubet 2017a), to the extent that some mothers report preferring to do the food work themselves, rather than letting fathers do it (B. Beagan et al. 2008b; Fielding-Singh 2017b). This is to be put in context again with the fact that fathers are less subject to normative framing when it comes to food. Some studies suggest that men are more committed to getting children to eat rather than getting them to eat well: they would put more pressure on children to eat quantities of food (Hendy et al. 2009) and do not restrict foods in line with health beliefs as much as mothers do (Musher-Eizenman et al. 2007). It seems that fathers tend to favour the principle of pleasure and sociability when considering food choices, for themselves and their

children rather than health and care, primarily considered by women (Dubet 2017a). In Australia, in particular, fathers have been reported to favour the family meal as an opportunity to connect and communicate with children and place less importance on children's eating behaviours (Harris, Jansen, and Rossi 2020; Owen et al. 2010). The findings on fathers' experience of family meals remain incomplete. Their positions regarding domestic food work are sometimes only (Tanner, Petersen, and Fraser 2014) or partially discussed through mothers' discourses (Fielding-Singh 2017b; Dubet 2017b). This lacuna is often explained by the fact that mothers are generally the main persons responsible for food work, and by the absence of fathers responding to call for research participants (Dubet 2017a) but it nevertheless remains problematic since they still influence, of course food practices and family life (Cardon 2017; Lareau 2000b). While there are recent studies that have since attempted to address this gap by including fathers in their sample (Dubet 2017b; Khandpur et al. 2016; Meah 2017), some offer a limited understanding of family food practices through interviews with fathers only, ignoring the interactional aspect of family food activities and their female counterpart's experiences (Jackson 2009b; Khandpur et al. 2016; Owen et al. 2010; Fenner and Banwell 2019; M. K. Szabo 2014; Walsh et al. 2017). This bias robs us of a balanced understanding of domestic life. Additionally, interviewing fathers alone may not provide sufficient evidence of their role in family life. Sociologist Lareau explains the inadequacy of interviewing fathers to gather this understanding and argues that in-person observations are more suited to 'capture the fluid and fleeting exchanges in the routines of daily life' (2000a, 429), of which meals are a part:

'In our own case, it was repeated field observations inside families that brought to our attention the many positive contributions fathers make. Without the observational part of our study, we might have added to the number of studies portraying fathers as deficient in key areas of family life' (Lareau 2000a, 429).

Although fathers are generally reported to be less involved than mothers in domestic tasks, they still have a significant influence on children's health and weight status (Khandpur et al. 2016), food preferences and practices (Fielding-Singh 2017a; Walsh et al. 2017) and food decisions for the whole family (Lareau 2000a). Moreover, the tendency to study family food practices exclusively through mothers' experiences might undermine fathers' progress in their appropriation of domestic practices and may serve to reinforce the tendency of positioning mothers as the main person responsible for feeding the family (Kemmer 2000).

#### 2.4.2. Including Children

Family food practices, including the family meal, are also a negotiation with children (Maurice 2015), who often contest and resist adult rules (Grieshaber 1997; Burrows and McCormack 2014). They influence family food purchases (Gram 2015), and their preferences impact the entire family's diet

(Banwell and Dixon 2004; Romani 2005) and can constitute barriers to the implementation of parents' ideals of a healthy diet (Wright, Maher, and Tanner 2015). Children should be taken into consideration when studying family food practices because of the impact children can have on food choices (DeVault 1991; Kerr, Charles, and Kerr 1988; Anving and Thorsted 2010). A process of reverse socialisation can take place, where children provide food knowledge to parents and other family members (Anving and Thorsted 2010; Ayadi and Bree 2010). Maurice has shown, however, how the influence of children on family food practices is also socially situated. Children from middle and high classes have less agency on family food practices and choices than children from lower classes (Maurice 2015). Whether or not they influence the food choices, children influence eating occasions through their own behaviours and practices during meals, which can cause conflict with their parents.

Reports from children's experiences of domestic commensality can be quite nuanced as well. While family meals are generally discussed by children in positive terms (Harman, Cappellini, and Faircloth 2018), some studies mention that they can also be negatively experienced, although this aspect is rarely emphasised (Pescud and Pettigrew 2010). A survey of adolescents in Australia found that 45% of them considered family meals to be unimportant (Gallegos et al. 2011). A qualitative study in the United States reports that children do not always view the mealtime rules and interactions positively, reporting disinterest in family meal conversations, and disliking being forced to eat the food served (Skeer et al. 2018). However, to our knowledge, there are very few other qualitative studies that examine children's experiences of and roles during family mealtimes.

#### 2.4.3. Focusing on Family Interactions and Relationships

Not only does each family member take part in the interactional process of family food practices but the family must also be approached as a group since, as Lareau states, the 'whole is more than the sum of its parts, [...] with members interacting in a fluid and dynamic fashion' (2000a, 429). The sociologist continues:

'Highlighting the nature of social connections in family life, recognizing them as fluid and ever-changing, is crucial to a more elaborate notion of the elements of family life. Analyses of families must necessarily, then, incorporate the different vantage points and experiences of various members of the group. Such analyses also must be attuned to interactional processes, embedded in a broader context, rather than discrete actions studied in isolation' (Lareau 2000a, 429).

Cappellini and Parsons also report about the collective and interactional aspect of family meals, wherein each family member takes part in the process of making meals happen, even if there is one person who is most responsible for the food work (Cappellini and Parsons 2012). They argue:

'Sharing a meal, which makes everyone "happy", is not simply the responsibility of the cook (often mother) as s/he tries to accommodate the different tastes of family members. Rather it is more than

the sum of the parts, it is a collective manifestation of being a family wherein each member of the family has to take part playing a specific role, or “doing their bit” (2012, 116).

If it seems necessary to be aware of this interactional process when studying family meals, there are also benefits to taking into account an even broader context, that of family relationships in general. Sociologists have warned against the biases of evaluating the impact of domestic commensality while separating it from family dynamics. A longitudinal study from Musick and Meier, testing the association of the wellbeing of adolescent’s with family dinners, showed how some of the potential benefits of family meals (in this case reducing depression symptoms and delinquency among adolescents) are the results of stronger family relationships (Meier and Musick 2014). Bowen and colleagues summarise these results as such: ‘the ability to manage regular family meals may, in other words, be a proxy for other dimensions of the family environment, like strong family relationships’ (Bowen, Brenton, and Elliott 2019, 256).

#### 2.4.4. Food Work and Family Meals throughout the Week

In recent years, researchers have begun to study the family meal in closer detail, generally seeking to identify which characteristics of the meal are most beneficial (Berge et al. 2018). While this closer focus is necessary, evidence suggests that we should not study eating occasions in isolation from one another. This implies that, while it is important to look further than just the frequency of family meals, even by extending the exploration to the meal environment, there are benefits to investigating several meals throughout the week, and focusing on the food work leading up to and after the meal. Cappellini and Parsons’s ethnographic study reveals different types of commensal occasions throughout the week within the same family: there are ordinary weekday meals and extraordinary meals for Sunday meals and family celebrations. The authors observe ‘wide discordance between expectations and ideals of family meals and lived experience of family meal’ (2012, 116) for ordinary family meals, while there is less discordance in the case of extraordinary meals. The authors have also observed meals from the planning to the cleaning up. This approach enabled them to establish a direct connection between the food work surrounding the meal (planning, meal preparation and cleaning up) and the way the family meal actually happened. They conclude:

‘Findings reveal a link between the effort, money and time invested in making a dinner and the effort and time spent in sharing a meal. In fact a thrifty dish becomes a thrifty meal wherein food is displayed, served and eaten in a thrifty way, saving time and effort for all the family members’ (2012, 117).

While the resources mobilised for meals during the week were limited (money, time and effort), for the extraordinary meals, which were still part of the weekly routine, the investment of resources to make them happen are significantly more important. Additionally, the family mealtime itself was quite different, especially regarding the discussion happening at the meal, as Cappellini and Parsons report:

'Margaret [middle class mother] observes that given the effort she has spent on the meal, her children are called to reciprocate by doing their part, in this case talking together during the meal. Having spent more resources preparing a richer meal, Margaret expects a richer thanks in return. Her children are expected to celebrate the special gift that Margaret donates to and shares with her family. In return for such a special gift, Margaret's sons have to share not simply richer food, rather they have to reciprocate with a specific performance (sitting down and talking)' (2012, 122)

Looking at reasons why families will not eat together also suggests that the meals should not be studied in isolation from food work nor without at least a minimal understanding of the family's daily life. A father in DeVault's study explains the following, after recognising that they hardly ever had family meals:

'It doesn't make any difference. Well, it does. But you're so damn tired. It's not the time, because you could do it if you wanted to. It just gets to where you're so damn tired, and fed up with the way the money situation is, and you just say, the hell with it' (DeVault 1991, 53).

This shows how organizing family meals requires efforts before, during and after the meal, and particularly mental and emotional efforts during the mealtime.

### **3. Epistemology and theoretical perspective**

The results from the literature review and the gaps identified have led me to adopt a constructionism epistemology. Crotty defines epistemology as 'way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know' or 'the theory of knowledge, embedded in the theoretical perspective and therefore the methodology' (1998, 3). Constructionism is built upon the conception that there is no truth *per se* that waits to be discovered. Truth comes out of our engagement with the world, which implies that meaning and knowledge is constructed rather than collected. According to this perspective, meaning can be constructed differently by different people. Crotty explains constructionism as such: 'all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context' (1998, 45). For Berger and Luckman 'human beings together create and then sustain all social phenomena through social practices', 'but at the same time experienced by them as if the nature of their world is pre-given and fixed' (Burr 2015, 15). As such, individuals both construct the world and are constructed by it. This theory of knowledge adopted is embedded in an interpretivist theoretical perspective, which investigates 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretation of the social life world' (Crotty 1998, 71). This implies investigating how phenomenon unfold and focusing on subjectivities, positioning sociology at the level of the individual, who 'can be defined sociologically by the multiplicity and complexity of his/ her socializing experiences' (Lahire 2020, 55). A sociology at the individual level is, in return, a prism to study society, as Lahire argues:

'Each individual is what his/her many social experiences have made of him/her. Far from being the most elementary unit in sociology, the individual is undoubtedly the most complex social reality to be apprehended [...]. Individuals have travelled through the past and are constantly moving through multiple social contexts (e.g., universes, institutions, groups or situations); they carry with them all the experiences (not always compatible, and sometimes clearly contradictory) that they have experienced in multiple contexts' (Lahire 2020, 57).

This research is also rooted in symbolic interactionism, which is 'the view that people construct their own and others' identities through their everyday encounters with each other in social interaction' (Burr 2015, 15). The work of Goffman is of particular interest for the study of family mealtimes and particularly his dramaturgical approach of social interaction. Individuals display their behaviours similar to actors and producers of a play. They display certain demeanours, practices, moving from front stage – trying to play how they are supposed to be in front of an audience – to back stage. The sociologist Finch argues that families 'display' – in the sense of putting on a show – everyday practices as their ways of 'doing family' (Finch 2007). The sociologists James and Curtis argue further that families today are under such normative imperatives that, there remains an 'audience', even in private sphere of households (James and Curtis 2010). So the display of families, even when happening in the intimate sphere of the household, is not simply a private affair. I seek to develop this metaphor of the performance to analyse ordinary family meals and describe how they are orchestrated, how the display is constantly renewed as families evolve, how everyday commensality is strongly related to the family's social and cultural environments.

### **3.1. Socialisation theories**

The different dimensions of family meals such as, for example, the food work, the table manners, the conversational exchanges can be investigated through the concept of socialisation, in its dual understanding. In sociology, the concept of socialisation has been developed according to two different traditions. In the first, most common, meaning socialisation is apparent to the concept of learning, or apprenticeship as an internalisation process. According to the second approach, socialisation is closer to the notion of sociability and refers to the interactions and social relationships between individuals (Grafmeyer and Authier 2015). As a learning and internalisation process, socialisation refers to the norms of a society or a group that individuals internalise such as language and cognitive skills, ethical dispositions and ways of behaving which ensure they belong to said group or society. The authors developing this approach of socialisation theoretically distinguish between a primary socialisation and a secondary socialisation. During primary socialisation in the family, children are in contact with their parents, which Berger and Luckman identify as 'significant others' who 'mediate' the world through aspects inherent to their own social position, their individual characteristics and their life trajectories (P. Berger and Luckmann 2018a). After having interiorised this

world, children proceed to an autonomisation and abstraction process, by shifting from the views and directives of their significant other to proper behaviours of society in general. Berger and Luckman provide an example of a child who understands he or she is not to spill the soup on the table, not simply to please his mother but because 'one does not spill soup' (P. L. Berger and Luckmann 1967, 150) as it is frowned upon, in society – or what they call the 'generalized other' –, to eat in such a manner (P. Berger and Luckmann 2018b). The secondary socialisation that Berger and Luckman refer to is a secondary process. The later can be a complementary one but also a contradictory and conflicting one. It implies incorporating oneself into new realms of society, such as conjugal socialisation for instance. As the family today is mainly constructed around children (Singly 2005; 2017), this research is mostly about primary socialisation, although I will also peripherally discuss forms of conjugal socialisation, in particular in terms of mealtime conversations.

The second understanding of socialisation refers to the social interaction between individuals that establish specific forms of relations. These are what Simmel calls reciprocal actions, and have mutual influence on the individuals. In this case, socialisation means being in relation. For the first concept of socialisation, inspired by the classic sociological tradition developed by Durkheim, the society takes precedence over individuals, in that it exists first and is initially exterior to individuals. According to the second tradition, developed by Simmel (G. Simmel 1894) there is no society per se. He prefers the word socialisation to society, arguing the later only exist within social interactions and the forms of relationship that comes out of them, whether these are relatively long lasting or ephemeral: 'there is a society, in the general meaning, anywhere there is a reciprocal action between several individuals<sup>13</sup>' (G. Simmel 1894, 499). This has led him to develop his sociology of form: 'if we want there to be a science which object is society and nothing else, it shall not be focused on anything else than those reciprocal actions, the modes and the forms of socialisation' (Georg Simmel, Deroche-Gurcel, and Muller 2013, 44). Simmel's intention is therefore that socialisation needs to be studied through the reciprocal actions, or put otherwise, by investigating the way socialisation unfolds and is materialised (Rubio 2006). Grafmeyer and Authier argue that, although these two concepts of socialisation need to be distinguished as they come from diverging intellectual traditions, they are not necessarily incompatible, providing 'we admit that any learning process is in itself interactive, and that "socialised" beings constantly adapt dispositions they have inherited to the situations they are living' (Grafmeyer and Authier 2015). This thesis follows in this later perspective.

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<sup>13</sup> Personal translation



## **4. A research object overlapping several sociological fields**

### **4.1. *Sociology of food and eating***

This research is primarily inscribed in the field of sociology of food. Having said that, we have not said much as there are various trends in this field. I will briefly describe these polarisations so as to position this thesis in relation to them. In France there are the studies on food that are theoretically and methodologically inscribed in the sociological tradition (Régnier, Lhuissier, and Gojard 2006; Cardon, Depecker, and Plessz 2019). Then there is also the socio-anthropology of food that is more focused on the symbolic and material aspects of food (Poulain 2013). Studies in this approach mobilise the concept of ‘food modernity’, which implies our daily experience of food is unique to the contemporary occidental context. The focus is on the ‘eater’, which designates an abstract and general individual in his or her relationship to food. Researchers that mobilise the notion of ‘eater’ are less interested in the variations between groups than what they have in common (according to the anthropological quest on the invariable). This studies are linked to the more general thesis on postmodernity focused on topics such as the individualisation of identities, the decline of institutions, the multiplications of risks and the associated individualisation of practices, the unstructuration of food rhythms and food crisis. In Great Britain, this polarisation is similar. On the one hand there is the sociology of food and eating, focusing on their social aspects (Warde 1997, 2016a). On the other hand, there are the pluridisciplinary food studies focusing also on the material aspect of food (Murcott, Belasco, and Jackson 2013).

This thesis is inscribed in the first field of sociology of food and eating, as I focus primarily on the actors and their social activities. Yet the methodological approach adopted also allows us to grant a significant attention to the materiality of food, eating and feeding. I also resorted to a few studies outside this field, that were of interest for this thesis in terms of methods used (grounded perspective).

### **4.2. *Sociology of family life***

It is a truism to say that domestic commensality is intrinsically bound to the notion of family and the English expression ‘family meal’ or ‘family mealtime’ leaves no space for doubt. The French expression ‘repas de famille’ is worthy of attention though. If we think of other activities that family members commonly do together and the manner of naming them in French, we have, for instance: ‘vacances en famille’ (family vacation), ‘balade en famille’ (family walk) or ‘fête de famille’ (family celebration). The expression ‘repas en famille’ exists, but it is less commonly used and has a slight variation in its meaning, suggesting social links may be a bit looser. The preposition ‘en’ signifies being in the family for said activity, being gathered as a family. It suggests the gathering is temporary and that, in a way, individual prevails over the family collective. The preposition ‘de’ indicates an origin, as if the meal

emanated from the family in itself. Or perhaps it is the reverse: the family emanates (partially) from the meal taken together. French historian Marenco has described how family mealtimes have been built, during the XIXth and XXth century as the “ultimate rampart against the restructuring of the family” (1992, 197). The evolutions of the family meal were then to be studied with the evolution of the family itself. In any case, a research on family mealtimes is inevitably inscribed in the sociology of the family. In reality, the expressions ‘repas de famille’ or family meal leaves us puzzled, if we look closely at them. It is difficult or even impossible to define precisely both the notions ‘meal’ and ‘family’. De Singly (Singly 2017) defines the contemporary family ‘not so much according to formal and structural criteria, but rather in reference to a double requirement: the creation of a formal living environment where everybody can grow while taking part in common life and the support of others<sup>14</sup>’ (Singly 2017). This double requirement of the contemporary family, which is both a relational and individualist one, creates a certain number of ‘tensions between contradictory principles, norms and interests’, according to which family members value and seek to protect their individuality and particularities but without giving up belonging to a family as a group. What matters for today’s families is the demonstration of family affection in conjugal and intergenerational relationships, the possibly of personal development with the family, as well as the protection of the independence of family members. These two objectives are complementary, as the demonstration of affections helps in the development of the individuality, but are also contradictory and need to unfold in a balanced manner, for fear of either breaking up the collective, or suppressing individual particularities. For De Singly, who is inspired by Berger, Kellner and Luckmann (1964, 1966), the importance of this relational aspect of family life is based on the fragility of individuality per se: individuals need their own self and personal world to be recognised and confirmed by others (Singly 2016). De Singly argues:

‘A “proper” family (socially considered as such) is a group that delivers to the children and parents an acknowledgment of a particular type: a “personal solicitude”, in the language of Axel Honneth, some support by significant others, according to the language of Peter Berger and Hans Kellner, accompanied by care, according to the language of Carol Gilligan and Joan Tronto’ (Singly 2017, 10).

Contemporary family life is also based on the “norm of equal love” (Singly 1996, 236; Gojard 2010). There is therefore another tension for parents between a personal attention to each child and his or her singularities and the equal treatment and attention to the different children: this value of equal treatment has even become of form of demonstration of parental love towards children. But this is all the more difficult for parents to put into practice as being a ‘good’ parent also means paying proper attention to the singularities of each child, therefore having a different perspective on each child.

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<sup>14</sup> Personnal translation

### **4.3. *Sociology of emotions***

The struggles that can happen at mealtimes indicates that the current research may have been missing a key aspect of food work. Restrictive definitions of 'food work' include the tasks of meal planning, shopping and meal preparation (Bove and Sobal 2006). More inclusive approaches include the mental load (Haicault 1984) of being in charge of feeding the family. Fielding-Singh considers it to be the "invisible work of thinking what everyone will eat" (Fielding-Singh 2017b, 99) while the sociologists Wright and colleagues define it as the "emotional and domestic management of children's eating" (Wright, Maher, and Tanner 2015, 422) and even the management of the partner's eating (DeVault 1991). If we take the reflection on family meals and food work a step further, there may be some key aspects of domestic commensality that could be understood through the notion of emotion work. The sociologists DeVault (DeVault 1991) and Hochschild (Hochschild 1979; 1983a; 1997) have begun discussing, from the 1980's on, the importance of emotion work in the activities of feeding the family. Family meals are rooted in a contradictory framework of pleasure and struggle, as DeVault describes about American households:

'Most people do not think of themselves as working when they sit down to eat with the family. Often (though not always), they are enjoying eating themselves, and enjoying the companionship of the others in their households [...]. But the difficulties that may arise, especially for parents who have other work as well, provide occasions when the efforts required at mealtimes become visible' (DeVault 1991, 51).

I adopt sociologist Hochschild's (1979; 1983a) theoretical framework of emotion work and feeling rules as a lens to analyse commensality and particularly to deconstruct conviviality. To the best of my knowledge, everyday family commensality has not yet been approached from the angle of the management of emotions and their underlying conventions. Moreover, Hochschild initially developed her theory of emotion management for workers in the service sectors, particularly airhostesses. She mentioned the private manifestation of emotional labour – which she named emotion work – but did not analyse as deeply the production of these emotional conventions in everyday private life. Although she argues there are 'feeling rules' and 'emotion work' going on as well in the private sphere, she does not question the way it enfolds. Investigating the convivial aspects of commensality provides an opportunity to mobilise and discuss Hochschild's theoretical framework in another context.

Emotion work is the private, unpaid manifestation of emotional labour, which Hochschild referred to as the emotional management that requires one 'to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in other' (1983b, 7). The basis of emotion work is 'trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling' (1979, 561). Emotion work constitutes the efforts provided, but does not necessary refer to the outcome, which may not be as expected (1979).

The notion of emotion work depends on what Hochschild names 'feeling rules' or 'emotional conventions' (1979), which are 'what guide emotion work by establishing the sense of entitlement or obligation that govern emotional exchanges' (1983b, 56). In the context of family life, there are implicit emotional obligations guiding the way family members try to feel and Hochschild argued feeling rules are socially situated: in middle classes families there would be greater importance placed on feeling rules and therefore, emotion work would be more commonly produced (1979). As a set of social conventions, feeling rules have safe keepers and "authority carries for a certain mandate over feeling rules [...]. It is mainly the authority who are the keepers of feeling rules." (1983b, 75). While there is usually an authoritative figure safekeeping emotional conventions, lapses and departures from the rules are inherent to them and participate to their legitimisation.

Producing emotion work is conditioned by several capacities. It implies recognising the existence of the emotional conventions, or feeling rules. It means being able to embody the expected emotional state, by managing and modelling one's own emotions. It also requires doing this work in a seemingly effortless manner so as to produce the appropriate emotional state in others. For Hochschild, emotions can be managed, rather than simply experienced as feelings against which the individual cannot do anything, as a merely biological manifestation. She conceives a feeling as:

'something we *do* by attending to inner sensation in a given way, by defining situations in a given way, by managing in given ways, then it becomes plainer just how plastic and susceptible to reshaping techniques a feeling can be. The very act of managing emotion can be seen as part of what the emotion becomes. But this idea gets lost if we assume, as the organismic theorists do, that how we manage or express feeling is extrinsic to emotion' (1979, 27).

This implies we *do* feelings rather than *have* feelings, and means we can have some form of control over emotions. To explain this mechanism, Hochschild resorts to the analogy of acting, differentiating surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting in emotion management is apparent to a mere display of emotions, with a remaining identifiable gap between the individual's displayed demeanor and his or her own emotional state. Performing deep acting requires digging into one's own emotions (whether past or present) and personality to perform the behaviour corresponding to the expected emotional conventions: 'this kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honour as deep and integral to our individuality' (1983b, 7). Hochschild defined two types of emotion work: '*evocation*<sup>15</sup>, in which the cognitive focus is on a desired feeling which is initially absent, and *suppression*, in which the cognitive focus is on an undesired feeling which is initially present' (1979, 561). Emotion work can be produced on oneself, on oneself for

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<sup>15</sup> Italics added to this quote.

others or by others upon oneself. There also exists *emotion work avoidance*, which constitutes nonetheless a recognition of the emotional conventions expected (Le Bihan and Mallon 2017).

More recently, domestic food work has been more directly approached in terms of emotions (MacKendrick and Pristavec 2019) but it is usually the food provisioning, preparation and the representations associated with healthy eating that are associated with emotion management. The mental load of having to deal with the various competing moral, social and health imperatives in the work of feeding the family lead some to describe it as emotion work<sup>16</sup>. Yet, as Hochschild argues, this is an improper use of the expression she coined<sup>17</sup>. Food work can be emotionally draining, but it does not necessarily imply or is based on forms of emotion work. Now coming back to the family mealtimes, there is still a dearth of studies that examine the potential emotion work that happens when family members eat together. In this thesis, I therefore look at how emotions are *done* at the table, how they are managed, modelled, evoked, dampened and suppressed. I also look at the result of this emotional management on the whole family mealtime atmosphere.

## **5. A two-fold questioning: unfolding everyday commensal performances, in relation to family life, gender, social position and cultural origins.**

Based on the literature review of the existing research on domestic food work and family meals, I have identified various gaps in the research on everyday domestic commensality. These gaps were of epistemological, theoretical and methodological nature and led me to resort to various theoretical frameworks to address the current limitation and further our understanding of everyday family mealtimes.

A two-fold questioning research problem emerged from this process, based on an interrogation of the conditions, forms and effects of everyday family mealtimes:

**How do the multiple dimensions of everyday mealtimes unfold, are regulated and negotiated, in light of gender dynamics, the family's social conditions and cultural origins?**

**How does the performance of commensality affect and is worked by, in return, family dynamics and health concerns within the households?**

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<sup>16</sup> <https://theconversation.com/what-is-emotional-labour-and-how-do-we-get-it-wrong-185773>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/11/arlie-hochschild-housework-isnt-emotional-labor/576637/>

The general aim of this thesis is to better understand the way family mealtimes happened on an everyday basis, from a practical, interactional and emotional perspective and to unfold in particular the various commensal dimensions.

In order to do so, I have set the following objectives:

- Investigate family mealtimes within the frame of family life and the households' social conditions
- Include all the family members in the investigation of their role in and experiences of everyday family mealtimes
- Identify, in particular, how fathers take part and experience everyday family mealtimes
- Put into perspective the results from Lyon with those from the families from Adelaide

This chapter has described the findings from the literature review, and the identified gaps in our current knowledge of everyday family mealtimes. These led me to adopt a suited epistemological stance and theoretical perspectives to be able to properly address the limitations. I have then discussed the various sociological fields over which the research is built. All these steps led to the construction of the research problem. The following chapter describes the methodological process of observing everyday family mealtimes, which implied dealing with ethical issues and making practical adjustments to the reality of the fieldwork.



# Chapter 2. Observing family meals: ethical issues, methodological choices and practical adjustments

## 1. Introduction

The richness allowed by the ethnographic approach, the possibility it gives to document practices that often go unnoticed and are rather unconscious provides considerable advantages over the use of questionnaires or interviews for the study of everyday domestic commensality. The combination of the immersion into family mealtimes – to have access to these elements that are barely conscientised because immersed in their routine practices – with the video documentation, interviews and food diaries allowed to document in depth and through different angles everyday family commensality. There is a form of vagueness in the concept of everyday family meals and is the object of few grounded discourses, as it lived rather than it is represented or displayed (in movies, for instance). The ethnographic approach allows us to clear away these ambiguities. This depth of the observation justifies the low numbers of cases/situations/families observed. Such ethnographic research on everyday family mealtimes as rarely been conducted, in France or in other countries.

In this chapter, I address the methodological choices adopted to be able to respond to the research problem. This research is the result of a multi-layered construction based on the particularities of the institutional contexts in which it was developed, on the specificities of the period during which it was conducted, on the scientific literature that guided the whole project as well as on the particularities and the multiple scientific disciplines in which it was inscribed. This thesis was also built around my personal interests and with my own shortcomings as an early career researcher. This chapter aims to lay out these elements in order to propose a frame of examination of the results for the reader.

## 2. Finding a way to ethnography: an access to fieldwork repetitively hindered

### 2.1. *The methodological approach of ethnography*

Ethnography is one of the most suited methodological approach to address some of the gaps identified in the previous chapter and grasp the complexity, richness and changing dimensions of domestic commensality (Crotty 1998). Ethnography is a grounded approach with a focus on understanding social and cultural practices and representations from the point of view of the actors (Olivier de Sardan



2015b). It is based on in-person fieldwork, during which the researcher is in close, long term and repeated contact with the participants, otherwise known as participant observation. This immersion in the milieu is usually complemented with interviews, strictly observational methods, and sometimes the collection of objects (which could be, for family food practices, shopping lists, grocery receipts, recipe books, meal plans, etc.).

This research is inspired by studies on family food practices and on family life in general mainly based on an ethnographic approach. Lareau's study titled *Unequal childhoods. Class, race and family life* (2011) on inequality in child rearing in the United States and Bowen, Brenton and Elliott's research on family food practices, *Pressure cooker. Why home cooking won't solve our problems and what we can do about it* (2019), in various American households. On top of doing observations in schools and interview an extensive number of mothers and sometimes fathers of 88 children, Lareau did observations within 12 families (poor, working class and middle class households) over 3 years, with the help of 10 students. They visited families about 20 times in the space of one months, for 3 hours or more per visit and one overnight stay in each family. The authors of *Pressure cooker*, along with other researchers, conducted over 250 hours of ethnographic fieldwork over 9 months in the homes of 12 low income families.

Adopting an ethnographic approach for the study of family mealtimes required that I be present during the families' food activities, from the food provisioning and preparation, through the consumption process and cleaning up activities. This meant including all of the family members in the study and taking into account all of the points of view. An ethnographic approach enables the observations of interactions and family relationships that shape and are shaped by domestic commensality. Providing results of ordinary family meals that show potential differences between the normative aspirations and the actual practices, without characterising struggles as failure may be a healthier approach to family meals, that would enable us to constitute a more inclusive and representative image of family eating practices and provide adapted recommendations for families.

## **2.2. Legitimising the ethnographic approach as a scientific method**

### **2.2.1. A tripartite institutional collaboration**

This thesis was conducted within the context of a CIFRE contract, a French frame for doctoral research executed by the ANRT<sup>18</sup> ("Association Nationale de la Recherche et de la Technologie", or National organisation of research and technology). This CIFRE device<sup>19</sup> ("Convention Industrielle de Formation

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.anrt.asso.fr/fr>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.anrt.asso.fr/fr/cifre-35654>

par la REcherche” or Industrial convention of training through research) allows the development of research partnerships between the private and the public sectors through the payment of public subsidies by the ANRT. In the case of this CIFRE contract, the private partner was the Institut Paul Bocuse Research Centre<sup>20</sup> (Ecully, France), a multidisciplinary private research centre within which a social sciences research axis focuses on the social and cultural dynamics of contemporary food practices, with a cultural comparison perspective. A tripartite collaboration contract was established between the ANRT, the Institut Paul Bocuse Research Centre and the UMR (Mixed Research Unit) 5283 Centre Max Weber<sup>21</sup> (Lyon, France), a public academic research laboratory which gathers sociologists for the Lyon area and affiliated, in particular, to the Université Lumière Lyon 2.

As a doctoral student, I am enrolled in a Sociology doctoral degree at the Université Lumière Lyon 2 and part of the social science doctoral school ED 483. This thesis was also developed within the frame of an international cotutelle agreement with Flinders University (Adelaide, Australia) at the College of Nursing of Health Science where I am enrolled in a Philosophy PhD program. On addition to the CIFRE and cotutelle contexts, this thesis was also constructed as a result from the collaboration with Mars Food, a branch of the multinational American food manufacturer Mars Inc. Mars provided over two thirds of the total funding for thesis project, the remaining budget coming from the ANRT and Flinders University. This thesis was funded in majority by the private sector and it was conducted according to academic standards.

The supervisory team of this thesis is constituted of actors from various disciplinary backgrounds. Isabelle Mallon is Professor of Sociology at Université Lumière Lyon 2; John Coveney is Professor of Global Food, Culture and Health at Flinders University. Maxime Michaud is Doctor in Anthropology and Carol Anne Pflaum Hartwick is Doctor in Public Health sciences. I have a research training in Social Anthropology. This thesis is enriched by these multiple disciplinary backgrounds but the main disciplinary inscription of this research is in Sociology.

### 2.2.2. Institutionalised research ethics: benefits, constraints and effects on fieldwork

The research project of this thesis was conditioned to the approval of three different research ethics committees from three different jurisdictions. In Australia, any type of study with human participants needed to conform to the principles dictated by the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. Some points of this document have legal force while others are considered ‘best practice’ by research institutions. These principles dictate that the relationship between the researcher and the research participants be based on the values of respect (individuals must be treated as autonomous),

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<sup>20</sup> <http://research.institutapulbocuse.com/institut-paul-bocuse-4887.kjsp?RH=RECH-FR>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.centre-max-weber.fr/English-presentation>

beneficence (minimising burden and making sure the benefits are more important than the risks) and justice (obligation to distribute fairly the burden and benefits of research). The researcher must also follow research merit and integrity.

This project therefore required a thorough evaluation and approval of research ethics committees before any contact with participants could begin. It was examined and approved by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) of Flinders University. At Mars, any research project involving human participants also needed to undergo an ethics evaluation. This project was evaluated and approved by Mars' internal Institutional Review Board (American expression designating Research Ethics Committee). Although in France this type of research did not require a presentation to an ethics committee, the collaborations with Flinders University and Mars implied that the fieldwork project in France also required a Research Ethics Committee approval. Therefore, this project was also evaluated and approved by the Research ethics committee of the University College of General Medicine (CUMG) of the Université Lyon 1. The whole research ethics evaluation process began in August 2019 – after the first stage of the literature review process – and the final approvals were received on the 14th of February 2020 by the CUMG of Université Lyon 1 (IRB n° 2020-01-14-03), followed by an approval by the IRB of Mars in February 2020 and an approval by the SBREC of Flinders University as a low risk project on the 27th of April 2020 (project n° 8596).

These evaluations by three different research ethics institutions had several implications for the construction of this thesis. In terms of timing, the initial recruitment of participants was significantly delayed. The research project of this thesis was reviewed seven times by the SBREC before finally being approved. The whole project was conducted over the course of 40 months, and no fieldwork could be conducted during the first 12 months of the project. For a three-year research project based on an ethnographic approach, delaying fieldwork until the second year is unusual. The length of this research ethics review is explained by several reasons. First, I began this project with a lack of training and specific knowledge of the research ethics process, which led me to have to take additional programs at the Université Lumière Lyon 2, at Flinders University and a private course required by Mars<sup>22</sup>. The ethics committees to which I submitted my project only gathered every two to three months and the members of some of them seemingly had an important amount of projects to evaluate, which may have added to the length of the whole process.

Moreover, extensive work was done to legitimise the ethnographic approach to the research ethics committees, and particularly to the Mars committee and the SBREC (Flinders University). Some of the

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<sup>22</sup> Protecting Human Research Participants Online Training

comments from these committees particularly questioned the use and validity of ethnography, for example:

'The rationale for family food practice choices and comparisons seem thoughtfully considered, yet even ethnographic sampling methods seem weak and unconvincing in being able to methodologically address the questions.'

The small number of families I planned to recruit – from 5 to 10 in each city – was met with particular doubt as to the so-called 'scientific validity' of the sample:

'Consideration might be given to at least increasing the sample size in both Lyon and Adelaide, without which detecting pattern effects and cross-national comparisons would be prone to observer bias'.

'The number of families is very small. Will that give you adequate information to evaluate trends with confidence?'

Some of the comments that required responses pointed to a certain distance to the principles of qualitative research and the inductive approach and required on my side efforts of translation to understand the language inherent to other scientific disciplines but also make the rationales of qualitative research understandable and acceptable:

'The concern is will the Principle Investigator be able to define patterns and draw inferences with convincing clarity, follow up compliance, validity and reproducibility?'

There were also questions about the possibility to recruit families for such a burdensome study:

'The interaction with the investigator in all aspects of food use and the lengthy interviews make me think it will be difficult to recruit families, especially without significant compensation. Have you been able to recruit families for studies like this in the past with little financial compensation?'

As I will explain below, working with these Research Ethics Committees also greatly affected the recruitment process, in particular in the construction and use of consent forms and in the financial compensation for participants. All ethics committees finally approved the project. Throughout, the process constituted a significant challenge during the first year of my PhD. Throughout; efforts were made to convince committee members, who were not from the social science fields, that the ethnographic approach was valid. However, this whole process gave me extremely valuable knowledge on research ethics, leading me to ask myself questions that I had never really considered before that. For example – and this is only one of the many lessons I gained from it – one of the principle I drew from my training in anthropology was that the more time spent in the field, with participants, the better, inevitably. I approached this question of time and fieldwork as a heuristic matter ('how can this benefits my research?') but I had never really thought of the methods I used in terms of burden for participants ('can I answer my research question with a less burdensome method for participants?'). Having to consider the burden of participation made me more sensitive to the nature of fieldwork.

### **2.3. The COVID-19 pandemic: delay in the fieldwork access and impossible in-person fieldwork in Adelaide**

#### **2.3.1. Dampened hopes of accessing fieldwork**

After having finally gained approvals from the research ethics committees, a couple of weeks after having begun my fieldwork, the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown that ensued in France dampened my hopes and my in-person fieldwork process. The rest of my fieldwork thus happened in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant interrupting or pursuing the investigation according to the various sanitary restrictions (see below *Figure 1. COVID-19 sanitary restrictions that impacted fieldwork*) and also evaluating the influence of these exceptional circumstances on the lives of the family members and on the collection of the materials.

# COVID-19 sanitary restrictions that impacted fieldwork

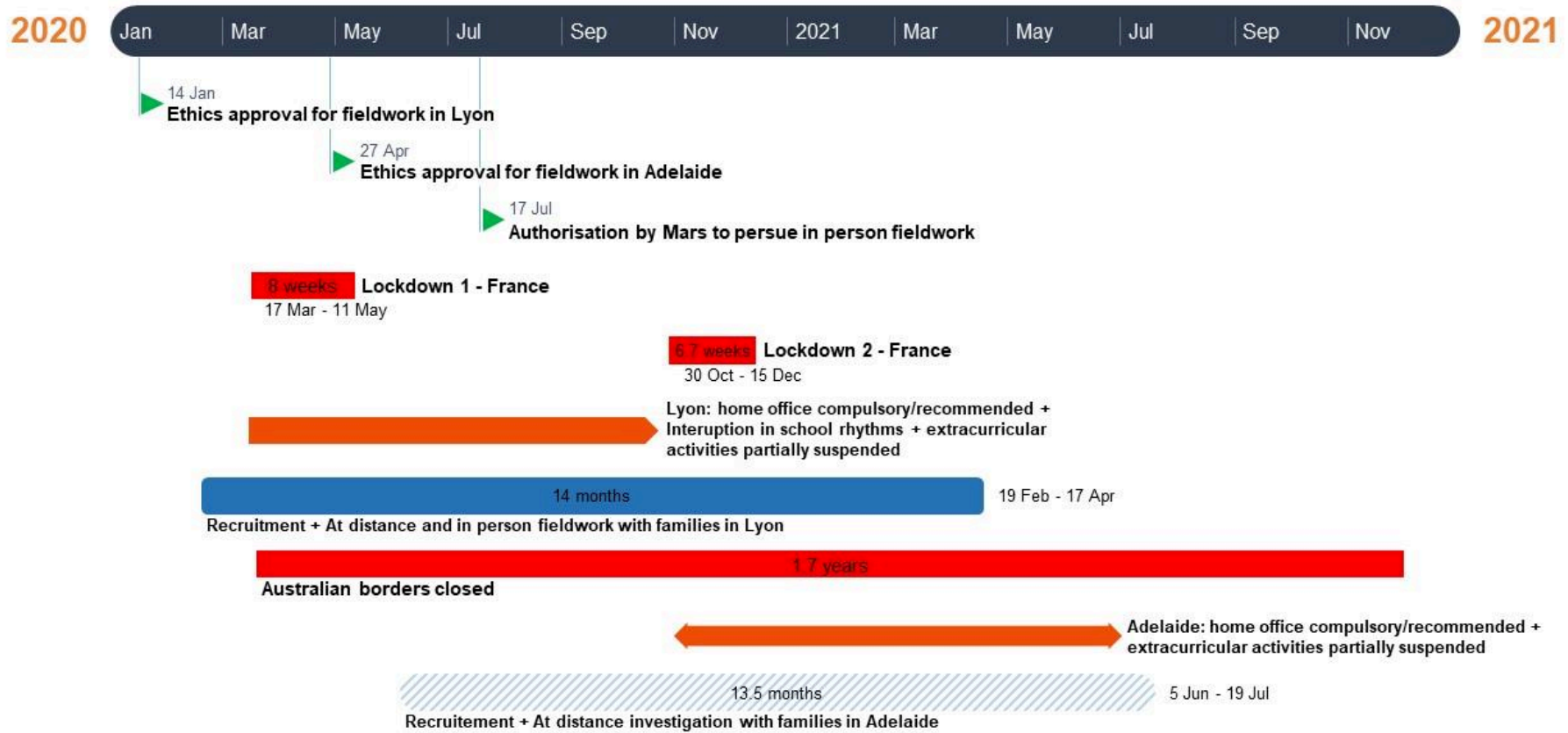


Figure 1. COVID-19 sanitary restrictions that impacted fieldwork

The COVID-19 pandemic and the sanitary restrictions that ensued affected the recruitment process as well. Before the first lockdown in France, 10 families had agreed to participate<sup>23</sup>. I had met with parents from 6 households<sup>24</sup> and had begun fieldwork with a couple of families<sup>25</sup>. After the lockdown was enforced, one mother no longer answered. She had mentioned, though, that she was running for a local election and was very busy. I learned afterwards that she was elected. While I never found out the reason of her dropping out, the pandemic might have accentuated an already busy schedule. Another mother did not appear as enthusiastic about shifting to an online participation during the lockdown ('yes, why not, it's doable') as she was for in-person visits:

'Hello! Still looking for a family for the study? We live in the 1<sup>st</sup> district of Lyon and we have two children of 8 and 11. Enjoy your evening! Serena (former anthropology student... I support!)

'Bonjour! Tjrs à la recherche d'une famille pour l'enquête ? Nous habitons Lyon 1 et nous avons 2 enfants de 8 et 11. Bonne soirée ! Serena (ex étudiante en anthropologie...je soutien !)

When I sent the information sheet to her, she found the study quite "burdensome" but agreed to participate anyway. Another mother<sup>26</sup>, who I interviewed by video conference during the lockdown then no longer answered for the rest of their participation. Of all the parents interviewed during the lockdown, the later was the one who talked about it in the most negative terms, indicating it was a difficult experience, and particularly in terms of feeding the family:

As we need to juggle with my own work and the children's homework, it's really... I don't know, I find it impossible to organize. And so the meals are no longer the priority. And now, for that matter, I have fallen into the thing we do when we go away on vacation: we go away for a vacation, we'll have a really relaxed week, I won't bother with anything. And so now, we are into this: it's ravioli from a can, some things really super easy and simple [25 March 2020, one week into the lockdown]

Comme il faut jongler entre mon travail à moi et les devoirs des enfants, c'est vraiment... j'sais pas, c'est impossible de s'organiser j'trouve. On fait vraiment, j'ai l'impression de faire de la haute voltige tous les jours. Et du coup les repas, c'est vraiment passé au deuxième plan. Et là pour le coup j'suis tombée un peu en mode, comme on fait quand on part en vacances : on part en location en vacances on va faire une semaine très cool, j'me prends pas la tête. Et donc là on est là-dedans, c'est des raviolis en boîte, des trucs vraiment hyper simples et faciles [25 mars 2020, après une semaine de confinement].

Perhaps the discontinuation of her participation was due to the feeling of remorse and of failure as a food provider, which she may not have wanted to display further. A third household was lost during the lockdown. I was in contact with the father and despite having planned an interview several times,

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<sup>23</sup> Bourdon, Imbert, Franquet, Comescu, Obecanov, Ferret, Armand, Stéphanie, Sérena, Eric. As the recruited participants will be presented further in the chapter, for now, their names are place here and not in the main text

<sup>24</sup> Benoit and Marie-Cécile Bourdon, Magali and Stéphane Imbert, Irina Comescu, Sophie Obecanov, Céline and Jérôme Ferret, Sébastien

<sup>25</sup> Bourdon and Ferret

<sup>26</sup> Bianca Armand

I finally lost contact with him. He had already mentioned his work and family life balance was greatly upset by the exceptional circumstances:

[25 March, 1:52 AM] : Sorry for my absence of response. I took me some time to find a balance between work/children [4 and 5 years old] (even though, considering the time I am writing to you, I am not certain I have found it yet).

[25 mars, 1 :52 AM]: Désolé pour mon absence de réponse. Il a fallu du temps pour retrouver un équilibre entre travail/enfants [4 et 5 ans] (même si compte tenu de l'heure à laquelle je vous écris, je ne suis pas certain de l'avoir trouvé encore.).

Moreover, the common aspect of the four households with whom I lost contact was that I had met neither of them in person, contrary to the other six families. Despite the mediation of the recruitment process through a bureaucratised firm, the potential participants only fully agreed to participate once they had met me in-person, as I will explain further on.

As a consequence of this loss of participants, a second round of recruitment was conducted. This second stage was also necessary to include more diverse households. I therefore recruited a lower middle class family<sup>27</sup>, two dual reconstituted households<sup>28</sup> and a single father<sup>29</sup>, two of whom were recruited through fathers<sup>30,31</sup>.

### 2.3.2. At distance investigation with households from Adelaide

Finally, the greatest impact of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic on the construction of this project was the closure of the Australian international borders for over 20 months. This meant, of course, it was impossible to travel to Australia and had effects on the recruitment of participants and the methods used. I delegated the search for families to an Australian recruitment company (Mac Gregor Tan, a market research company<sup>32</sup>). This also had consequences for the project, as they were unfamiliar with the ethnographic approach, which required further explanation. This delegation implied as well less control over the temporality of recruitment, which turned out to be a lengthy process in Adelaide. It also meant less control over the type of families recruited. As there were difficulty to find families that conformed to the initial recruitment criteria, a couple of the recruited households had children below 5 years old<sup>33</sup>. For the second round of recruitment, MacGregor Tan had found 3 households who agreed to participate. Unfortunately, for one of them, the father did not want to take part (which was

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<sup>27</sup> André

<sup>28</sup> Lebrun and Nimaga

<sup>29</sup> Rizzo

<sup>30</sup> Lebrun and Rizzo

<sup>31</sup> Guillaume was recruited through the direct method (I had met him before at a sports center) and Pierre was recruited through the intermediary of a friend.

<sup>32</sup> <https://mcgregortan.com.au/>

<sup>33</sup> Isla Chapman: 1 year old and Henry Bennet: 3 years old



a non-negotiable recruitment criterion for this research) and the other household never answered further.

As with the restrictions imposed in France, the impossibility to travel to Australia led me to implement several digital methods to conduct the at distance investigation. All the family members from Adelaide were interviewed by video conference. While interviews are not the most appropriate method to investigate everyday family meals, the preliminary results of the ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Lyon enabled me to draft a more appropriate and solid interview grid for interrogating family mealtimes in Adelaide, therefore providing greater possibilities of grasping the ways the multiple dimensions of domestic commensality unfolded.

A few of the children from Adelaide were interviewed by video conference<sup>34</sup>. The 3 remaining children were too young to be interviewed by video conference<sup>35</sup>. Some of these interviews presented similar difficulties as those conducted in Lyon, as I will discuss further.

As a complement to these interviews, three families<sup>36</sup> reported about their daily food practices directly to me during a weeklong diary (reporting done on WhatsApp, Messenger or by mail). These diaries provided an interesting and valuable insight into family members' daily practices and experiences. The fourth family from Adelaide<sup>37</sup> sent videos covering three of their mealtimes. As with the videos sent from Lyon, this method turned out to be an excellent method of observation, which was complementary to the in-person observations.

Overall, the construction of the fieldwork with the families from Adelaide followed best practices in ethnography, as I resorted to methods that enabled me to gain an understanding of the family members' lived experience while trying to minimise the interference of the observation method (Garcia 2020; Pink et al. 2016). Moreover, the ethnographic approach is based on a constant adaptation to real life realities and pursuing the fieldwork online was the best way to follow this. Auto-ethnography techniques (such as diaries and participants produced photos and videos) are also a valid methodological approach that have already provided valuable results in terms of food practices and experiences (Lindsay et al. 2019a; Parsons 2016).

The amount and type of materials from Lyon compared to those from Adelaide remain unbalanced, which is to be expected with such small qualitative methods. This unbalance is a result from the closure of the Australian borders and my incapacity to travel to Australia and build my fieldwork from there.

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<sup>34</sup> Hannah and Jacob Chapman, Liam and Ivy Brown, Henry Bennet and Lily Davies

<sup>35</sup> Isla: 1 year old, Oliver and Abigail: 5 years old

<sup>36</sup> Bennet, Brown and Chapman

<sup>37</sup> Davies

For the first couple of years of this research, my thesis was built on the plan that I would be able to travel to Australia and develop an in-person fieldwork with a similar number of households than for the fieldwork I conducted in Lyon. In the third year of this project, I finally settled on doing only digital observations with the households from Australia. All these constraints were enhanced by the funding of this project and the final deadline to finish my manuscript, which was not meant to exceed three years and a half.

The construction of the Australian digital ethnography still provided materials that were put into perspective with the results from Lyon. Fieldwork in Australia was built as a counterpoint rather than a proper cultural comparison. Despite the differences in the amount of observational methods, the physical and cultural distance that existed between myself and the families in Adelaide also proved to be an asset for the interviews. As I was not familiar with the normative representations of proper and healthy meals in Australia, parents and children may have felt that I was automatically less in a position to judge their practices than with families in Lyon. All the parents from Adelaide seemed to talk about their practices in a more unapologetic or inhibited manner than the parents from Lyon. Of course, cultural differences in practices and representations about food and health may have explained this but we cannot exclude that my position as an outsider could have enhanced these differences (Faulkner and Becker 2008).

### **3. Recruiting households for a burdensome study**

#### **3.1. *Different ways of accessing to families: recruitment process***

##### **3.1.1. Recruitment criteria**

The recruitment criteria were established following the literature review. I sought to recruit mostly middle class family households with primary school aged children in the urban areas of Lyon and Adelaide. I wanted to recruit families with children between the ages of 4 and 12 only. I was seeking families whose composition could be dual headed (reconstituted or intact), or male single headed. The parent(s) needed to be working professionally outside of home at least 80% of the time.

##### *3.1.1.1. Gathering a small sample of participants*

The initial recruitment criteria was based on a sample of 5 to 10 families recruited in Lyon and a similar sample of families recruited in Adelaide. The priority was the possibility to conduct an in depth investigation with each family rather than have a larger sample and a more quantitative approach. Some methodological principles safeguard from making overgeneralisations based on insufficient and

sporadic data: the triangulation of research methods and research participants, and the saturation of materials collected (Olivier de Sardan 2015b). The saturation principle means that the fieldwork can stop when the materials produce do not lead to new knowledge (Fusch and Ness 2015; Glaser and Strauss 2009). Triangulation implies that the researcher will recruit various participants and use different methods so that complementary (or contradicting) points of view can be obtained on a same phenomenon.

### 3.1.1.2. *Putting into perspective results from Lyon to materials from Adelaide*

In some research French family practices have been compared to those in Anglo-Saxon cultures, but the comparison is mainly with households in North America, so the results are not always relevant to families in other jurisdictions (Fischler and Masson 2014; Ochs and Shohet 2006a; Kremer-Sadlik et al. 2015). The urban areas of Lyon and Adelaide bear some similarities, despite the overall contrasting cultural contexts. Both the Metropole de Lyon and the Greater Adelaide have an average population of 1,3 million<sup>38</sup>. The working population in the Metropole de Lyon constitutes 48% of the total population and 47% in the Greater Adelaide. In Lyon, just above half (52%) of the working population are 'cadres et professions intellectuelles supérieures' (managers and intellectual professions) and 'professions intermédiaires'<sup>39</sup> (intermediary professions). In the Greater Adelaide, Professionals, Clerical and Administrative workers and Managers constitute just under half (48%) of the working population<sup>40</sup>. The dual headed households with children constitute 43% of the total families in the Metropole de Lyon and the single headed household with children 18%. In the Greater Adelaide, the couple families with children constitute 43% of the total families and the one parent families 17%. Both cities therefore have a large population of families of middle and upper class positions. Both Lyon and Adelaide also have a reputation of being gastronomic or 'food' cities. Yet, despite these similarities that allow us to put into perspective the sample of families from Lyon with some families in Adelaide, there exist two great structural divergences that need to be taken into account in this study as they influence the way we think about practices of families in Lyon in relation to families in Adelaide. Primary school finishes a bit earlier in Adelaide than in Lyon (from 3PM in Adelaide, from 3 to 4:30 PM in Lyon but mostly 4:30PM). The city of Adelaide is much more extended than Lyon is and Adelaideans rely more on the car to go shopping, to work and bring children around. This was the case for all for families from Adelaide, who lived in the suburbs. In Lyon, only one household lived in the suburbs and had no other option than taking their car for work, school and groceries.

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=EPCI-200046977#chiffre-cle-1>  
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population/latest-release#capital-cities>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=EPCI-200046977#chiffre-cle-1>

<sup>40</sup> [https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/4GADE?opendocument](https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/4GADE?opendocument)

### 3.1.1.3. *Focusing on middle class families*

De Singly approaches the family as constructed around a double requirement, which refer to the necessity of creating a sense of collectiveness, while giving individuals enough space for themselves and to express their own individual singularities. This implies that the families selected could either be single or dual households, of heterosexual or same sex orientation, the parents can be spouses, civil partners or not. The caregiver(s) could be the biological, adoptive parent(s) or could be the stepparent. The fact that the initial recruitment criteria did not include these categories did not mean that the family composition was not analysed as a condition of variation on everyday habits.

Many authors have already pointed out the influence of social class on food practices and representations (Halbwachs 1912; Bourdieu 1979; Claude Grignon and Grignon 1980; Régnier and Masullo 2009; Wright, Maher, and Tanner 2015; Le Pape and Plessz 2017; Fielding-Singh 2017a). This is also the case for parenting practices (Lareau 2011; Gojard 2010). Studying such common and daily routines that are family mealtimes requires that social class positions be taken into account. The context of this research is that of a prevalence of prescriptive food norms. Parents in France and in Australia are exposed to many nutritional recommendations (Cardon, Depecker, and Plessz 2019; H. L. Meiselman 2009), although their (dis)engagements with them are extremely varied (Régnier and Masullo 2009). I am not examining the gap between representations and practices, but exploring how the different family members mobilise and engage with food norms which they spontaneously refer (even if in a more or less conscientised manner). These positions vary between a preventive approach to food in term of health to a curative one (Régnier, Lhuissier, and Gojard 2006; Régnier and Masullo 2009; Coveney 2005). I recruited in majority families from middle classes as well as some households situated at the limits of middle classes, including lower middle class and upper classes families. Individuals situated in middle classes adopt ambivalent relationships to food and health norms (Régnier and Masullo 2009). Individuals positioned in lower middle class tend to be more critical of normative food norms, where individuals situated in upper middle class positions adhere much more to these norms and adopt preventive approaches to food. The methodological choice of seeking to recruit families situated at the border of the middle classes is justified by the fact that food styles are a marker of social class and always in relation and opposition to other classes (Halbwachs 1912; Régnier and Masullo 2009).

I follow Bosc's conception of middle classes in France (Bosc 2008), who considers that social positions can be defined according to professions and socio-professional categories (PSC), which are built according to the work status (independent/employed), the sector of employment (private, public), the function exercised, the level of education. I also gathered for all families, except 3, their household net

income, which helped position them in terms of social class<sup>41</sup>. I also obtain the income details of the households from Adelaide. Yet, in Australia, it is more common to categorise social class positions according to the households' Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA)<sup>42</sup>. The latter constituted the main classification criteria for the families from Adelaide. Individuals can be situated at the intersection of different social class positions through inter-professional proximities, through social network and through kinship but, with that in mind, I non the less categorised the different families with the following classes: lower middle class, intermediary middle class, upper middle class and upper class. At the lower end of middle classes, Bosc places employees, and at the higher end, there are executives and intellectual professions. Following Bosc's methodological definition of classes is relevant for our research since family food habits are so strongly influenced by work constraints (Hochschild 1997) as well as lifestyles in general (Bourdieu 1979; Claude Grignon and Grignon 1980).

#### *3.1.1.4. Primary school aged children*

The families were selected on the basis that there was at least one child between the age of 4 and 12 years old and that there was a father living at least part of the time with the child or children. This age range was defined according to our subject of interest. I aimed at investigating interactions and negotiations during family food practices and particularly the role of children during mealtimes. During this age range, parents take decisions concerning children's food socialisation but children are also old enough to negotiate and influence those decisions (Mathiot 2014). For children above this age range, even though family food norms remain the reference (Diaso et al. 2009), adolescents' practices are also defined against family norms.

#### *3.1.1.5. Working parents*

Studies have shown that working parents report time constraints as one of the main barriers to having regular family meals (J. A. Fulkerson et al. 2011; Berge et al. 2013; Trofholz et al. 2018). Time constraints also impact the content of the meal, with some studies suggesting that working parents under time stress rely more on convenience food and take away (Alm and Olsen 2017; Trofholz et al. 2018). However, other studies have shown that being unemployed is also associated with fewer family meals (Riou et al. 2015b). Overall, I sought to recruit parents who were working at least part time.

#### *3.1.1.6. Adapting the recruitment criteria to Adelaide*

The recruitment criteria for the fieldwork in Adelaide were adapted after the fieldwork in Lyon. The age range of the children was lowered to 11 years to exclude any children that could be in senior

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<sup>41</sup> See Appendix 1 for the categorisation of households according to family composition and social class

<sup>42</sup> See Appendix 2 for an example of a SEIFA categorisation of an neighbourhood of Adelaide

secondary school. As I reduced the sample size to four participants (due to the many ethical challenges and COVID-19 related constraints presented above), I sought to recruit only intact dual headed families in order to be able to put into perspectives with more confidence the results from Adelaide with those from Lyon.

#### *3.1.1.7. Compensation for participation in research*

The households were compensated for their participation by cash in Lyon and by food store vouchers in Adelaide. A full participation in Lyon was compensated with 150 euros, given at two stages: 40 euros after the interviews and the second visit and 110 euros at the end of their participation. The four families in Adelaide were sent their vouchers of 100 dollars at the end of their participation. Compensating individuals for their participation in the research is highly regular in Australia, but this is not yet the case in France. The financial compensation of the participants was a recommendation from the Mars and Flinders Research Ethics Committee, which I decided to follow for various reasons. This study was quite burdensome for the participants, in terms of time, energy but also because they were feeding me as well. Providing a financial compensation was first a way to cover the cost of food. Had I not done this, I would have probably brought some food at each meal, which would have biased even more the observations: bringing food, such as something to drink for instance, was too disruptive in terms of their own practices and choices and also positioned me as a regular guest<sup>43</sup>, which I was not. Providing a financial compensation was also a way (among others) of showing recognition for their time and dedication to this study. However, the amount of the financial compensation was decided so that money would not be the main goal of the participants.

#### **3.1.2. Recruitment process**

The various types of interactions with the interested respondents and the participants were kept as materials: these were constituted of social media comments, messages and mails. These elements enabled me to keep trace of the recruitment process and describe it here with accuracy.

##### *3.1.2.1. Recruitment media*

Recruitment messages were posted in several local Facebook groups related to parenting or specific neighbourhoods' and sent to the mailing list of the Institut Paul Bocuse Research Centre. There were approximately a total of nine thousand members in all of these groups and the mailing list. I also sent the recruitment message to five non-profit food organisations, to friends (who transmitted the recruitment message to their colleagues) and former colleagues. I posted as well some flyers in several

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<sup>43</sup> At least in France, it is common to bring an food item when invited to another household

food stores and sport centres of the 7<sup>th</sup> district of Lyon. For the fieldwork in Adelaide, as explained above, I delegated the recruitment process to an Australian recruitment company (Mac Gregor Tan<sup>44</sup>).

### 3.1.2.2. *Recruitment messages*

The recruitment flyers<sup>45</sup> mentioned interviews and observations as well as a compensation (although the amount was not provided at this stage). The focus of the research was left vague on purpose and there was no mention of family meals. The recruitment message detailed that the researcher would be a female PhD student. It was indicated I was affiliated to the Institut Paul Bocuse, which may have biased the recruitment. Magali Imbert (up. class) and Céline Ferret (up. class) talked positively about the Bocuse restaurants and Céline showed me her Bocuse recipe book. We can suppose that being associated to Bocuse could have incited some participants to want to display particular cooking skills or menus. For Pascal André, the association of this research with Bocuse may have enticed him to accept to participate:

**Pascal:** She was talked to me about it and told me: 'are you interested?'. I said: 'well, am I interested..? I don't see why not, but what is the aim?' I saw Bocuse, I said: 'Maybe we will go eat at Bocuse' [laughter]

**Pascal :** C'est elle qui m'en a parlé, elle m'a dit ' Est-ce que ça t'intéresse '. Moi j'ai dit ' Bah si ça m'intéresse... moi je vois pas d'inconvénient, mais c'est quoi le but ? ' J'ai vu Bocuse, j'ai dit ' Peut-être qu'on va aller manger chez Bocuse ' [rire]

In summary, this research proved to be highly burdensome. An examination of the potential participants initially interested, as well as the loss of participants illustrates this bias in the recruitment and how burdensome this study was for the participants<sup>46</sup>.

### 3.2. ***Obtaining participants' consent and assent: between a bureaucratised process and informal interactions***

The institutionalisation of the research ethics process also affected the construction of the fieldwork in itself. The initial contact with participants was mediated by official information and consent forms (up to 12 pages of forms)<sup>47</sup>. These documents allowed the participants to be informed of the purpose and expected conditions of their participation as well as the potential risks and benefits associated to it. Nevertheless, these forms constituted both too much and too little information for participants: they produced a form of bias in the recruitment and could also be misleading for participants. Some of the intermediary middle class parents felt this bureaucratisation was exaggerated and teased me about it. For example, on the 7<sup>th</sup> dinner at the Lebrun household, the family were in the kitchen,

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<sup>44</sup> <https://mcgregortan.com.au/>

<sup>45</sup> Appendix 3 and 4

<sup>46</sup> Appendix 5

<sup>47</sup> Appendix 6

cooking. They were all still in their bathing suits, after having been in their pool. I was taking a picture and Lucien (nephew of Pierre Lebrun) commented, by joking, that they would be in bathing suits on the pictures, which he seemed to think was both fun and inappropriate. Pierre replied it was not a problem as the photos had to be anonymised and he added: ‘we read 45 pages [laughter]!’. This shows he took the consent forms seriously – in particular the aspects about pictures, as with most parents – but there was some mockery in his comment. Others seemingly signed the documents with some indifference, as if they were giving their consent in another manner. Sophie Obecanov returned the consent forms on the third dinner. She told me she did not sign in the right place, or rather that she also signed in Viktor’s name, by mistake:

**Sophie:** This morning, I was on hold on the phone, I was gathering some papers, and suddenly, I thought: oh bugger, the forms! But once I signed everything, I went! In fact, I’ve done too much, I have all... [laughter].

**Sophie :** Ce matin j’étais en attente au téléphone, je rassemblais les papiers autour, et d’un seul coup j’me suis dit : oh, purée, les papiers ! Mais une fois que j’ai tout signé, j’ai fait : en fait je me suis enflammée, j’ai tout ... [rire].

The signing of the documents usually happened without me there, so I could not know how the participants examined these documents. Yet, I also clearly felt that these forms were not the only way to obtain the family members’ consent. While the initial consent was obtained through this bureaucratised form, I sought to maintain or even gain the family’s trust and consent throughout the whole study.

First of all, the parents invited me into their home according to their own availabilities. Once we had agreed I would visit several times, I let them decide when they wanted to have me over. They were the ones contacting me and proposing the dates. For me, this was a way to make sure their consent still existed throughout the whole of their participation. I also never assumed there was inevitably going to be a next visit or a next interview because, again, I wanted them to feel free to stop their participation at any time. This was also particularly important because of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>48</sup>.

Gaining the consent and the trust of the children was also more complex than through the simple mediation of assent forms. While parents assented for them children also had to sign an assent form, gaining the assent of children was not necessarily a straightforward process either. Pierre Lebrun explains how his eldest daughter Lena would likely react to my presence:

**Pierre:** How shall I put this? Our children are a bit overwhelming [laughter], after a first timid contact [...]. My daughters will adopt you, Chloë (8) will adopt you in thirty seconds!

**Fairley:** Oh yeah, they are at ease?

**Pierre:** No

**Laëtitia:** So Lena (10) not so much, it will take some time with Lena...

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<sup>48</sup> See Appendix 7 for a description of how I took preventive sanitary measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic during my in-person visits



**Pierre:** ... it will take some time with Lena  
**Laëtitia:** The others [laughter], it will go well!  
**Pierre:** Léo (6): well, you're a girl, so we will see...  
**Laëtitia:** You will be have a little charming scene...  
**Pierre:** ... yeah, that's it, he is going to do his seducer scene. Nathan (11) is going to show off [laughter]  
**Laëtitia:** ... "oh, I am the eldest, I need to be proper"!

**Pierre:** Comment dire? Nos enfants sont un peu envahissants [rire]. Après une première approche timide [...]. Mes filles vont t'adopter, Chloë (8) va t'adopter en trente secondes !  
**Fairley :** Ah oui, elles sont à l'aise?  
**Pierre :** Non  
**Laëtitia :** Alors Lena (10) pas trop, Lena va mettre un peu de temps...  
**Pierre :** Lena, elle mettra longtemps...  
**Laëtitia :** ... les autres [rire] ça va bien se passer !  
**Pierre :** Léo (6), t'es une fille donc bon, on verra...  
**Laëtitia :** ... tu vas avoir droit à un numéro de charme  
**Pierre :** ... oui, c'est ça, il va faire son numéro de séducteur. Nathan (11) il va faire son malin [rire]  
**Laëtitia :** [rire] ' Je suis plus grand, faut que je fasse bien ! '

It turned out Chloë (8) was more shy with me at first than was Lena, who appeared straightaway very at ease, even taking me as a confidant on her games and imagination. At times, parents asked their children to come to join them on the computer for me to interview them, but for a few of them, I could see they did not really want to be there, so I quickly abandoned the interview, such as with Rose (5) for example. The matter of parents' assent but the implicit refusal of the children to participate in interviews became an issue once in Adelaide, when a child started crying during the interview:

**Amy:** Jacob, are you concentrating? You just have to sit, listen and talk, okay?  
**Jacob:** I don't wanna...  
**Fairley:** It's okay, if you don't want to talk anymore, we can end here if you want  
*He starts crying*  
**Amy:** It's alright.... Why are you crying?  
**Fairley:** It's okay, it's okay, Amy, don't push it. It's fine Jacob, you did a really good job in answering!  
**Jacob:** [crying] because I don't wanna do it anymore...!  
**Fairley:** Oh, that's okay, it's fine Jacob  
*And then Amy pushes him to answer a few questions*  
**Amy:** All you have to do is sit still and concentrate, there's a few more

She finally pushed to have one more question, which he listened to and gave the answer to his mother. This calmed him down, and his distress seemed to go away as quickly as it came, but obviously, the whole interview showed that he was not giving his assent during the time he was crying. At the end of the interview, Jacob started crying again. Amy then commented it was a long day but then reprimanded him: "Oh stop! You've been so excited by this the whole day!" At this point, I felt caught between Amy's parenting practices – who obviously felt it was important that Jacob took part in the interview, because they had discussed it together earlier and because he initially seemed excited about it – and Jacob's distress. The rest of the interview was aimed to find a middle point in between these two positions: not intervening in Amy's parenting practices, and asking Jacob questions and interact

with him in a way that I thought would make him more at ease. In the end, I did not integrate Jacob's interview in this research, as proper, ethical conditions were not reached to conduct an interview.

The reverse process also happened with another child. I always gave the numerous information documents and consent forms to the parents before their participation began and explained to them orally as well what the whole study implied. Yet most of the time, parents did not give me back the consent forms straightaway, which was also an indication of the form of consent they valued most (interactional consent). At the Bourdon household (up. class), I got Lucie (6) and Marius (8) to read and sign the child assent form at the fifth visit, when I interviewed them. I read the document with Lucie<sup>49</sup>, explaining it to her when she told me she did not understand. Lucie seemed to understand why I was there: she said she agreed to talk to me about food at home. Yet, once I asked her if she wanted to tick the 'yes' box for participating and write down her name, she says 'no':

**Fairley:** Do you want to participate?

*Lucie shakes her head, saying 'hm hmm'. Marius, who is right beside us in the sitting room, bursts into laughter, and goes and get his father from the kitchen saying 'she said "no", she said "no!!" Both parents then arrived*

**Fairley:** You were bothered, this morning, when I asked you some questions?

*Lucie says 'naaah', with a smile*

**Marie-Cécile:** Especially because you love that!

**Benoit:** 'You can't stop talking at any moment'. 'Hmm, stop talking? Me?' You don't know how to how, stop talking [laughter].

**Fairley:** So do you want to write your name at the bottom of the page, or not?

**Benoit:** Come on, I think you can write your name, right? You found that fun?

*Lucie approves, with a little smile*

**Fairley:** You found it weird that I was there?

*She does not answer*

**Marius:** Yes and no

**Fairley:** I am not a guest, I am not a baby-sitter, but who am I really?

**Benoit:** Yeah, it's a bit weird, right. She is not a friend...

*Lucie laughs*

**Fairley:** So usually, I would get you to sign them at the very beginning

**Marie-Cécile:** [to her children] But at the same time, it is complicated to show them to you when you don't exactly know what is going to happen. So asking for your opinion when you don't exactly know what is going to happen, it's always complicated.

**Fairley:** Est-ce que tu veux bien participer ?

**Lucie :** Elle secoue la tête et fais : ' hm hm '

*Marius, qui est assis à côté, éclate de rire et court chercher ses parents dans la cuisine, en criant ' elle a dit non, elle a dit non ! '. Les parents arrivent dans le salon*

**Fairley :** Ça t'embêtait, ce matin, que je te pose des questions ?

*Lucie dit ' naaan ', avec un sourire*

**Marie-Cécile :** Surtout que t'adores ça !

**Benoit :** Adélaïde Tu peux t'arrêter de parler à n'importe quel moment ', ' Euh, arrêter de parler, moi ?!' Tu sais pas faire, t'arrêter de parler [rire] !

**Fairley :** Est-ce que tu veux écrire ton prénom ou pas du coup ?

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<sup>49</sup> I did not read the documents to all the children. Some parents took care of this. But I never read the forms together with the parents, which constituted a lack of explicitation and objectivation of the impact of the age of the participants on the social relationship of the investigation. In this case, only reading the forms to certain children, I thus positioned myself in a hierarchical relationship with them (Mallon 2017).

**Benoit** : Je pense que tu peux écrire ton prénom quand même, hein ? T'as trouvé ça rigolo ?  
*Lucie dit oui, avec un petit sourire*  
**Fairley** : T'as trouvé ça bizarre, un peu, que je sois là ?  
*Lucie ne répond pas*  
**Marius** : Oui, et non  
**Fairley** : Je suis pas une invitée, je suis pas une baby-sitteuse, mais au fond, je suis qui ?  
**Benoit** : Ouai, c'est un peu bizarre, hein... C'est pas une copine...  
*Lucie rigole*  
**Fairley** : Normalement, je vous fais signer ça dès le début hein...  
**Marie-Cécile** : [à ses enfants] Mais en même temps, c'est compliqué de vous le montrer quand vous savez pas encore ce qui va se passer... Donc vous demander votre avis alors que vous savez pas exactement ce qui va se passer, c'est toujours un peu compliqué.

Throughout the study, both Lucie and Marius appeared to be comfortable with me being in their home. They were shy at the beginning, as with some of the children on the first visit, and I respected their space and privacy, but quite quickly, they appeared at ease with me, and even included me in their little mischiefs. At one point, on the first dinner, when Marie-Cécile asked Lucie if they could tell me one of the things she did during the lockdown, which her parents were proud of, she refused. This was an indication for me that she was able to say no when she was uncomfortable, even in front of me. Yet, had I prioritised the written assent form over the verbal and interactional contract, perhaps the Bourdon (up. class) would not have participated at all in the study. And as Marie-Cécile pointed out, the whole study might have been too abstract to imagine without practice for young children. Overall, obtaining children's assent was a much more complex and longitudinal process than the research ethics committees made them appear to be.

The anthropologist Bosa reflects on his experience with Australian research ethics committees and how he had to, at times, play around the institutionalised ethics process, which did not, however, prevent him from conforming to best practice in terms of ethical fieldwork, which Bensa and Didier Fassin call the 'policies of fieldwork' (Fassin and Bensa 2008):

'In a way, the consent form can hinder the investigation relationship by bureaucratizing it: it is difficult to establish an accomplice relationship when the form is there to remind the ultimately investigator/investigated relationship [...]. If the ethnographer does not have any choice than to bypass or amend the institutional protocol, this does not prevent him or her, on the contrary, from conforming to a certain "ethics of fieldwork". That is also what we call the "policy of fieldwork"' (Bosa 2008).

Yet, perhaps my whole explanation above is simply a justification to hide the fact that the ethnographic practice can have an unethical aspect to it, as Schwartz notes. He describes fieldwork as containing:

'highly tactical and calculative dimension [... and requires a] series of rather unethical skills [...]. How do we hide the point to which the investigation is the result of a form of soft and manipulative intrusion into the lives of the subjects, of a permanent effort to see what shall not be seen and without being seen? How do we silence the voyeurism and the double bind inherent to such an enterprise?<sup>50</sup> (O. Schwartz 2012b)

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<sup>50</sup> Personal translation

### **3.3. Participating families**

#### **3.3.1. Final group from Lyon**

In total, 10 families in Lyon fully participated in the study, full participation being interviews with both parents and at least 1 observation visit. I still integrated the interviews of the households who gave up participating<sup>51</sup>, as their interviews and food diary provided marginal materials, which complemented the material from the 10 principal households (see *Table 7. General characteristics of the participants from Lyon*).

For this research, only 4 out of the 12 families contacted me through the father. The majority of households were inhabitants of Lyon's 7<sup>th</sup> district (North and South, but all were in the wealthier part of it), but one family lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> district (West and wealthier part) and another one in a suburb of Lyon.

Five families were recruited through the parenting and neighbourhood Facebook groups<sup>52</sup>. When I posted the recruitment message on the pages, the first group had 1526 members and the second over 6000. Two families were recruited through a climbing centre of Lyon (with whom I had already chatted briefly before at the centre, so they recognized me when I contacted them). One family was recruited through a former colleague, who had posted my recruitment flyer at her new office. One family was part of the same non-profit organization as me and finally, a friend and her family agreed to participate as well.

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<sup>51</sup> Bianca Armand and Sébastien Cellier

<sup>52</sup> One of the groups was managed by 5 moderators, one of which was a former district councillor of Lyon 7 and a member of the center-right wing political party LREM (La République En Marche)

Table 7. General characteristics of the participants from Lyon

Family	Composition	Age children Public/Private school <sup>53</sup>	Occupation		Annual household net income after taxes (euros)	Social class	Highest education degree	Neighbourhood Housing type Owner/Tenant	
			Mother	Father					
Bourdon	Intact dual headed	6, 8 Public	Education advisor in a Secondary School	Environmental engineer, head of his service	Between 100 000 and 105 000 <sup>54</sup>	Upper class	Masters for both	Lyon 7 Apartment Tenant	
Imbert		5, 8 Private	Pharmaceutic industry - sales	Pharmaceutic industry - technician	100 000 <sup>55</sup>		Masters for both	Lyon 7 Apartment Owner	
Ferret		7 Public	Engineer, Associate partner in her company	Management consultant	85 000		Master for both	Lyon 3 Apartment Tenant	
Comescu		7, 10 Public	Assistant Professor and researcher (public)	Engineer in informatics	73 000 <sup>56</sup>		Doctorate for Irina, Master for Laurent	Lyon 7 Apartment Tenant	
Franquet <sup>57</sup>		10 (6ème classe) <sup>58</sup> , 12 (3ème classe) Private	Teacher in engineering school (public)	Engineer in transports, manages a team	55 000		Upper middle class	Master for both	Lyon 7 Apartment Owner
Obecanov		6 Public	Real estate agent	Assistant Professor and researcher (public)	48 000		Intermediary middle	Doctorate for Viktor, Masters for Sophie	Lyon 7 Apartment Tenant
Lebrun	Reconstitute d dual	6, 8, 9, 10, 11 Public	Human resources officer	Manager of a public childcare advisory agency	46 500	Masters for both		Southern suburb House Owner	

<sup>53</sup> Private school are socially more selective (in particular in terms of cost) and provide another indicator of the household's social class position (Zanten 2009).

<sup>54</sup> The Bourdon communicated an annual income without taxes of 125 000 euros, which meant an estimate net annual household income after taxes between 100 000 and 105 000 euros. They also mentioned they had a realty but Marie-Cécile said they were losing money with it.

<sup>55</sup> The Imbert communicated an income without taxes of 115 000 euros, which meant an estimate net annual household income after taxes of approximately 97 500 euros.

<sup>56</sup> The Comescu communicated an annual income without taxes of 80 000, which meant an estimate net annual household income after taxes of approximately 73 000 euros

<sup>57</sup> Based on their annual net income only, the Franquet would be positioned in the intermediary middle class. However, several elements indicated they belonged to the upper middle class: they owned a quite big and new apartment in an quite wealthy neighbourhood of the 7<sup>th</sup> district of Lyon, Lucas occupied a managing position as an engineer and Marie worked in higher education. Their children both went to private schools.

<sup>58</sup> Both the Franquet children skipped a class, which meant that, despite a similar age with the other participating children, they were closer to being pre-teenager and teenager. This also explained why they had significantly more negotiation power at the table.

Nimaga		5, 12 (16 did not participate) Public	Researcher in the private sector	Welder	46 800		Masters for Ana A levels for Issa	Lyon 7 Apartment Owner
Rizzo	Single headed	10 Public		Artist, director of his own company Work as a sports instructor during the summer as well	33 000 <sup>59</sup>		A levels	Lyon 7 Apartment Tenant
André	Intact dual headed	4, 6, 7 Public	Unemployed <sup>60</sup> Worked previously as a translator	Consultant in management for a franchised company	41 450	Lower middle	Masters for Angélique CAP for Pascal	Lyon 7 Apartment, Tenant, social housing
Armand		8, 11	Used to work as a translator in the industry, now studying (Masters)	Insurance inspector	<i>Unknown</i>			Villeurbanne Apartment (?)
Cellier	Single headed	6, 8	Project manager		<i>Unknown</i>			Lyon 7 Apartment (?)

<sup>59</sup> Guillaume reported an annual net income before taxes of 35 000 which resulted, approximately, in an annual net income after taxes of 33 000 euros.

<sup>60</sup> According to the recruitment criteria I established, all parents were meant to be employed at least part time. However, seeing the impact of the COVID-19 on work configurations (with some parents working from home and others becoming unemployed or partly unemployed, I decided to be less strict with this criteria and still recruited the André, despite the mother being unemployed.

### 3.3.2. Final group from Adelaide

Four dual headed families were recruited in Adelaide (*Table 8. General characteristics of the participants from Adelaide*). All the parents worked full time (or more) and they lived in individual houses in the suburbs of Adelaide. Three Australian families had household income between 140 000 and 180 000, which positioned them in the fourth quintile and the intermediary and upper middle class<sup>61</sup>. One household was positioned in the lower middle class. The median annual household income in South Australia in 2016 was 62,712 Australian dollars<sup>62</sup>. They all lived in suburbs of Adelaide of similar Socio-Economic Index for Area (SEIFA)<sup>63</sup>. Three household were located in the suburb of Tea Tree Gully (Wynn Vale, Greenwith and Golden Grove) and one lived in Burnside. The SEIFA scores ranged from 1038 for Wynn Vale (Bennet), 1046 (Greenwith), 1051 (Golden Grove) to 1081 (Burnside), which positioned the neighbourhoods as predominantly middle and upper middle class.

*Table 8. General characteristics of the participants from Adelaide*

Family	Composition	Age kids inside rec. crit	Age kids outside rec. crit	Occupation type and work %		Annual household income range	Social class	Neighbourhood Housing type
				Mother	Father			
Bennet	Intact dual headed	7	3	Public servant in housing	Public servant manager Engineer,	140 000 – 180 000	Upper middle class	Wynn Vale, house
Brown		8, 6		Public servant in housing	Firefighter	140 000 – 180 000		Burnside, house
Chapman		7, 5	1	Primary school teacher	Public Servant manager, social services	140 000 – 180 000	Intermediary middle class	Greenwith, house
Davies		7, 5, 5		Executive assistance at University + Independent marriage celebrant	Public servant youth worker	100 000 – 140 000	Lower middle class	Golden Grove, house

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/finance/household-income-and-wealth-australia/latest-release#key-statistics>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2016/4>

<sup>63</sup> See Appendix 5 for an example of SEIFA categorisation of a neighbourhood (Tea tree Gully)

## **4. Organisation of the ethnography and the different methods used**

### **4.1. Various types of observational methods**

#### **4.1.1. Home visits**

##### *4.1.1.1. Focus of the observations*

In between the periods of high levels of COVID-19 contaminations and the sanitary restrictions that followed, I was able to visit many households in Lyon. During the time I was in the families' homes, I witnessed or took part in the following type of activities: the food preparation, the preparation of the eating area, the meal, clearing the table, putting away the food, filling the dishwasher, cleaning the kitchen. I also took part in other everyday domestic activities such as playing games with children, weeding in a garden, swimming in a pool, which were all activities that the family members invited me to take part in, as it was what they were doing while I was there. During all of these activities, I had many conversations and interactions with all the family members. All the in-person visits were audio recorded, from the moment I arrived until I left the house. The recorder was in the middle of the table during the mealtimes and on me otherwise, when we were not at the table.

##### *4.1.1.2. Position as an observer and impact of my interference*

My position as an observer varied over time and throughout the families. There were differences between the first and the following visits. For most of the families, the first visit was an occasion for the whole family to meet me in person. I had met some of the parents and children (Bourdon household, Imbert parents, Sophie Obecanov, Irina Comescu, Céline and Jérôme Ferret, Issa and Ana Nimaga and Guillaume Rizzo) but for the rest of the participants, the first meal was the first time they got to know me. This implied that, at times, during the first meal, I occupied a greater space than I would have liked to in terms of conversation because asking me questions and talking with me seemed to be a way for the family members to ease out the oddness of the situation. This also corresponded to regular practices of having a guest over. Parents and some children also seemed to be genuinely interested in my research, my origins and my personal life. Perhaps this was also a way for the family members to make sure they still wanted to give consent for the study. In any case, I always answered honestly to their questions, except when families questioned me about the other families of the



research (which some of them did<sup>64</sup>). In the latter case, my concern was protecting the other participants' identity, but I also did not want to influence them with my observations of the other families' practices. So I either answered by saying that I was still in the process of the analysis and that I had no clear vision of the results (which was true), or I talked to them about elements which I thought were insignificant in terms of what I was researching about.

Over the visits, I learnt to take up less space in the mealtime, which was also permitted by the fact that everybody was more at ease with me being there. Taking up less space meant trying to talk less, trying not to initiate a new conversation, trying not to initiate any action (such as sitting down or leaving the table before anybody else, asking for more food, etc.). I tried to be as passive as possible all while being active enough to make the whole family feel comfortable.

In terms of mood, I also tried to adapt to the emotional atmosphere that the family members were creating. If the mood was fun and jolly, I would follow in this as much as possible (making jokes, as would the rest of the family members, for example). If the mood was relax and quiet, I tried to behave in the same way. When parents got cross, I simply did not say anything nor tried to show any reaction.

Overall, my attitude during the fieldwork was guided by two imperatives: the first was to make efforts to attenuate the awkwardness of the situation by trying to blend in as much as possible. The second imperative was influencing the practices and the atmosphere the least possible, similarly to what Lareau and her team were aiming for:

‘Intervening to alter family dynamics would jeopardize the fundamental purpose of the study, which was to see how the families acted in their natural routines. Having a field worker sitting smack in the middle of the living room was hardly “normal”; I certainly didn’t want to add yet more disruption. All of our efforts needed to be aimed at minimizing the influence of the study on family interaction. The rule of thumb I followed, and instructed the research assistants to follow, was to “hang out” and not to intervene’. (Lareau 2011, 401)

At times, one imperative contradicted the other. For example, during the first or the first few visits, I felt it important to engage in the conversations if parents wanted this. I also took this opportunity to engage with children, asking them some questions for example, so as to create a connection with them. However, I could see this was disturbing the mealtime and a child (Rose Imbert) even reproached her parents that they were talking too much with me.

My role as an observer also varied from one family to another. A few families gave me a more central position in their household than others. This was the case with the families with an only child (Ferret, Obecanov, Rizzo) but also with the Imbert. Other families seemed to particularly understand well what

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<sup>64</sup> A recurring question asked by parents or children was if the food I was served at the different households was ‘good’ (in the tasty and healthy meaning of the term) and if I ever had to force myself to eat something I really did not like. I always answered that I enjoyed the food and insisted on how lucky I was to be able to eat with the families and be served food. What I meant to transmit was that I easily appreciated any type of food I was served.

my objectives were: I was not a usual guest and they did not pay too much attention to me, nor ask me too much information about myself or my research. This was particularly the case at the Bourdon (up. class), the André (low. mid. class), the Nimaga (int. mid. class) and most of the time at the Lebrun (int. mid. class) and at the Franquet (int. mid. class). Feeling too much at ease was an indicator that helped me recognise if I was shifting too much toward the 'ordinary guest' rather than the 'observer guest'. Being a bit uncomfortable, on the contrary, was a good sign: trying not to take part in mealtime conversations nor help with the food preparation, the laying and clearing of the table, the washing up made me felt uncomfortable. Just as families had to get used to having an unusual guest at their table, I had to force myself not to be a 'proper' guest either. This implied shifting towards what I would have characterised as a rather rude behaviour if I had been a simple guest. After a while, I even told families to consider me as a distant cousin they were hosting, who was staying at their place for a while – and whom they could be comfortable with – but would never helped them in anything.

In any case, whatever the position I adopted or family members' reaction to my presence, I influenced their practice and created a bias. Yet my impact on family members' behaviours was informative, providing I was able to recognise it as such. This is what Schwartz called a "useful interference"<sup>65</sup> (2012b), following Devereux's reflections on the heuristic aspect of the participants adaptation to the ethnographer's observation (1980). Schwartz recommends:

'Turning over the meaning of the interference by treating it not as an epistemological obstacle but, on the contrary, as a source of a specific knowledge that could not be obtained in any other way'<sup>66</sup>. (O. Schwartz 2012b)

Schwartz considers that the interference that arises from the relationship of observer-observed creates symbolic value that allows the researcher, in return, to learn more about the world of the participants. The participants' reaction to the research situation can be that of trying to hide or show something. At the Comescu household, for example, the children were significantly quiet at beginning of my first visit, until I asked them during the meal if they were behaving that way because I was there. Both parents responded that they were not usually so quiet. This interference showed how Lea (7) and Hugo (10) thought they should have behaved in the presence of a guest. They were also exaggerating their display of proper table manners, which also indicated they knew table manners were also meant to be integrated so that they could adapt to any type of public commensality.

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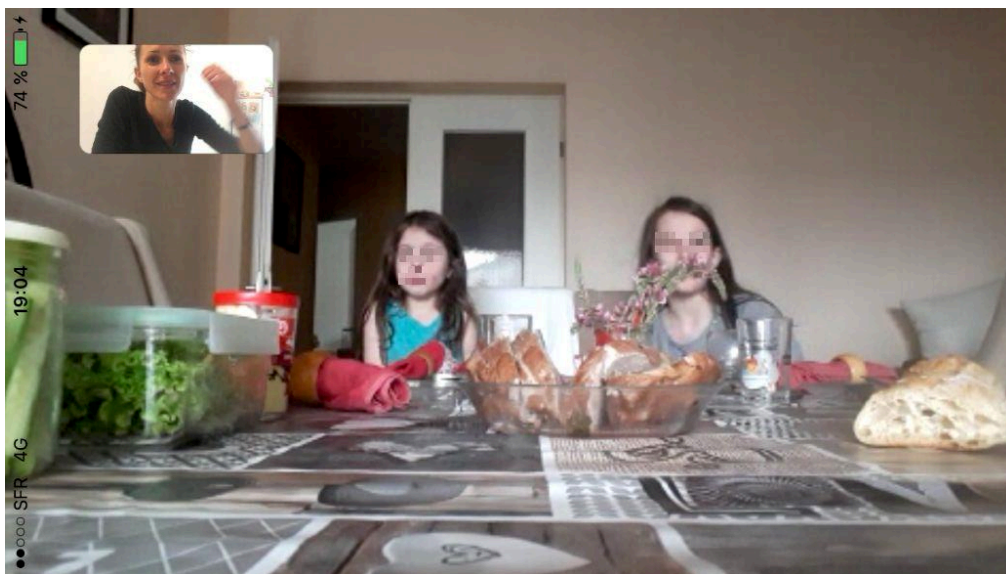
<sup>65</sup> My translation of "perturbation utilisée".

<sup>66</sup> Personal translation

#### 4.1.2. Video conference dinners

After the first lockdown in France persisted a period when parents were still working from home, children had not returned to school yet and multiplying in-person contact was not recommended. I also had to wait several weeks before receiving the authorization from Mars food to return to in-person fieldwork (authorisation attached to the financing of the project). As a consequence of this, I adapted my methodology again to be able to observe some family mealtimes and I proposed to 6 households to have ‘video conference shared meals<sup>67</sup>’ and 3 of them accepted (Imbert, Comescu and Obecanov).

The parents would call me when they were preparing the meal or when they were about to sit down and we would “share” a meal mediated by the video conference. In order to reduce the awkwardness of this situation, I also ate my meal in front of the camera. The parents used either their phone or their computer that they set on or beside the table, which meant that one of the family members was displaced and sat elsewhere, so that all could be seen by me (*Figure 2. Lunch 4, video conf. Bourdon*). Four video conferences of these meals were audio recorded and one of them was video recorded.



*Figure 2. Lunch 4, video conf. Bourdon*

The idea of the method came up during the lockdown, when alternative ways had to be constructed to pursue the research. Some of the families had mentioned sharing food virtually with friends or relatives during the lockdown (Imbert, Comescu, for example). Sharing a meal over a video conference is practiced and described, in other contexts, for transnational families who regularly come together for meals thanks to video tools (Marino 2019). Migration studies have already put forward the way that families that are separated physically by migration processes recreate family relationships,

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<sup>67</sup> By using video-conferencing software such as Teams, Zoom and Skype

intimacies (Mckay 2018) and even parenting practices (Salazar Parnas, 2008). Such practices question what eating together means and suggest that sharing the same space is not necessary a condition. This method remained for the households of this research, however, a highly unusual way of having family meals. Yet it provided interesting and useful insight into family members' daily lives and proved to be an efficient way to progress with fieldwork, keep contact with families and adapt to the sanitary restrictions. Nevertheless, it also quickly showed its limits. Having dinner in front of a screen greatly interfered with the mealtime dynamics, especially in terms of interactions:

**Stéphane:** Ultimately, what I found was a pity, it is more in terms of sounds. In fact, I don't have the impression that we can have a proper conversation, in a normal way. As we don't hear you much, we are obliged to stop. So I think it's kind of a pity.

**Magali:** We are obliged to listen to each other.

**Stéphane:** Yeah, we are especially obliged to have some silence, in fact. I find it's a bit of a pity. It's a bit like we were on a walkie talkie, or something like that, it's weird.

*Dinner 3 by video conference*

**Stéphane:** Ce que je trouve qui est dommage, dans l'absolu, c'est plus au niveau du son. En fait, j'ai pas l'impression qu'on peut avoir une conversation qu'on peut avoir de façon normale. Comme on t'entend peu, au fait, au final, on est obligé de s'arrêter, voilà... ça je trouve ça relativement dommage.

**Magali:** On est obligé de s'écouter

**Stéphane:** Mouais, on est surtout obligé d'avoir du silence en fait. Je trouve ça un peu dommage.... c'est comme si on était sur un talkie walkie, ou un truc comme ça, c'est bizarre.

*Dîner 3 en visio conférence*

*Magali is telling me how she sells some empty jars online. Stéphane is speaking to the girls at the same time:*

**Magali:** [to Stéphane] Well if we all speak at the same time, we don't hear each other.

**Stéphane:** Go ahead

*Lunch 4, video conf.*

*Magali me raconte qu'elle vend des bocaux vide en ligne. Stéphane parler aux filles en même-temps*

**Magali:** [à Stéphane] Ah oui, mais si on parle en même temps, on s'entends pas

**Stéphane:** Vas-y

*Déjeuner 4, video conf.*

The family members' reaction to the appearance of screens on the table also revealed, in return as a 'useful interference' (O. Schwartz 2012b) some of the central aspects of their mealtimes: the priority of table conversations and the importance of sharing food. During the first video conference dinner, Laurent Comescu is explaining how they met with friends over video conference twice, while having an 'apéro'. Then he goes on:

**Laurent:** I miss physical [contact] and also the interaction... And I am fed up of screens! I am not looking, it's not that I don't want to see you..., but working from home means that, screens, I can't stand them anymore!

*Dinner 1, video conf.*

**Laurent :** Le physique me manque, et puis l'interaction... Et puis moi je sature des écrans ! Je regarde pas, c'est pas que je veux pas vous voir... mais le télétravail fait que, l'écran, je le supporte plus quoi !

*Dîner 1, video conf.*

At the end of the video conference dinner at the Obecanov household, both Viktor and Sophie proposed that the next dinner took place in person, while respecting sanitary precautions:

**Viktor:** I think that the aspect, a bit from afar [by video conference], the exchange is less good...

**Sophie:** ... yeah, it's less nice...

*Dinner 1, video conf.*

**Viktor :** Je pense que le côté un peu... de loin [en visio], l'échange il est moins bon...

**Sophie :** ... ouais, c'est moins sympa...

*Dîner 1, video conf.*

Viktor and Sophie were referring here to dimensions of their mealtimes that would later appear to be central: being able to talk all together and experiencing a convivial atmosphere. At the first visit in person, Sophie also commented on how it was nicer for me to be able to eat the same food as them (as opposed to different food over video conference).

#### 4.1.3. Family produced videos

Again because of the COVID-19 health restrictions, I asked a few families (Bourdon, Franquet, André, Rizzo, Nimaga in Lyon and the Davies in Adelaide) to film their mealtimes and send me two or three videos. Only 4 out of these 6 households accepted to pursue with this method (André, Franquet and Nimaga) and, in the end, only the André and the Davies sent some videos. Guillaume Rizzo and the Franquet ended up inviting me for in-person visits and the Nimaga experienced technical difficulties with filming. The Bourdon (up. class) refused and Marie-Cécile explained later on during a visit:

**Marie-Cécile:** We are all fed up of visio and video. And yet, I thought about it [pursuing their participation by sending video of their family mealtimes], but I told myself: in fact, we all forbid ourselves to have screens at the table..., I mean... I told him [her husband]: we are not going to film ourselves!

*Dinner 3*

**Marie-Cécile :** On en a tous ras le bol de le visio et de la vidéo. Et pourtant, moi j'y ai réfléchi [à poursuivre leur participation en envoyant des vidéo de leur repas], mais j'me suis dit, mais en fait, on s'interdit tous des écrans à table..., 'fin... J'lui ai dit [à son mari] : on va pas se filmer quoi !

*Dîner 3*

These family produced videos started when the family members arrived at the table (or at the couch, for the Davies) and ended when the last family members left the table or during the cleaning up. The children were of course aware they were being filmed, and sometimes turned towards the camera to make a joke, a wince or just stare at it. However, for the majority of the mealtime, the children seemed to ignore the camera. At the André household, a parent would occasionally glance at the camera, which meant they did not forget it was there either, of course, but like the children, they otherwise acted as if the camera was not recording. This method still biased the materials, as all the household members still felt observed (as suggested by the occasional glances to the camera). Yet it biased differently their

practices, as they did not have to contend with me being there in person, talking to me and serving me food.

#### 4.1.4. Ethnographic field notes and audio recordings

Ethnographic notes were written directly after the observation visits. At times, the writing was substituted by an audio-recorded description of the visit. By doing this, I aimed at describing elements that I thought would not appear on the audio recording nor the pictures, such as children silently leaving the table, children starting to eat before the rest of the family was, non-verbal communication like a father frowning to a child indicating she was not sitting properly and the child readjusting her posture without a word.

### 4.2. *Interviews*

All the family members were interviewed except the children of 3 families (Ferret, Nimaga and André), due to the COVID-19 health restrictions and delay in the research schedule. The principal method being the observations, this did not compromise the fieldwork. All the interviews were audio recorded. Each parent interview lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour and twenty minutes and each child interview lasted between 10 to 40 minutes, with the majority being under half an hour.

The interviews provided extremely valuable materials on parents' experience and expectations about family food practices and specifically about family meals. However, the materials from the interviews about family members' practices were of lesser quality than the materials resulting from the observations. My mastering of the interview method was at times limited to get the family members to describe their practices. I made the mistake of asking questions to parents that were too vague, such as 'in general, how do you...?'.

#### 4.2.1. Online interviews

Because of the COVID-19 restrictions, 22 out of the 29 adult interviews and 10 out of the 21 interviews with the children happened online, by video conference. These digital interviews were conducted on the platform of choice of the participants (usually Skype, Zoom or WhatsApp). I had initially planned to begin the fieldwork by the observations and conduct the interviews in a second stage, after preliminary results were drafted, as a means to complement observations and question family members about their practices. In order to progress with fieldwork and to keep contact with the participants, I decided to begin conducting the interviewed with some of the parents online. This was also necessary to interrogate family members about the effect of the sanitary crisis on their daily lives and food practices.

These interviews provided indeed valuable data, but the conditions in which they happened had several effects. They could not be conducted in a confidential: there was always a spouse, a child or a parent nearby, which may have biased the interviewee's discourse, leading them to hide certain experiences from their spouse or children or, on the contrary, led to exaggeration of discourse.

In addition, most parents were already spending their day behind a computer, and a few of them mentioned they were fed up of it, potentially adding some lassitude during the interview:

**Laurent Comescu:** Right now, we say some buddies for an hour over visio, and on top of that, you as well, and work, that's all I do! Oh screens, I can't take them any more!

**Laurent Comescu :** Là, on a vu des potes pendant une heure, via la visio, et puis après ça, plus vous aujourd'hui versus le boulot, je fais que ça ! Ah moi, les écrans là, personnellement je sature!

Some parents who sought to have more privacy during their interview (Stéphane Imbert, Bianca Armand) did not find comfortable positions enough to provide the necessary headspace: Stéphane was interviewed on his balcony and there were regularly cars with sirens flaring passing by which bothered both of us. Bianca was in her garden but I could see she was not comfortable. At times, I felt uneasy interviewing the parents during the lockdown, as I knew most of them were already under greater stress than usual: the Bourdon and the Comescu, in particular, had been ill with COVID-19 for a few weeks and Bianca Armand was having difficulty adapting to the whole situation of working from home and taking care of the children.

The quality of the conversation with the children during these online interviews was usually very poor. I had not met any of these children in person, which made it more difficult for me to make them feel comfortable with me and more difficult for children to feel at ease. Some parents would intervene a lot, so in the cases of the children from Lyon I interviewed some of them again in person, individually, once the restrictions were lifted (Hugo (10) and Lea (7) Comescu: up. class; Elisa (6) Obecanov: int. mid. class). The difficulty to interview children online was accentuated by my own shortcomings in terms of interviewing techniques and especially conducting interviews with children. The in-person interviews with children (Bourdon, Comescu, Obecanov, Lebrun and Rizzo) provided more valuable material as they were based on pictures that I had taken during the fieldwork, of the cooking and the mealtime (photo elicitation method). Overall, I estimate that only 10% of the material from the digital interviews with the children from Lyon and from Adelaide were useful for this research.

#### **4.3. *Digital reporting of food practices***

Some of the families also produced a weeklong food diary by reporting daily on their family food practices through written descriptions and photos. The instructions were to report during seven days

the participants' activities relating to food and how they felt about these. They were also oriented to understand the changes happening in the households during the lockdown. The participants were informed that I would also ask them questions about their descriptions and send them prompt questions if I saw they did not report for a long period (over 24 hours). Consequently, the food diaries took the form of a discussion, similar to interviews. These discussions are similar to what Kaufmann and Peil call the Mobile Instant Messaging Interview (MIMI) (K. Kaufmann and Peil 2019). This method has been developed by inspiration from the diary and the mobile experience sampling method (MESM). The MIMI offers the advantage of sending reminder messages to participants and explore remotely the descriptions and visual data that the participants were sending. All the participants already used the reporting tool (WhatsApp, Messenger, mails) on a regular basis in their daily life. Each of these food diaries, once gathered in a Word document, amounted to between 10 and 20 pages per household, of written description and pictures. Although they also provided rich materials, these were only used marginally, for lack of time to process to a systematic coding of these documents. These food diaries were also only partially successful in providing information on the way mealtimes happened, as parents reported mostly about what they cooked and ate. This method also constituted a way of keeping in touch with the families that I had recruited before the confinement, although I do not know if there would have been any drop outs without this follow up technic.

#### **4.4. *Arriving in families' homes***

I let parents decide when they wanted me to arrive at their place, with the condition that I be able to witness the food preparation. My arrival varied between 5 to 6:30 PM and coincided with a variety of activities, from picking up the children from childcare (once at the Obecanov household) to arriving when the table was already laid (the later only happened twice, at the Imbert household). For the majority of the visits, I arrived when one or both parents were home (in the case of home office) and children were busy playing, having their bath/shower or just hanging around. I could therefore sometimes witness the transition into family life and the evening preparation. Usually, I was able to transition directly into whatever was happening; most of the time this meant being with the parent(s) in the kitchen while they were preparing dinner. Other times, if I arrived earlier, I would usually join the children in the games, or just be there without being too much in the family members' way.

#### **4.5. *Leaving families' homes***

It was unclear when was the appropriate moment to leave the family's home. I had initially planned to leave after the dishes were done. However, this would have implied that I sometimes stayed until very late in the evening, after the children were put to bed, or even stayed until the next day. I usually



observed part of the dishes being done (filling the dishwasher), but some of the dishes were left in the sink or the kitchen counter to be washed later on in the evening or the next day. For my first visit at the Imbert household, at the very beginning of the fieldwork in Lyon, I naively asked a mother that she let me know when they wanted me to leave; her answer revealed that leaving families home is trickier than this:

**Fairley:** You will let me know when I need to leave, right?

**Magali:** Yeah

**Fairley:** Let's do that, you tell me...

**Magali:** Well you will notice, we will be in bed [laughter]

*Dinner 1*

**Fairley:** Vous me direz quand il faut que je parte, hein ?

**Magali:** Ouais

**Fairley:** On fait comme ça, vous me dites...

**Magali:** Ben tu te rendras comptes, on sera couché [rire]

*Dinner 1*

I decided to leave when children were told that they had to go to bed, not too long after dinner. The length of the visit varied from 45 minutes to 3 hours and 45 minutes<sup>68</sup>. I therefore heard the parents asking children to get ready for bed and the children's regular negotiation of this. I was sometimes still there when children were washing their hands, sometime their face and brushing their teeth but I would not be there when children were getting into bed.

#### **4.6. Ending fieldwork**

The parents of this study knew that their participation implied having me over to eat between 4 to 10 times. This left space for adjustments, for me to ask for more visits and for them to end their participation before 10 visits. Several factors provoked the end of fieldwork. Parents usually invited me first for what I perceived was their easiest and ideal mealtime, which meant the evening when they had the most time to prepare and eat together and when all of them were home for dinner. This was not always the case though, and I was also visited when the rhythm was quite rushed. If the families had several types of meal during the week, I asked to witness the various types of them. For example, I knew some households had extraordinary or exceptional mealtimes as weekly routines. These could be eating in front of the TV, having a family meal with one parent absent, eating out or ordering in, having a guest over (other than me), preparing exceptional menus. I had a more trouble to be invited to these meals, but managed, towards the end of the fieldwork, to do so for 7 households (Bourdon, Imbert, Comescu, Obecanov, Lebrun, Ferret, Rizzo). Parents seemed happy to have me over for these meals, but I felt this was not the first type of commensality they wanted me to witness.

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<sup>68</sup> See Appendix 8 for the type and length of each observation

I visited most the Bourdon, Imbert, Comescu, Obecanov, Lebrun, Rizzo (between four to seven visits). For the fieldwork in these households, the principle of saturation of materials applied. I never felt like parents were fed up of having me and so I had the possibility to decide on the number of visits, within what was announced. Obtaining visits with the Franquet, Ferret, Nimaga and André families was more difficult and the fieldwork with these families took place for a longer period. This delay may have been partly due to particular events happening in these households (medical issues, moving houses, shared custody of children and limited availability). Other factors then arose that provoked the end of fieldwork with these households (COVID-19 health restrictions and the schedule imperatives of this research that needed to be unfold within a restricted time frame of 3,5 years). Ending fieldwork with the households from Adelaide was more straightforward. The Bennet, the Brown and the Chapman families were not expected to send videos of their dinners. Sally Davies was asked to send two videos and they ended sending three.

#### 4.7. Summary of the different materials constructed<sup>69</sup>

The whole fieldwork in Lyon included 12 households and I led an at distance investigation with 4 families from Adelaide.

A total of 42 meals were observed. I did 33 in-person visits to the 10 families in Lyon (for the two other families from Lyon, no observations were done), which amounted to approximately 70 hours of in-person observations. In addition, I did 5 video mediated meals with 3 families from Lyon (5h). In addition, two other families sent me 5 videos of their dinners (André and Davies). This amounted to approximately 79 hours of observations, only 4 of which were with families in Adelaide<sup>70</sup>.

The limited amount of video observations with the Australian households (3 meals) explains why the findings from Lyon were put into perspective rather than properly compared with those of Adelaide. Between 1 and 7 observations of meals were made per family.

The in-person observations were audio recorded (all except two visits due to technical difficulties) and approximately 10 pictures were taken per visit, which I considered to be less intrusive than video recordings. Ethnographic descriptions were also taken right after the visits.

A total of 50 family members were interviewed. 15 fathers were interviewed once (out of 16 fathers from the 16 families), all 14 mothers were interviewed once, for an interview that lasted approximately one hour. In Adelaide, the mothers and fathers additionally took part in a half hour introduction interview. Twenty-one children out of 34 were interviewed.

10 families took part in a 'diary of food practices'<sup>71</sup>. Both parents were asked to participate but in 7 households, only the mothers reported<sup>72</sup>.

In Lyon, the core materials came from the observations and were complemented by the interviews. In Adelaide, the materials that came from observations were central for 1 family only (Davies) and for the 3 other families, the core material came from the interviews and were complemented by the auto observations from the diaries of food practices. The materials about children's role and experience of family meals came mainly from the observations.

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<sup>69</sup> See Appendices 8, 9 and 10 for a precise description of the duration and type of materials constructed and mobilised in this thesis

<sup>70</sup> See Appendix 8 for a detail account of the observations per household.

<sup>71</sup> Bourdon, Imbert, Comescu, Obecanov, Ferret, Nimaga, Armand, Bennet, Brown, Chapman

<sup>72</sup> Bourdon, Imbert, Comescu, Obecanov, Armand, Bennet, Brown

## **5. The analytical process**

The results from this research come from a multilayered and evolving analytical process. There were several major steps. The first one is what I call instant fieldwork analysis, that is to say superficial analysis of what I was witnessing during the visits and interviews. I then proceeded to the transcriptions, which constituted another level of analysis. The coding process followed this. Here, a deeper analysis began and it was divided into two steps: an initial coding process based both on large themes and small details, followed by a reorganisation of some of the codes, merging small ones into larger ones and subdividing larger themes. The last analytical process happened during the writing of the manuscript in itself. Overall, the analysis was based both on my sociological intuitions, which were more numerous during the fieldwork as well as on a rigorous analytical process of the corpus of materials.

### **5.1. *Instant fieldwork analysis***

The first level of analysis happened during fieldwork itself. This research is situated between an exclusively inductive approach and a deductive one. A solely inductive approach would have implied going into fieldwork without previous conceptualisation of the research topic nor particularly set research questions. This was not the case here: I had spent over 6 months on literature review and the construction of the research questions. I did not adopt either, of course, a deductive approach, in the sense I was not testing a hypothesis in the field. The research questions were meant to be large enough to leave space for new perspectives to arise during the fieldwork, but also restricted enough to allow for sufficient focus and rigor in my investigation. Therefore, I inevitably arrived into the families' homes with a more or less vague analytical frame in mind. The choices I made in terms of number of visits and type of practices and discourses focused on came from my initial understanding of the materials I was creating. For example, deciding when to stop the fieldwork within a particular household, or when to ask for more visits was in itself guided by my first level of analysis of having reached saturation or needed further observations. During fieldwork, I also quickly decided to focus on the food preparation and meals, leaving out the food provisioning. This came from the realisation that my initial focus was too large and that I needed to re-centre around family meals and commensality.

### **5.2. *Transcription***

Once fieldwork was over, I transcribed all of the interviews and all of the audio and video registered observations. I did not transcribe my ethnographic notes and my audio registered ethnographic descriptions. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, including all the particularities that constitute oral speech (the hesitations, the repetitions, the contractions, the lexical errors, the emotional

indicators and the tonality). The same process was applied to the transcription of the audio and video registered observations. For these materials, I sometimes summarised sections of the recording, which I thought at the time constituted peripheral elements. Later on, I had to return to these summaries and transcribe additional materials.

All 6 interviews with the parents from Adelaide were transcribed verbatim by an Australian professional company<sup>73</sup>. A few interviews from Lyon were also transcribed by two different interns who worked for me: Florette Rat (first year of Anthropology, University Lumière Lyon 2) transcribed 8 interviews (parents) and Victoria Hatem (first year Master in Social Sciences, ENS Lyon) transcribed 7 interviews. I transcribed myself the other 29 interviews as well as the 40 recordings of meals (two visits were not recorded). Transcribing the audio recordings of the observations myself was central to the construction of materials and the analytical process. There were many non-discursive elements of the visits that did not appear *per se* in the audio recordings but I was able to transcribe them anyhow, usually from memory or by referring to my ethnographic notes. These elements could be the general mood, the silent actions of participants, looks and expression on their faces, body positions. Of course, this type of recollection is in itself an unreliable process, but I did not describe elements I was not sure to have witnessed. Resorting to the pictures and the ethnographic descriptions also stimulated the recollection process. Most of these materials could have been constructed with video recording techniques but I preferred the later to remain complementary methods as I thought the audio recording would create less interference than filming participants with a camera.

Although the verbatim was transcribed with its oral specificities, I did not reproduce all of them in the interview and observation excerpts that I used in the manuscript (DeVault 1991). Although this is an unusual practice in anthropology, I felt it was necessary for several reasons. First, I translated the extracts from the fieldwork in Lyon myself that I mobilised in the manuscript (from French to English). I did not feel it would have been possible for me to translate these numerous oral specificities. I was therefore already losing some elements in the translation. This in itself would not have been a sufficient reason to 'polish' the verbatim. The first drafts of chapters were based on the original verbatim and I found (as did supervisor Isabelle Mallon) that such raw materials rendered less audible the participants' discourses. When listening to the audio recordings, their discourses appeared clear and understandable, even with the many repetitions, contractions, etc., but putting it as such on paper made it rather difficult to read and trickier to understand. Of course, it is very delicate to adjust oral speech into a more straightforward written one, the risk being betraying, in another manner, the original discourse. In order to safeguard against this, the first three steps of the analysis were done

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<sup>73</sup> <https://www.outscribetranscription.com.au/>

with the original verbatim, which enabled me to make sure I was not misinterpreting the comments. I also left some hesitations, some repetitions and some contractions when these were heuristic in themselves. For example, Issa's hesitations and repetitions showed how he felt when their mealtimes conversations were interrupted by other dimensions (teasing) and became all the more important as they had made the effort to exclude screens from the table:

**Fairley:** There are no screens at the table?

**Issa:** Oh no, no, no, no, no, that is not possible

**Fairley :** Y'a pas d'écrans à table ?

**Issa :** Ah non non non non non, ça c'est impossible

Many participants mobilised verbal tics such as 'like', 'um', "ah", 'euh', 'ben', 'bah' (and their English equivalents for the families from Adelaide). They also commonly repeated words. Most of the time, these elements did not bring additional information to their speech, unless they were a marker of hesitation in which case I would not delete them.

The ethnographic material collected during the fieldwork were of particular nature: they were all based on recording techniques (audio and video records, written messages from the participants and photos). This is rather unusual but constitutes a strength. I also took succinct ethnographic notes and I audio recorded my own comments on the observations after each visit. I did not transcribe nor code these ethnographic notes. They were mobilised more peripherally, or as a way to confirm the results emerging from the recorded materials. This limit has two explanations: first, I positioned recorded materials as being more valid than my own notes, implying I began the transcription and analytical process with these. Secondly, when I realised that my ethnographic description were also interesting materials, I no longer had the time to treat them with the same rigor and systemacy as I treated the other records. Such ethnographic description remain a valid material and may have enriched or nuanced my findings.

### **5.3. Coding**

Before I began to code, I created some large categories, some of which were 'food provisioning', 'food preparation', 'family meal', 'alternative family meal', 'clearing/cleaning/washing', 'participant characteristic', 'impact of covid', 'impact of my presence'. I created other central subcategories such as: 'mealtime conversations', 'humour', 'emotions', 'table manners', 'conflicts', 'conviviality'. I also created codes related to the different family members' roles and experiences. The later codes came from the literature review and the gaps identified. I created, however, the majority of the codes as I was going through all of the transcripts. Usually, when I finished with a document, the transcript was nearly entirely coded. Once this first level of coding process ended, I reorganise some codes into new

categories and merged some of them together. When I began writing my manuscript (which meant I was no longer coding), I had 983 codes for 3465 coded segments covering all the interviews and the observation materials. Of course, this did not imply that there were only 3 or 4 coded segments per code. Even at the very end of the coding process, many of the lowest level of codes only had 1 coded segment (for example: ‘mother distributes conversation turn during emotion game’) while some other had over 30 (‘family member getting up during a meal’). There were up to 7 levels of coding and the same sections of transcripts were often placed in different codes, which allowed the coding process to be both vertical and horizontal. In the end, the first level of code corresponded to the main chapters of my manuscript (*Figure 3. Final organisation of codes into chapters*)

Code System	3 465
> CHAPTER 1_CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK	60
> CHAPTER 2_SOCIAL & CULTURAL CONDITIONS OF FM PERF	832
> CHAPTER 3_FRONTIERS & FORMS OF FM PERF	999
> CHAPTER 4_EATING, FEEDING AND MEALTIME FOODWORK	497
> CHAPTER 5_CONVERSATIONS_varolised but unequal investement	393
> CHAPTER 6_SOCIALISATION & MANGEMT OF EMOTIONS & HUMOUR	226

Figure 3. Final organisation of codes into chapters

Some other codes of first level were transversal to many chapters (*Figure 4. Final organisation of codes into transversal results*):

> ALTERNATIVE FAMILY MEALS in ordinary family life	138
▼ ORDINARY FAMILY MEALS	0
> Chapter 5 & 6_PLAYING/SINGING during family meals (+)	12
> All_CONFLICT/CONFRONTATION and its resolution	32
> All_SCREENING during family meals	29
> All_IMPORTANCE OF EATING TOGETHER	33
> All_EXPERIENCES of/REPRESENTATIONS of EATING TOGETHER	120
▼ Chapter_EXTRAORDINARY COMMENSALITY	0
> GUESTS OVER FOR FAMILY MEALS	6
> EATING OUT & EATING AT OTHERS (+)	17
▼ COVID & LOCKDOWN	0
> - Impact Covid-19 sanitary measures -	26
> Missing ingredients - change in food habits	1
> Trying out new food/recipes	1
> Being fed up of new routine of eating together	0
> Children participate more in food prep	1
> Start to eat together to reassure children	0

Figure 4. Final organisation of codes into transversal results

At the end of this coding process, I was able to draft a first version of this manuscript’s structure, with three or four levels of organisation per chapter.

#### **5.4. *Analysing through writing***

The last step in the analytical process happened during the writing of the manuscript. The writing was constructed upon the verbatim extracts from the different interviews and visits. Appendix 10 details the number of extracts mobilised per each observation, interview and food diary to provide an overview of the way the materials were mobilised across the manuscript.

Analysing through writing implied a deeper analysis, a reorganisation of the results and debate with the existing literature. The writing in itself led me to notice and deconstruct elements of the fieldwork that had not appeared clearly before. This was also the step when I resorted to the secondary materials: the ethnographic descriptions, the pictures and the diaries. The previous steps of analysis could be considered as rather passive and grounded. The writing implied putting extra distance with the materials, deciphering the contradiction and the implicit in the participants' discourses and actions. In this process, some elements of results which I thought were important were put aside for lack of evidence or relevance, and new results arose. In the end, the content of the various chapter appeared to be quite different from what I had initially announced in the very first draft of the manuscript.

#### **5.5. *Reflexivity***

To what point is it possible to observe ordinary family commensality, and particularly its interactional, emotional and conflictual aspects? It is usually a private routine but the requirement of observation created a context where my presence may also have been generating additional mealtime work and unusual forms of commensal performances, which might tend more towards an actual theatrical performance (with a new public: a researcher) rather than everyday rehearsal performances. I took into account and analysed this type of fieldwork disturbance (O. Schwartz 2012a).

In the case of this research project, these efforts of reflexivity seem to be beneficial for several reasons. One of the principal imperatives of this research lies in the necessity not to take the normative family meal imperative, presented in the Introduction and in Chapter 1, as a foundation for my work, as Grignon warns us (Grignon 2015). It was necessary to deconstruct the social and cultural representations of commensality as equivalent to conviviality and food quality. Laying out the different experiences that I have had of family meals constitutes a means for safeguarding against a personal interpretation, which can be much more subject to moral and ideological biases.

Bourdieu considers reflexivity as a key to the qualitative improvement of research. The social science researcher, as an 'observed observer' must submit to 'objectification not only all that he is, his own social conditions of production, and thereby the limits of his brain, but as well his own objectification of work, the hidden interests that are at stake, the profits they promise' (Bourdieu 1978, 68). Data or



research materials are produced during the researcher's interactions with the participants. Consequently, there is a degree of subjectivity in the construction of these materials. 'Such a bias is inevitable and should neither be denied (positivist attitude) nor overestimated (subjectivist attitude). It can only be controlled, and at times utilized or minimized through an 'explicitation process' (Olivier de Sardan 2015a, 58). The anthropologist Olivier de Sardan argues that there is inevitably a 'personal factor' corresponding to the intervention of subjective elements in the research process. That is to say, the researchers' strategies, interests and affects have an influence on his or her interests, on the object of study and on the production of materials and knowledge, no matter how systematic the observation procedures may be. The impact of the 'personal factor' is all the more true during the ethnographic fieldwork when 'the interactions of the researcher with members of the group studied play a central role in the production of the data itself, whether produced through prolonged immersion, interviews, or observation' (Olivier de Sardan 2015a, 112). Olivier De Sardan warns that it is impossible to scientifically measure and control the impact of subjectivity, as it is too complex. He argues however that some 'explicitation' appears to be necessary 'both to shed light on the researcher's personal trajectory in the field and to uncover possible domination effects or describe certain particularly significant research interactions. However, these considerations only have methodological significance at a low dose, without inflation or pretension, and provided they remain in the background' (Olivier de Sardan 2015a).

I am from a French rural and farming origin (small organic farm). My parents both come from families who have been farmers for generations. They have an A-level education. My father began an engineering school, without graduating from it. My mother is of Canadian origin and both of them have traveled and lived abroad. My current position as a PhD candidate and an employee positions me in the middle class with rather high cultural capital.

Lareau argues, in a methodological appendix of her book *Unequal Childhoods*, (Lareau 2011) that, 'as is a truism in ethnographic research, our own biographies influenced the research, especially my reasons for beginning the study and what we saw.' She explains that her own chaotic childhood had consequences on her fieldwork experience during which she 'felt comfortable in families where there was yelling, drinking, emotional turmoil, and disciplining by hitting.' (Lareau 2011, 395). My own experiences of family life and family meals certainly have influenced how I reacted during fieldwork. I grew up with 5 siblings, in a house where there was a lot of bustle and teasing but also order and rules. As such, I felt at first more comfortable in families where there was also a lot of agitation (Lebrun, André, Nimaga and Obecanov). During my childhood, family meals occupied a central position in our daily lives: we always ate together and the meals were quite lively. I also remember, though, that we had to remain silent when my parents needed to talk about matters that concerned them only (usually

work). There were some strict mealtime rules which concerned principally the rhythm of commensality: arriving at the table on time, waiting till everybody was served and my mother had sat down to begin to eat, not eating too quickly (this one was not followed very well by my siblings and myself), getting up and leaving when authorised. Overall, I do not remember the other table manners to have been particularly strict (other than sitting up straight and not talking with a mouth full). This meant that I felt a bit less comfortable in families where there was more order and application of table manners (particularly at the Bourdon household and the Imbert). I also experienced family life with Canadian relatives, where eating together was much less important than it was in France. I had noticed, however, that these relatives socialised elsewhere than during family meals, such as after work and school with a snack and a drink (in the living room or outside, on the porch or the patio) as well as after dinner, in the living room. I entered fieldwork with the notion that it was fine for families not to eat all together.

## **6. Conclusion**

This chapter has described the methodological choices that I made, which followed the identification of the research gaps in the literature and the chosen theoretical perspectives. These choices were in reality adjusted to the institutional contexts in which I conducted this research, in particular by working with the various research ethics committees. Many adjustments also had to be made in order to pursue the fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic and its many health restrictions. Hence, the fieldwork process was not a straightforward one, as it is always the case with ethnographic studies. Other than the habitual adjustments that an ethnographer needs to make in the field, the contexts in which this research was conducted added extra challenges to the construction of the fieldwork. These challenges also enriched this research, in particular by providing heterogeneous materials. In the end, I was able to construct a large and saturated enough corpus<sup>74</sup> of materials to elaborate this manuscript.

In the next chapter, I present with greater depth the participating households of this research, depicting succinct family portraits and describing their everyday social life rhythms, which also affect the performance of everyday domestic commensality.

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<sup>74</sup> The amount of materials collected exceed the scope of this manuscript.



# Chapter 3. Family portraits and social life rhythms

## 1. Introduction

I have succinctly described in the previous chapter the participants' main characteristics (*Table 7. General characteristics of the participants from Lyon* and *Table 8. General characteristics of the participants from Adelaide*). The objective of this chapter is to provide in depth portraits of the different households and describe the overall social life rhythms and priorities within which everyday domestic commensality took place.

The research was not meant to be based on an in depth focus of the participants' life trajectories *per se*, nor on their work experiences and cultural activities. Yet, the different interviews conducted with the participants, and the many hours of observations undertaken in the households (along with the other complementary methods) provided a large number of materials on the dimensions cited above, which I took into account for the analysis of family food practices and family commensality. The following descriptions will be incomplete, fragmented portraits but enlighten, in some way on another, the analysis of everyday family commensality.

The socio-economic and cultural positions of the recruited families varied greatly, even with these small groups of 10 households in Lyon and 4 in Adelaide. The participating households were mostly situated within the middle classes (11 households). The other three households were positioned, by their income in the upper classes: (Bourdon, Comescu and Imbert). There were not only differences, and sometimes similarities, in terms of household income, but also in the parents' education, career trajectories and stability or interruptions. Parents had varying experiences of their professional work as well as different ways of dealing with work and family life balance. The family members' lives and their household pace were also shaped differently by children's various extracurricular activities (or the absence thereof) and sometimes by parents organised leisure activities. Some households could afford domestic help while others could not. A few grandparents were significantly invested in the children's weekly care, especially in Adelaide, while others lived far away. The families' apartment or house setting varied as well, which partially contributed to shaping food practices and commensality (Jönsson, Michaud, and Neuman 2021). In some households, the TV occupied a central position in family life while it was more rarely the case for others.

## **2. 'Disclosing their private life without revealing their identities'<sup>75</sup>**

The research contract with the participating families implied the anonymisation of all the materials from Lyon and Adelaide. This was all the more important as I was intruding in family members' homes and private lives.

For this thesis, the presentations and articles, all the names and surnames of the participants have been changed, by finding substitutions that did not betray the participant's age, sex, social and cultural origins. Some parents had compound surnames but for the sake of clarity, I have substituted the two surnames by a single one. The exact job title is not disclosed nor the company or organisation where the parents worked. The schools of the children are not revealed. The Facebook groups where the recruitment messages were posted are not disclosed nor the location and name of the sport centres where a couple of families were recruited. This anonymisation process also applied during and outside of fieldwork: I did not reveal identifying elements to the participants that questioned me about other participating families, nor did I disclose these elements to colleagues, friends, relatives who questioned me about fieldwork. The participants were also told that I was the only one to have access to these identifying elements and so all raw materials are kept in a secure location accessed only by me.

Within each family, the conditions of confidentiality during observations and interviews were followed. This happened during observations and interviews where I did not repeat what I was told to the other participants. Similarly, parents often questioned me about the interviews I conducted with their children. I was never completely alone with them – as at least one parent was in the house at the same time – but for some interviews, parents were in the other room but did not necessarily overhear. Some of them later asked what their children had told me, and I did not disclose any information. All the family members signed the consent and assent forms, but these have not been integrated in the appendix of this manuscript, for anonymisation purposes<sup>76</sup>. These consent forms are therefore stored securely as raw materials.

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<sup>75</sup> (O. Schwartz 2012b)

<sup>76</sup> See Appendix 4 for a sample of blank forms

### 3. Families from Lyon

#### 3.1. *The Bourdon, a rich family with high cultural capital*

The Bourdon were a dual headed household with a 6-year-old girl (Lucie) and an 8-year-old boy (Marius). They were recruited through the intermediary of a friend who transferred my recruitment message addressed to fathers to her work colleagues. This shared acquaintance could have helped in the recruitment and their trust in inviting me into their home. Benoit, the father, contacted me directly by mail. I met the whole family at their home before their participation began. Their economic situation positioned them as rich and they were situated just above the upper class. They communicated to me an annual net household net income of approximately 100 000 euros and conveyed having a comfortable financial situation:

**Marie-Cécile:** Are we capable of answering right now, about our income?

**Benoit:** Hum..., yes

**Marie-Cécile:** I don't know how much you earn

**Benoit:** I earn...

**Marie-Cécile:** ...you earn enough for me to be able not to know [laughter]

*Dinner 4*

**Marie-Cécile:** On est capable de répondre là, tout de suite maintenant, sur notre tranche de revenus?

**Benoit:** Euh... oui.

**Marie-Cécile:** Moi, je sais pas combien tu gagnes

**Benoit:** je gagne...

**Marie-Cécile:** ... tu gagnes largement assez pour que je puisse me permettre de ne pas savoir [rire]

*Dîner 4*

Benoit was a civil servant and worked as an assistant director in a public establishment specialised in sustainable development. His work was quite demanding and stressful, which affected his private life:

**Benoit:** It's a job that, intellectually, is demanding, and so sometimes, indeed, I have trouble disconnecting. And in fact, I don't really disconnect. So I take the public transports to, indeed, erase a bit the hard drive. It does not really work, especially at the moment, where it's a bit complicated. I mean, there really was a lot of work to do. And so I arrive home not really available.

**Benoit :** C'est un boulot qui, intellectuellement occupe beaucoup, et du coup j'ai, parfois effectivement, du mal à débrancher. Et en fait, je fais pas forcément la coupure. C'est-à-dire que je prends les transports en commun, donc en général j'essaie de lire dans les transports en commun, pour, voilà, un peu effacer le disque dur. Mais ça marche pas beaucoup, surtout ces derniers temps où c'était un peu compliqué. Enfin y'avait vraiment beaucoup de choses à faire. Et donc du coup j'arrive à la maison pas forcément l'esprit très libre.

Marie-Cécile also worked as a civil servant in a secondary school, as a Principal Educational Advisor. Benoit studied two years at a 'preparatory class'<sup>77</sup> and then got a degree from a public engineering

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<sup>77</sup> My translation of « classes préparatoires », a highly selective and demanding two year program that then opens up entry into universities and elite schools.

school. Marie-Cécile also studied at a literary preparatory class (to please her parents, she said), then moved on to study Arts at the University (Bachelor) and finally graduated with a Master's degree in History. During her interview, Marie-Cécile talked extensively about her career and the professional sacrifices she made, giving up a successful career in the private sector to work in a secondary school, in order to take care of their children. Her discourse showed a certain pride of having previously occupied a position with high levels of responsibility but also revealed the contradicting imperatives she faced in terms of professional career and what she considered to be proper parenting:

**Marie-Cécile:** At the time I met Benoit. I had just come back from India and spent a year unemployed. I remembered that people who receive fifty thousand CVs in a day don't even look at them [she previously worked in a recruitment agency]. So I had to do something else. And I finally decided to make the network work, all that stuff [...].

So I arrived at [a private business school] to work on the creation of their campus in China. As I said to the managing director at the time: 'I'm delighted with this project and I'm delighted that you're recruiting me, just before I sign, do we agree that I've never been to China and I don't speak a word of Chinese?'... 'Yes yes we agree'. 'Well, okay, no problem' [laughter]! So I opened the campus in China, I worked on a lot of things, the development project, the campus plan... there's a lot of things, I was doing: selection interviews, I was helping everyone all the time. I had a job that was a bit of a jack-of-all-trades in the management.

And then after two years I asked to get closer to the school's operational side. And then I was offered [...] to organise the admissions and competitions department. So I started with the international branch. And in four years, I was in charge of all the French and international admissions and competitions.

And once Marius was born – so I came back from maternity leave and parental leave, I got my job back – and then I found myself faced with the big difficulty which was that the peak of activity for admissions and competitions generally takes place between May and September; that's roughly the 15th of May and the 15th of September, and when you have children it's not as easy as that. So I hadn't anticipated this at all, I thought 'yeah, as long as they're not in school normally, as long as they're not in school normally it's fine'. Except that I hadn't calculated at all that the nanny was taking a month's holiday in August! [So it was a bit complicated to manage the first year and I said to myself that I really had to think about what I was doing because it wasn't really going to be possible. And it was going to be even less possible because in the meantime I learned that I was pregnant with Lucie, [laughter]! So 1) it wasn't possible, but 2) it was going to be even less possible, [laughter]!

And it was complicated because it was a period when I was moving around a lot... You end up spending weekends at the grandparents', coming back to go away, and the following weekend you have to pick up Marius from his grandparents', it was a mess.

And so I asked myself what I could do that was compatible with having children in school, and I came to the conclusion that, apart from national education, there weren't many solutions [laughter]!

So I thought about what I could do in Public Education [...]. And I discussed it with some of my friends who are teachers and one of them said to me: 'but in fact you should be a teacher', I said to him but in fact the level at which I am today, I don't really see what I could do in the end because I want something really operational and not too complicated in terms of training and things like that because I still had two kids...

And I was saying I don't really see how I can do it apart from the headmistress position, but I'm not sure that it's compatible (incomprehensible) with having children. And he said to me 'but don't do the headmistress competition because your children are too young anyway and it requires too much availability, my mother was... it's horrible, look at the Principal Education Advisor training. And I looked at the Principal Education Advisor training, so I signed up [...].

I was the one who thought about it, I spoke to Benoit about it, saying that it was impossible to do otherwise [than to leave his post]. At the same time, Benoit is the one who brings home the main income. So even if I earn a lot less than when I was at [the business school], even when I was at [the business school] he was the one who earned the most. We're almost ten years apart, so in terms of career reversal, between forty and fifty for a man it's still very complicated to manage and it's above all mission impossible to go back. So I really asked myself the question. And when I said to him, 'I'm thinking

of taking up this training because... with the children, the Public Education system will be easier', he said, 'yes, all right'.

**Marie-Cécile** : A l'époque où j'ai rencontré Benoit. Je suis rentrée d'Inde j'ai passé un an au chômage. Donc là, bon effectivement, à force de me prendre des râteaux je me suis un peu découragée et je me suis rappelée en fait que les gens qui reçoivent cinquante, cinquante mille CV dans la journée, en fait ils les regardent même pas [elle a travaillé précédemment dans une agence de recrutement]. Donc il fallait que je fasse autrement. Et j'ai fini par me décider à faire fonctionner le réseaux, tout ça [...].

Et je suis arrivée à [a private business school] pour m'occuper de la création de leur campus en Chine. Comme je disais au directeur général de l'époque: ' je suis ravie de ce projet et je suis ravie que vous me recrutiez, juste avant que je signe, est-ce qu'on est bien d'accord sur le fait que je n'ai jamais mis les pieds en Chine et que je n'parle pas un mot d'chinois ? '... ' oui oui on est d'accord '. ' bon, ok, pas d'problème ', [rire]! Donc j'ai ouvert le campus en Chine, j'ai travaillé sur plein de trucs, le projet d'aménagement, le plan campus... voilà plein d'trucs, je faisais de entretiens de sélections, je dépannais un peu tout le monde tout l'temps voilà. J'avais un poste un peu touche à tout à la direction.

Et puis au bout de deux ans j'ai demandé à me rapprocher de l'opérationnel de l'école. Et là on m'a proposé [...] d'organiser en fait le service des admissions et concours. Donc j'ai commencé par la branche internationale. Et en quatre ans, j'avais pris la tête de toutes les admissions et concours français et international, tous les concours.

Et une fois qu'Marius est né – donc je suis rentrée de congé mat' et de congé parental, j'ai récupéré mon poste – et là je me suis retrouvée confrontée à la grosse difficulté qui était que le pic d'activité des admissions et concours à lieu en général entre mai et septembre; c'est grosso modo quinze mai, quinze septembre et que quand on a des enfants c'est pas si facile que ça. Alors j'avais pas du tout anticipé en plus, je m'étais dit ' ouais enfin tant qu'ils sont pas scolarisés normalement, tant qu'il est pas scolarisé normalement c'est bon '. Sauf que j'avais pas du tout calculé que la nounou elle prenait un mois de vacances au mois d'aout ! [rire] Donc ça a été un peu compliqué à gérer la première année et je me suis dit faut vraiment que je réfléchisse à ce que je fais parce que là ça va vraiment pas être possible. Et ça allait être d'autant moins possible que dans intervalle j'ai appris que j'étais enceinte de Lucie, [rire] ! Donc 1) c'était pas possible, mais 2) ça allait l'être encore moins, [rire] !

Non puis c'était compliqué c'était une période où je me déplaçais beaucoup... Enfin on se retrouve à passer des week-ends chez ses grands-parents, à revenir pour partir en déplacement, le week-end d'après fallait récupérer Marius chez ses grands-parents, c'était n'importe quoi.

Et donc je me suis demandée ce que je pouvais faire qui était compatible avec le fait d'avoir des enfants scolarisés, j'en suis arrivée à la conclusion que bah à part l'Education Nationale, y'avait pas beaucoup de solutions [rire] !

Donc je me suis penchée sur ce que je pouvais faire dans l'Education Nationale [...]. Et j'en ai discuté avec quelques-uns de mes copains qui sont profs et y'en a un qui m'a dit : ' mais en fait tu devrais faire CPE '. Je lui disais mais en fait le niveau où je suis aujourd'hui, je vois pas trop ce que je pourrais faire finalement puisque j'ai envie d'un truc vraiment opérationnel et pas trop compliqué en termes de concours et de choses comme ça par ce j'avais quand même deux gamins...

Et je disais je vois pas trop comment je peux faire à part le concours de cheffe mais, le concours de cheffe d'établissement j'suis pas sûre que ce soit compatible avec le fait d'avoir des enfants. Et il m'dit ' mais fais pas l'concours de cheffe par ce que de toute façon tes enfants sont trop jeunes et ça demande trop de disponibilité, ma mère l'a été... c'est l'horreur, regarde le concours de CPE.' Et j'ai regardé le concours de CPE, donc j'me suis inscrite [...].

C'est moi qui y ai réfléchi, j'en ai parlé à Benoit en disant là c'est pas possible de faire autrement [que de quitter son poste]. En même temps Benoit, c'est quand même lui qui ramène le principal des revenus à la maison. Alors même si je gagne beaucoup moins que quand j'étais à [l'école de commerce], même quand j'étais à [l'école de commerce] c'est lui qui gagnait le plus. On a pas loin de dix ans d'écart, donc en terme de revirement de carrière, entre quarante et cinquante ans chez un homme c'est quand même très compliqué à gérer et c'est surtout mission impossible de revenir en arrière. Donc moi j'ai, je me suis, enfin je me suis vraiment



posée la question toute seule. Et quand je lui ai dit : ' voilà j'envisage de préparer le concours parce que... avec les enfants l'éducation nationale ça va être plus simple tout ç ' ' et il m'a dit ' bah oui d'accord ' .

This excerpt also revealed Marie-Cécile's upper class background, which seemed to have entitled her with particular competences in terms of professional advancement. For example, she ended up shortcutting traditional recruitment methods and functioning according to 'the network' and demonstrated a sense of entitlement (working in China without previous knowledge of Chinese). Marie-Cécile conveyed an enjoyment of her current job in Public Education, especially due to the freedom it allowed her in her tasks:

**Marie-Cécile:** And no regrets. It's really, it's great. I knew in advance that the Public Education system would be difficult for me [laughter]! It's confirmed. But the advantage is that when you're a Principal Education Advisor you do what you want. Really, you do what you want. But really what we want.

**Fairley:** And that means that your experience of work is rather positive? When you go home after a day's work... Is it something that is burdensome or...?

**Marie-Cécile:** So, I have a forty-five minutes drive, which is a good break. A little too long for my taste but it's a good break. Most of the time it's fine, and I manage it all the better as I go back to a place... I mean, the house is protected, balanced, my children are fine, my husband is fine, we don't have any worries, so... ten miles away from what I have to deal with on a daily basis with the worries of my students. So it's great.

**Marie-Cécile :** Et aucuns regrets. C'est vraiment, c'est top, voilà. Je savais à l'avance que le fonctionnement institution éducation nationale j'allais avoir du mal. [rire] ! Ça se confirme. Mais l'avantage c'est quand on est CPE on fait ce qu'on veut. Vraiment, on fait c'qu'on veut. Mais vraiment ce qu'on veut.

**Fairley :** Et ça veut dire que vous vivez plutôt bien votre travail ? Est-ce que quand vous rentrez chez vous à la maison après une journée de travail, enfin voilà, est-ce que c'est quelque chose qui est pesant ou...?

**Marie-Cécile :** Alors, j'ai quarante-cinq minutes de voiture qui me font une bonne coupure. Un peu trop longue à mon gout mais qui me font une bonne coupure. La plupart du temps ça va très bien. Et je le gère d'autant mieux que je rentre dans un endroit, enfin voilà la maison c'est protégé, équilibré, mes enfants vont bien, mon mari va bien, on a pas d'soucis tout ça donc... à dix-mile kilomètres de ce que je peux côtoyer au quotidien sur les soucis de mes élèves. Donc c'est top.

Marie-Cécile went on by explaining the difficult situations she occasionally experienced at work, such as 'gore' events or when students threw stones at her car or tried to burn it, all while conveying her ability to deal with these situations.

**Fairley:** And when you're at the table, you manage to disconnect? You are with the children, you manage to disconnect from work?

**Marie-Cécile:** [at the same time] I say 'oh no'... I tell the children, I tell them 'oh no', you're not going to start being difficult because I've had a very bad day, the students have been very difficult, they've done nothing but nonsense so you're not going to start...' [laughter]

**Fairley :** Et vous arrivez quand même à couper quand vous arrivez chez vous ? Vous êtes à table, vous arrivez à couper ? Vous êtes avec les enfants vous arrivez à couper par rapport au travail ?

**Marie-Cécile :** [en même temps] Je leur dis ' ah non '... Je leur dis aux enfants, je leur dis ' ah non, vous allez pas commencer à être pénibles par ce que j'ai eu une très très mauvaise journée, les élèves ont été très très pénibles ils ont fait que des bêtises donc vous allez pas vous y mettre...' [rire]

Marie-Cécile's father was a doctor and her mother a nurse. Benoit also had a position of high responsibility, which affected his family life in that he mentioned having difficulty to disconnect from work when arriving home. Marie-Cécile and Benoit both lived and travelled abroad, in Asia, for several years. They rented their apartment and had no immediate plans of becoming owners:

**Marie-Cécile:** The prospect of moving and losing quality of life... [...]. Property is not an end in itself. We have a ridiculous rent, we pay our landlord's pension, we have great neighbours, a nice apartment. So, yes, we'd have to do some work on the flat... pfft...

*Dinner 4*

**Marie-Cécile :** La perspective de déménager pour perdre en qualité de vie... [...]. La propriété n'est pas une fin en soi. On a un loyer ridicule, on paie la retraite de notre proprio, on a des voisins super, un appart chouette. Bon alors effectivement, faudrait faire des travaux dans l'appart... pff...

*Dîner 4*

They had hired a baby-sitter who picked up Lucie (6) and Marius (8) from the public school and kept them until 7PM, when Marie-Cécile got home. The baby-sitter supervised the children in their homework and sometimes gave them their bath, but Marie-Cécile mentioned she still checked whether they had correctly done their homework, once she got home:

**Marie-Cécile:** What really simplifies the evenings is when, Tuesday night and Friday night, there's no homework. Lydie does most of the homework, but I still check. It's not that I don't trust Lydie, I don't trust my children, it's not the same, [laughter]!

*Dinner 4*

**Marie-Cécile :** Ce qui simplifie vraiment les soirées c'est quand mardi soir et vendredi soir, y'a pas de devoir. C'est Lydie qui fait l'essentiel des devoirs, mais je regarde quand même. C'est pas que j'ai pas confiance en Lydie, j'ai pas confiance en mes enfants, c'est pas pareil [rire] !

*Dîner 4*

Marie-Cécile went through what she called a 'burn out' about 10 years ago. Since then, they hired domestic help once a week to clean the house and iron Benoit's shirts (which Marie-Cécile refused to do):

**Marie-Cécile:** That doesn't mean that we don't do it at all, but it's sure that THE big cleaning of the week, we don't do it, it's outsourced and it's really great.

*Dinner 4*

**Marie-Cécile :** Ça veut pas dire qu'on en fait pas du tout hein, mais c'est sûr que LE grand ménage de la semaine, c'est pas nous qui le faisons, c'est externaliser et c'est quand même super quoi.

*Dîner 4*

Lucie went to extracurricular music classes and Marius had weekly swimming lessons. Marie-Cécile had a yoga class once a week. Benoit did not take part in any organised leisure activities.

At the Bourdon household house, parents and children mentioned regular cultural activities such as listening to radio programs (France Culture, France Inter), going to art exhibitions and reading. Their living room had several library shelves with books, many of which were art books. On the wall were

some paintings (some of which were by an artist friend). There was regularly classical music in the background, when I was there and the children mentioned their father loved to have this type of music on.

They usually stayed in Lyon during the weekends but they had many weeks of vacations throughout the year during which they went away. They regularly talked about their summer vacation travels in France (in Brittany for the past two summers). The children took part in a summer camp during the fieldwork period.

Their kitchen was a separate room. Marie-Cécile would have liked to have an open plan kitchen but then joked that Benoit would not be able to listen to his podcasts while cooking if they had one.

In accordance with upper classes households with high cultural capital, the Bourdon displayed a certain distance to material consumption. For example, Benoit did not want to buy a washing machine; he preferred to do the dishes by hand. However, they displayed a sense of prodigality in their food shopping practices:

**Fairley:** Mhmm, do you tend to... let's say count with what you buy... ?

**Marie-Cécile:** Not at all

**Fairley:** ...or pay more attention to that?

**Marie-Cécile:** If there's one thing... no, we can pay attention to a lot of things, not to what we eat. Really not. So I who also never pay attention to what we eat and how much it costs, I noticed that, since the beginning of the lockdown, some things had increased

**Fairley:** Oh yeah?

**Marie-Cécile:** That's it. I noticed, that's all. That's it. And despite our differences in the perception of the cooking and all that... I think it's clearly something we agree on with Benoit [...]. We'll be able to count on... We have cars that are all more than ten years old. And I think we'll only change cars when they're really dead. It's not conceivable to count with food. But really, it's not, it's a thing... So we don't do very big restaurants and all that because there's also a time when the cost maybe, compared to what it represents is almost indecent. But we did it anyway [laughter]!

**Fairley :** Mhmm, est-ce que vous avez tendance à... on va dire à compter par rapport à c'que vous achetez... ?

**Marie-Cécile :** Pas du tout.

**Fairley :** ...ou plus faire attention à ça?

**Marie-Cécile :** Si y'a bien un truc... non, on est capable de faire attention sur plein de choses, pas sur ce qu'on mange. Vraiment pas. Alors moi qui en plus fais vraiment jamais attention sur ce qu'on mange et sur ce que ça coûte, j'ai constaté que, depuis le début du confinement y'avait quand même des trucs qui avaient augmentés

**Fairley :** Ah ouais?

**Marie-Cécile :** Voilà. J'ai constaté, c'est tout. Voilà. Et malgré nos différences de perception de la cuisine et tout ça... je pense que c'est clairement des choses sur lesquelles on est d'accord avec Benoit [...]. On va être capables de compter sur..., enfin, voilà, on a des voitures qui ont toutes les eux plus de dix ans. Et ça, je pense qu'on ne changera de voitures que le jour où elles seront vraiment mortes. Compter sur ce qu'on mange ça c'est pas concevable. Mais vraiment pas quoi, c'est un truc... Alors donc se fait pas des très grands restaurants et tout et tout parce que y'a aussi un moment où le, le coût peut-être, par rapport à ce que ça représente à la limite de l'indécence. Mais on l'a fait quand même [rire] !

Marie-Cécile's discourse was paradoxical: she made it sound like they did not care about the price of food items, yet being able to remember the prices of products and their changes indicated they had a habit of paying attention to the financial value of food. When questioning Benoit, his purchasing practices clearly showed an awareness of the prices, and he explained he made sure not to buy overpriced fish, for example. They did seem to spend a lot of money on food as seen, for example, in the type of fish and cheese they bought, but this was not without any consideration of prices either.

Although Benoit provided the vast majority of the household income, their parental roles did not appear at first as being traditional. In fact, these roles were partially inverted: Benoit took care of the food shopping and cooking as well as the mental load of feeding the family. His position was that of being the career for the health and wellbeing of the family, through cooking and the products he chose. But Marie-Cécile was the one who made the decision to put her career on hold to take care of the children (also justified by Benoit's highest salary) and was also the one who was responsible for the administrative aspects of childrearing. She also seemed to be the one keeping on top of their children's preventive medical appointments. Marie-Cécile appeared to be more authoritative in her tone and behaviour than Benoit seemed (at the table for example, safeguarding table manners), but also outside of food practices (getting children to bathe, for example). Benoit's role appeared to be a bit more that of a quiet, patient and benevolent parent.

### **3.2. *The Imbert family, a socio-economic ascension from a working-class background***

Magali Imbert answered to my recruitment message posted on a Facebook parenting group of her neighbourhood and I met her and Stéphane at their home before their participation began. The Imbert were situated in the upper class. They had two daughters: Louise who was 8 and Rose who was 5. Magali worked as a director of commercial operations in a biotech company. Stéphane worked in the pharmaceutical industry in research. They declared a net annual household income of approximately 100 000 euros. Magali earned significantly more than Stéphane. She mentioned she would have liked to work less and spend time with her family, but they depended on her salary for the lifestyle they had. They owned their apartment. Both of them came from a working class background of manual workers (Stéphane's parents worked in a factory). Magali lived a few years in Vietnam. The whole family had travelled abroad several times (North America). Some of their food preferences contrasted with their upper class situation: they loved what they called 'junk food', which was what they missed most during the lockdown. Magali's discourse about money and food was similar to that of the Bourdon:

**Magali:** We don't have a life where we spend a lot of money, it's true that, proportionally, we earn quite a good living and therefore we have no limits when it comes to food, we take what we like, we don't count.

**Magali** : On n'a pas une vie où on dépense énormément, c'est vrai que, proportionnellement ; on gagne plutôt bien notre vie et du coup sur la nourriture on a aucune limite, on prend ce qui nous plait, on compte pas.

Like the Bourdon as well, Magali displayed in her discourse a certain distance to material consumption, which came from her background and her acquired social status in the upper middle class:

**Magali**: And since I was little I used to go with [my parents] to the supermarket and they always taught us to look at the price per kilo and always take the cheapest. Look at the special offers and so on. And it's true, perhaps it's also a reaction to that, my parents pushed me to study and I acquired a social status that is different from that of my parents. That allows me today to earn a good living. That means that, as I have this education of not throwing money away, I'm not necessarily attracted by equipment, I don't have branded clothes... We don't care... well, it's not things I'm after.

**Magali** : Et depuis que j'étais petite j'allais avec [mes parents] au super marché et, toujours, ils nous apprenaient à regarder le prix au kilo pour prendre à chaque fois toujours le moins cher. Regarder les promos etc. Et du coup c'est vrai, peut-être que c'est une réaction aussi par rapport à ça. Moi, mes parents ils m'ont poussé à faire des études et j'ai acquis un statut social qui est différent de celui de mes parents, qui me permet aujourd'hui de gagner bien ma vie. Ça fait que quand même, comme j'ai cette éducation de pas jeter l'argent par les fenêtres, je suis pas forcément attirée par le matériel, j'ai pas de fringues de marques... On s'en fiche...enfin c'est pas des choses après lesquelles je cours.

The daughters went to a private catholic school. Magali and Stéphane were Catholics and they mentioned going to mass on occasions. The daughters went to Catechism courses. Magali and Stéphane took part in the Christian program called *Vivre et Aimer* on conjugal and family life. The girls were part of the Scouts. The cultural practices spontaneously mentioned were mainly watching TV shows (for parents and children) and reading books (for the daughters). Their kitchen was a separate room and they ate together in the dining room/living room, where there was a large dining table.

At the last dinner At the Imbert household (apéro-dinatoire), a conversation revealed various dimensions of their household. Magali was explaining that, when she came back from living in Vietnam, Stéphane moved in with her. This was conditioned, however, on Stéphane's side, by having a 'proper' table, instead of eating on a mat on the floor:

**Stéphane**: I said to myself, from the moment we become a couple, we start to create a family life, and there is the table for the meal and all the "ceremonial"

[...]

**Magali**: I came back from Vietnam, you see, I had a big mat plus a thing..., it wasn't even a coffee table, it was a tray with legs, which served as a coffee table. At home you had..., if a sofa, a coffee table.

**Fairley**: And yes, settling down as a couple means doing things.... ?

**Magali**: ... well

**Fairley**: Well

**Rose**: And doing things as the husband says!

**Stéphane**: Really?

*I laugh*

**Rose**: but... I don't understand! Frankly, I don't understand!

**Stéphane**: We never understood in fact

*Stéphane corrects Rose back on what she is doing on the armchair*

**Magali**: Where did that come from? [laughter]! It's a disaster! I mean, what a failure [laughter]!

**Rose**: (loudly) And also, and also the mother!

**Magali:** Oh yeah, all the same!

**Rose:** If there are mothers

**Magali:** When Rose was old, Louise used to say to us: 'when I'm older, I'll ask my husband if he'll buy me that car'. 'And 'when I'm older, I'll ask my husband if he'll buy me this camera, because I'd like to have this camera'. So everything, she had to ask her husband. But I told her: 'you don't need to ask your husband, you don't! You go to work and you buy with your money what you want!' [laughter]

**Stéphane:** So what's funny...

**Rose:** ... me, when I'm older... (loud voice)

*Stéphane starts to explain, while Rose is talking, that they are not like that*

**Rose:** ... I'll ask my husband to work and me, when I'm older, I'll ask my husband to do nothing.

*Stéphane continues talking about it and wonders if it comes from the grandparents*

**Stéphane:** Knowing that actually, it's Magali who brings in a lot more money than me...

**Magali:** But they don't see that at all

**Stéphane:** They see that you're going to take my money

**Magali:** Yes. because in fact...

**Stéphane:** I have cash

**Stéphane:** Louise! (she farted)

**Magali:** Oh, that's not cool

**Louise:** I didn't do it on purpose!

**Magali:** Ah yes, but still

**Stéphane:** No

**Magali:** You hold back and go to the toilet. No but it's that I never withdraw cash and it's that Stéphane, he always has cash in his wallet, and so, about every week, when I go to the market, I pass in front of the cabinet in the entrance and I take his cash in his wallet to go to the market. And one day Rose and I were watching a show [...]. And so there, it was stories of people who had been tricked by love with people who in fact, well, swindled them out of money and then Rose came and stood next to me and asked me what it was about, I said it was about people who had pretexted they were in love in order to take money from other people. And then at one point she looks at me and says: 'no, but I think you're really in love with Daddy anyway!'

*I laugh*

**Magali:** I said what? I'm taking Daddy's money? But where did you see that? And in fact, it's the entrance trick! [laughter]

**Rose:** Because I see her!

**Magali:** She's watching

*Dinner 6*

**Stéphane:** Je me suis dit, à partir du moment où on se met en couple, on commence à faire, à créer une vie de famille, et y'a la table pour le repas et tout le cérémoniel, entre guillemets... [...]

**Magali:** Moi je revenais du Vietnam, tu vois, j'avais une grande natte plus un truc..., c'était même pas une table basse, c'était un plateau avec des pieds, qui servaient de table basse. Lui, chez lui il avait..., t'avais..., si un canapé', une table basse. C'était la condition, sinon il venait pas.

**Fairley:** Et oui, s'installer en couple, c'est faire les choses.... ?

**Magali:** ... bien

**Fairley:** ... bien (je reprends ce qu'elle dit)

**Rose:** Et faire les choses comme le mari dit!

**Stéphane:** Ah bon?

*Je rigole*

**Rose:** Mais... je comprends pas! franchement, je ne comprends pas !

**Stéphane:** On n'a jamais compris en fait

*Stéphane reprend Rose sur ce qu'elle les galipettes qu'elle fait sur le fauteuil*

**Magali:** D'où ça sort? [rire] ! C'est une cata quoi! [rire], je veux dire, quel échec, [rire]!

**Rose:** [fort] Et aussi, et aussi la maman !

**Magali:** Ah ouais, quand même!

**Rose:** Si y'a des mamans

**Magali:** A l'âge de Rose, Louise elle nous sortait: ' alors moi, quand je serai plus grande, je demanderai à mon mari s'il veut bien m'acheter cette voiture-là '. ' et puis ' quand je serai plus

grande, je demanderai à mon mari s'il veut bien m'acheter tel appareil photo, parce que j'aimerais bien avoir tel appareil photo '. Donc tout, il fallait qu'elle demande à son mari. Mais je lui disais : ' t'as pas besoin de demander à ton mari hein! Tu vas travailler et t'achèteras avec tes sous ce que tu veux! ' [rire]

**Stéphane:** Alors ce qui est marrant...

**Rose:** ... moi, quand je serai plus grande...(voix forte)

*Stéphane commence à expliquer, en même temps que Rose parle, qu'eux, ils ne sont pas comme ça*

**Rose:** ... je demanderai à mon mari de travailler. Et moi, quand je serai plus grande, je demanderai à mon mari de faire patati

*Stéphane continue à en parler et se demande si ça vient des grands-parents.*

**Stéphane :** Sachant que, effectivement, c'est Magali qui ramène beaucoup plus de finances que moi...

**Magali:** Mais ça, elles le voient pas du tout

**Stéphane:** Elles voient par contre que tu vas me piquer mes sous

**Magali:** Oui. Parce qu'en fait...

**Stéphane:** C'est moi qui ai du liquide

**Stéphane:** Louise! [elle a pété]

**Magali:** Oh, ça c'est pas cool hein

**Louise:** J'ai pas fait exprès!

**Magali:** Ah oui, mais même

**Stéphane:** Non

**Magali:** Tu te retiens et tu vas aux toilettes.... Non mais c'est que moi je retire jamais de liquide et c'est que Stéphane, il a toujours du liquide dans son porte-monnaie, et donc, à peu près toutes les semaines, quand je vais faire le marché, je passe devant le meuble de l'entrée et je prends son liquide dans son porte-monnaie pour aller faire le marché. Et un jour on regardait avec Rose une émission... tu sais, c'était Delarue qui faisait ça avant (...). Et donc là, c'était des histoires de personnes qui s'étaient fait avoir par amour avec des gens qui en fait, les escroquais au niveau de l'argent et puis Rose elle vient et elle se met à côté de moi et elle me demande, ' ça parle de quoi ? ' je dis ' ça parle de personnes qui ont fait croire qu'ils étaient amoureux pour prendre l'argent des autres personnes '. Et puis à un moment elle me regarde et me dis: ' non, mais je crois que toi, t'es vraiment amoureuse de papa quand même! '

*Je rigole*

**Magali:** Je fais ' hein? ' [rire], ' comment ça ? '. Ben ' tu lui prends son argent, mais t'es quand même amoureuse pour de vrai? '. J'ai dit quoi ?! Je prends l'argent de papa? Mais où tu as vu ça? Et en fait, c'est le coup de l'entrée! [rire]!

**Rose:** Parce que je la vois!

**Magali:** Elle surveille hein

*Dîner 6*

This excerpt indicates indeed that Magali is the main financial provider for the household, contrary to the Bourdon. Yet, the traditional roles of mother and father were not necessarily inverted, as the following chapters will show, and the daughters' comments on their parents' life and on their conjugal relationship revealed this. It also showed the important role TV programs played in their family life and cultural socialisation.

### **3.3. The Franquet family, an established upper middle class household accommodating their son's illness**

Nathalie Franquet responded to a recruitment post on a Facebook parenting group of their neighborhood. The Franquet family were an upper middle class dual headed household with two sons.

Marco was 10 year old and Jules 12. Marco had been diagnosed with Crohn disease a year before their participation in the research began. Lucas explained the impact of this non-curable disease on their life:

**Lucas:** So Crohn's disease is an inflammation..., I mean it's an auto immune disease. It's his immune system that attacks his digestive system, and so he has to avoid certain foods, in particular all foods such as peas, chickpeas, lentils, etc. that have a kind a hard skin. And then he has to avoid certain foods that are a bit long or hard to digest, like cabbage. He should avoid eating too many raw vegetables. Rather cooked. Well, after that, it's a disease that you can never get rid of. On the other hand, it can be put to sleep, so in fact, depending on the phases in which it is, if it is active or not, we can either adapt the diet [...]. And as a result, the last year that has just passed, we had to prepare his lunches. He couldn't eat in the canteen. He ate at the canteen but we were the ones who brought the meal, so that meant an extra meal to prepare, with some dietary constraints. Well, he can eat almost everything but there are still things to avoid. So, for example, at the moment he has a new treatment, which is working well so the disease is in remission, so he can eat almost everything. Apart from the things I mentioned at the beginning, he can eat everything. It's up to him to judge what's good for him or not, so we can adapt certain things.

**Lucas :** Alors la maladie d' Crohn donc c'est une inflammation..., enfin c'est une maladie auto immune. C'est son système immunitaire qui attaque son système digestif, et du coup il faut qu'il évite certains aliments notamment tous les aliments type petits poids, pois chiches, lentilles etc. qui ont des espèces de coques, enfin des peaux un peu dures. Voilà, et après faut qu'il évite certains aliments qui sont un peu longs ou durs à digérer comme le chou. Faut qu'il évite de manger trop de légumes crus. Plutôt cuits. Après c'est une maladie dont on peut jamais se guérir. Par contre on peut la mettre en sommeil, donc en fait selon les phases où elle est, si elle est active ou pas on peut soit adapter le régime, alimentaire [...]. Et du coup la dernière année qui vient de passer, en plus on devait lui préparer les repas du midi. Il pouvait pas manger... 'fin il pouvait pas manger à la cantine. Il mangeait à la cantine mais c'était nous qui amenions le repas donc ça faisait un repas en plus à préparer, avec quelques contraintes alimentaires. Bon, ça va, il peut manger quasiment de tout mais y'a quand même des choses à éviter. Donc là par exemple en ce moment il a un nouveau traitement qui marche bien donc la maladie est en rémission, donc il peut manger quasiment de tout quoi. A part ce que je vous ai cité au début il peut manger de tout. Après, c'est à lui de juger ce qui, ce qui lui fait du bien ou pas, donc on peut adapter comme ça certaines choses.

Even during the remission phases, Marco's diet remained quiet restricted and the whole family adapted to it. Nathalie mentioned her sons' illness when she responded to the recruitment message.

Lucas was an engineer; he worked in a consulting firm in public transports and managed a team (as an executive). Nathalie was teaching social sciences in a public engineering school<sup>78</sup> and used to be a secondary school teacher. She had reduced her workload to 80% because of her son's illness but she still worked more than full time and considered her job 'tiring':

**Nathalie:** And then we have a lot of administrative work to do, and in the end, my preparation time for classes is too little compared to the needs I have, so that's why it's tiring, it's really wearing [...] I reduced it because of Marco's medical problems, I didn't really know what he would need this year. So now I'm at 80%, and in fact, instead of being at 200%, I'm going to be at 120-130, I'll be able to breathe a little, it will be better [...]. But yeah, it requires a significant investment.

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<sup>78</sup> This is a prominent school in France, training engineers in a variety of domains (mathematics, physics, chemistry, environment, informatics, etc.). The entry into this school is based on a competitive examination.



**Nathalie** : Et puis on a beaucoup d'administratif à faire, et au final, mes temps de préparation de cours sont trop peu nombreux par rapport aux besoins que j'ai, donc c'est en ça que c'est fatiguant, c'est vraiment usant [...] J'ai réduit par rapport aux problèmes médicaux de Marco, je savais pas trop de quoi il aurait besoin cette année. Donc là, je me retrouve à 80%, et en fait, au lieu d'être à 200% de temps de travail, je vais être à 120-130, je vais pouvoir souffler un petit peu, ça sera mieux [...]. Mais ouais, ça demande un investissement non négligeable.

Her new position in the school greatly affected her private life and in particular the feeding of the family:

**Nathalie:** So now I'm in higher education, I've been here for two years [at this engineering school], with a work rhythm that has changed, I think it's important when we talk about food and family organisation, with a much more sustained rhythm: much longer days, I leave earlier, I come back later. And weekends are often studious, not always but often. So that clearly has an impact on the daily organisation... And for the organisation of meals.

**Nathalie** : Donc là je suis dans le supérieur, ça fait deux ans que je suis [à cette école d'ingénieur], avec un rythme de travail qui a changé, je pense que c'est important quand on va parler d'alimentation et d'organisation familiale, avec un rythme beaucoup plus soutenu : des journées beaucoup plus longues, je pars plus tôt, je rentre plus tard. Et les week-ends sont souvent studieux, pas toujours mais souvent. Voilà, ça a un impact clairement sur l'organisation au quotidien... Et pour l'organisation des repas.

They lived in the 7th district of Lyon and owned their apartment. Both children skipped a class: Marco was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade<sup>79</sup> and Jules in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (Jules was 12 when the family accepted to participate and 13, six months later, when the fieldwork with them began). They went to private schools. Sports was highly valorised among the boys: they had different sports activities planned throughout the week and Marco was in a sports program at his school.

Their kitchen was an open plan and their dining table was located in the passage between the kitchen and the entrance/living room. Their table was at arms' reach from the fridge.

### **3.4. The Comescu family, a relatively high economic capital and Eastern European cultural origins**

The Comescu were recruited through a Facebook parenting group of their neighbourhood. I met with Irina, the mother, at their home before their participation began. They were a dual headed household with two children: Lea was 7 and Hugo was 10. Irina was an Assistant Professor and researcher in Mathematics at a local University. Laurent was an engineer in informatics and managed a team. They reported an annual household net income of approximately 70 000 euros (before taxes). Laurent had a Masters in statistics and Irina a PhD in Mathematics.

Irina condensed most of her class in one semester and tried to dedicate the rest of the year to research. When she gave classes, her workload was heavy and her energy and headspace were reduced for family life. Laurent was away from home two nights a week, working in Paris, except during the health

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<sup>79</sup> 6ème and 3ème, according to the French system

crisis and the period when I did my fieldwork with them (he was away only once). The children went to a public school but the eldest son was going to go to private middle school the following year.

Irina came from Romania and arrived in France during her studies. She grew up during the Ceausescu communist regime (during which she experienced severe food restrictions). Her parents were architects. Laurent came from a modest background and lost his father when he was still young:

**Laurent:** When I was growing up, for many reasons [he mentions his father's alcoholism], I was the one who did the shopping for the family because my mother didn't have time and my father died early. So it was just the two of us. And so it was, in general, at the time, as I was a teenager, a pleasure [doing the groceries], even if we didn't have any money and so with a... [it cuts] to be careful with that.

**Laurent :** Dans mon enfance, pour plein de raisons [il évoque l'alcoolisme de son père], c'est moi qui faisait les courses pour la famille parce que ma mère avait pas le temps et mon père est décédé tôt. Et du coup on était que tous les deux. Donc du coup, c'était, en général, à l'époque, comme j'étais adolescent, un plaisir, même si on n'avait pas de sous et donc avec une... [ça coupe] de faire attention à ça.

Irina used to have an individual leisure activity (crafts) but not longer went for lack of time. Both children went to weekly theatre classes. They played a lot of board games, as a family, on weekends. They usually went to Romania during summer. When the weather was warm enough, in spring, summer or fall, they would spend their weekends in their mobil-home they owned, about an hour away from Lyon. Their kitchen was a semi open plan, which gave onto the living room/dining room where their dining table was.

### **3.5. *The Ferret family, maintaining an upper class position while developing a career***

Céline Ferret responded to a recruitment message sent to some members of a non-profit organization related to food waste prevention, of which I was also part of. I had already met Céline several times at volunteer events and had met Jérôme, the father, and Noémie, their 7-year-old daughter once in the context of this organisation. When Céline contacted me, she said that her husband believed it to be a good idea for them to participate. Céline was an environmental engineer and an associate partner in her firm. Jérôme was a consultant in management, although he was not working at the time of the fieldwork. Their annual net income was 85 000 euros. Céline has a Master's degree in biology and ecology. Her mother was a public servant and her father was a sales director in various large companies. They rented an apartment, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> district of Lyon. Their kitchen, like that of the Bourdon and the Imbert, was a separate room located at the opposite of the living room and dining area.

Céline mentioned that both her and Jérôme came from a background where 'traditional' practices in terms of table manners were valued, which she found important to pursue as well with their daughter:

**Céline:** It is important [table manners] because we both have families who can be very particular about this. Jérôme's parents are quite... They don't hesitate to make remarks to the grandchildren when their elbows are on the table, when they speak too loudly, when they express themselves too much. And on

my father's side, not my father but my grandparents and aunts, they're a bit in that vein too, so... So yes, yes, it's... so we can be a bit rigid, I mean rigid with Noémie, we're not putting a broom in her back to make her stand up straight either. But it's like language, I want her to feel comfortable with everyone. With people who make noise when they eat their soup or with people who are going to... how should I say it, cut up their pear and peel it with a fork and knife. No but I mean... I think that, well, that's it. I think that's what my role as a parent is, to make her adaptable to all possible situations.

**Céline** : C'est quand même important [les manières de table] parce que on a l'un et l'autre des familles qui peuvent être très regardantes là-dessus. Les parents de Jérôme sont assez... 'fin plutôt très traditionnels sur la façon d'se tenir à table hein, et ils n'hésitent pas à faire des remarques aux petits-enfants quand y'a les coudes sur la table, quand ils parlent trop forts, quand ils s'expriment trop. Et moi du côté paternel, alors pas mon père mais mes grands-parents, tantes, ils sont un peu dans cette veine là aussi donc... Donc oui oui c'est... du coup on peut être un peu rigides, 'fin rigides avec Noémie, on est pas non plus à lui mettre un balai dans l'dos pour qu'elle s'tienne droite hein. Mais c'est comme le langage, j'veux qu'elle puisse se sentir à l'aise avec tout l'monde. Avec des personnes qui font du bruit quand elles mangent leur soupe ou des personnes qui vont... comment dire, découper leur poire et la peler à la fourchette et au couteau quoi. Non mais 'fin... Moi j'trouve que, voilà voilà. J'estime que c'est un peu ça mon rôle de parent c'est la rendre adaptable à un peu toutes les situations possibles.

The elements Céline mentioned and the observations during the visits point to her upper class social background: being able to display traditional table manners of upper classes but also the discourse of being 'adaptable' to all types of background, with the conditions of mastering practices from the upper classes. This type of discourse, related to the notion of 'cultural omnivore' (Peterson 1992) – that is to say upper classes individuals 'adding diverse practices and cultural forms to their cultural repertoire' and 'developing a taste for everything' (Warde, Wright, and Gayo-Cal 2007; Parsons 2016) – was also mobilised by other parents (Guillaume Rizzo, Laëticia Lebrun) from middle class background and position. Yet, these discourse and practices were different according to whether the household was rather upper class or intermediary middle class. At the Ferret household, children had to incorporate 'traditional' table manners as dispositions during their childhood: they were socialised to them on a regular basis over mealtimes. In the intermediary middle class household, traditional table manners had to be known: children had to know the rules, and they were occasionally tested about them (as when I visited), but I did not witness an everyday socialisation to these type of mealtime manners.

### **3.6. *The Obecanov family, an intermediary middle class family with Eastern European cultural origins***

Sophie Obecanov responded to a recruitment message on a Facebook parenting group of her neighbourhood. I met her at her work place before the family began their participation. The Obecanov were a dual headed family with one 6-year-old daughter (Elisa). Sophie was a real estate agent and Viktor, the father, an Assistant Professor and researcher in cellular and molecular biology. They reported an annual net household income of 48 000 euros (before taxes). They lived in the 7<sup>th</sup> district of Lyon and were tenants of their apartment. Sophie had a Masters in Biology, and had worked in a research lab in the past. During the fieldwork, she was undertaking a training in real estate (Brevet de

Technicien Supérieur, or BTS<sup>80</sup>). Viktor was a Doctor in Biology. They both mentioned some flexibility in their work hours, although less so when Viktor gave classes. Viktor came from Bulgaria: he arrived in France for his studies. Viktor's father was a military pilot and his mother was a store clerk, from modest origin. They travelled annually to Bulgaria to visit his family. Viktor's father was military man and his mother worked in a clothes store and came from a working class background.

Elisa had judo and swimming lessons once a week. Viktor went to the swimming pool on Wednesday after dinner, ran occasionally and practiced meditation exercises. Sophie occasionally went to the gym or the swimming pool. When I met Sophie for the first time, she told me they could not take part in the study during the weekends because they usually went skiing. TV occupied an important space in their family life, and they regularly watched it during mealtimes. Their kitchen was an open plan that gave onto the dining room/living room where a large dining table was. The TV could be seen from the dining table.

### **3.7. The Lebrun family, a new couple and a large family of intermediary social class**

The Lebrun were a reconstituted dual headed family who had been together for approximately a year before they took part in the study. Pierre had three children (Léo: 6, Chloë: 8, Lena: 10), Laëtitia two (Nolan: 9, Nathan: 11). They both had part time custody of their children one week out of two and every other weekend. All five children had known each other since they were infants as Pierre and Laëtitia were friends before becoming a couple. Pierre was recruited through a friend of mine who worked in the sports centre where Pierre was employed. I had never met Pierre before the study began. They lived in a residential middle class suburb of Lyon, and Pierre made sure to distinguish themselves from their neighbourhood:

**Pierre:** You are part of the people who have the same ideologies as all my friends... and so we are in the same spheres [...]. They are organic ecologists, with dads getting involved. In the end, we are surrounded by people who are like us [...]. The problem is that we are in closed environments [...]. The people around me [in our neighbourhood] don't do the same jobs as me at all, you know... and my two neighbours are, radically, in different spheres...

**Laëtitia:** ... no, but that's what's good...

**Pierre:** ... and it's very, very funny. The guy is a school bus driver. These are people who, thanks to time, have managed to acquire and live in places like that, and he, next door, I don't really know...

**Laëtitia:** ... ah, I don't know...

**Pierre:** ... but on the other hand, he has completely different values...

**Laëtitia:** ...ah completely opposite to ours, yeah...

**Pierre:** That's it, completely opposite, even in terms of education for children, it could be problematic at some point, because...

**Laëtitia:** ... it's possible...

**Pierre:** ... yeah, he's the guy who [Inaudible] after his kids 24/7...

**Laëtitia:** 'I'll slap you!

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<sup>80</sup> Brevet de Technicien Supérieur, or Senior Technologist's Certificate is a level III diploma in the French higher education system which does not require graduating from an A Levels' degree.

**Pierre:** That's it...

**Laëtitia:** Yeah, no, maybe not

**Pierre:** So it might be limited at some point so I'll..., I shouldn't have cut the hedge, [laughter]! I should have let it grow, I made a mistake, [laughter]!

*Dinner 1*

**Pierre:** Tu fais partie des gens qui ont les mêmes idéologies que tous mes amis... et du coup on est dans des sphères [...]. Ils sont écolos, bio, où les papas s'investissent, en fin de compte, on est entourés de gens qui nous ressemblent [...]. Le problème, c'est qu'on baigne dans des milieux fermés [...]. Les gens autour de moi [dans notre quartier] font pas du tout les mêmes métiers que moi, tu vois... et mes deux voisins sont, radicalement, dans des sphères différentes...

**Laëtitia:** ... non, mais c'est ça qui est bien...

**Pierre:** ... et c'est très très drôle. le gars, il est chauffeur de bus de ramassage scolaire. c'est des gens qui grâce au temps, ont réussi à acquérir et vivre dans des endroits comme ça, et lui, à côté, je sais plus trop...

**Laëtitia:** ... ah, je sais pas...

**Pierre:** ... mais par contre, il est dans des valeurs complètement différentes...

**Laëtitia:** ...ah complètement opposées aux notre, ouais...

**Pierre:** voilà, complètement opposées, niveau éducation enfants, même, limite, ça risque d'être problématique à un moment donné, parce que...

**Laëtitia:** ... c'est possible...

**Pierre:** ... ouais, c'est le gars qui [Inaudible] après ses gamins H24...

**Laëtitia:** 'je vais t'claquer!'

**Pierre:** c'est ça...

**Laëtitia:** ouais, non, peut-être pas

**Pierre:** donc ça risque d'être limité à un moment donné donc je vais..., j'aurais pas dû couper la haie, [rire]! j'aurais dû la laisser grandir, là j'ai fait une erreur, [rire]!

*Dîner 1*

Laëtitia was in charge of a public childminder advice agency and used to work as a licensed childminder, working from home. Pierre worked in a national sports centres company: he was a director of human resources and of informatics. He had a Bachelor in Sport studies and a State certificate in sports<sup>81</sup>. Pierre's mother was a sports teacher and his father a physics teacher, both in high school. Laëtitia had a research Master's in Psychology. They communicated an annual net income of approximately 46 500 euros. When I told them I was working with middle class families, and families situated at the margins of middle classes, Pierre argued:

**Pierre:** Oh yes, here, you're not in a middle class home. We're above middle class. Well, I have the impression, I don't know, but...

**Laëtitia:** ... not in the head...

**Pierre:** ... ah no, not in my head, but... uh, I don't feel like I'm in the middle class, I think I'm more in the middle class...

**Laëtitia:** ... yeah, I... for me, yes, but actually... since I've been with you... I have a bit more income. I've changed class a bit, [laughter] [...] we have a bit of a salary difference, which means that... [Pierre's salary is not far from the double of Laëtitia's]

**Pierre:** ... we're not in the middle class at all...

**Laëtitia:** ... no, well I'm not anymore...

**Pierre:** ... we're not in the rich class, far from it, but we're still in the middle class + + what, without ANY problem whatsoever

**Laëtitia:** ... ah yes

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<sup>81</sup> The type of sport centre Pierre worked at and is specialised in is not disclosed for anonymisation purposes.

### *Dîner 1*

**Pierre:** Ah ben oui, ici, t'es pas chez une classe moyenne. On est au-dessus de la classe moyenne. enfin, j'ai l'impression, après j'en sais rien, mais...

**Laëtitia:** ... pas dans la tête...

**Pierre:** ... ah non, pas dans la tête, mais... euh, j'ai pas l'impression d'être dans la classe moyenne, je me dis plus dans la classe moyenne...

**Laëtitia:** ... ouais, moi je... pour moi, si, mais effectivement... depuis que je suis avec toi... j'ai un peu plus de revenus. J'ai un peu changé de classe, [rire] [...] on a un peu une différence de salaires qui fait que... [Pierre's salary is not far from the double of Laëtitia's]

**Pierre:** ... voilà, on est pas du tout dans la classe moyenne...

**Laëtitia:** ... non, ben je le suis plus...

**Pierre:** ... on est pas dans la classe riche, loin de là, mais on est quand même dans des classes moyennes + + quoi, sans AUCUN problème quoi

**Laëtitia:** ... ah oui

### *Dîner 1*

They were situated in the middle class, economically, but they had indeed quite high cultural capital? Pierre's reaction also showed he felt quite content with their economic situation. They had just moved into a house they bought, in the suburbs of Lyon, where they had renovations going on, some of which they were doing themselves. They had a garden and Pierre took care of growing some vegetables.

Laëtitia worked 36 hours over 4.5 days. She loved her job and talked about it as being quite pleasant.

Pierre worked full time and seemed to experience more stress at work, although he tried to avoid work infringing upon their family life:

**Pierre:** I'm not at work like others, who will work all night to answer all their emails, I'll be very focused on..., more focused on the working day. The working day is the working day, and when I'm at home I cut out, that does not mean it does not overwhelm me [...]. My work puts me under a lot of stress, too much, in fact. But on the other hand I manage to make a real break when I'm with the children. And I try not to let work get in the way, and on the weekend, as long as there's no emergency, I disconnect. And also, well, it's clear that the stress is even greater with Covid, because all of a sudden we have to restart all the structures.

**Pierre :** Je suis pas au travail comme d'autres, qui va travailler toute la nuit pour répondre à tous ses mails, je vais être très concentré sur..., plus concentré sur la journée de travail. La journée de travail c'est la journée de travail, et quand je suis à la maison je coupe, c'est pas pour ça que ça m'envahit pas [...]. Mon travail me stresse quand même beaucoup, euh, trop d'ailleurs. Mais par contre j'arrive à faire une vraie coupure quand je suis avec les enfants. Et j'essaie de pas me faire envahir par le travail et le weekend pareil, tant qu'il n'y a pas d'urgence, je coupe et après ben c'est sûr que là, le stress est d'autant plus important avec le Covid, d'un coup on doit relancer l'ensemble des structures.

Laëtitia described her career choices in relation to having children. After her studies in psychology, she worked briefly in research and in teaching at the University, but did not enjoy it (she felt it 'wasn't for her'). She was a stay-at-home mother when Nathan was born ('I really took care of him, it was important for me to be home with him') and became a single mother when she was pregnant of Nolan:

**Laëtitia:** It was the only job [registered childminder] that allowed me to stay at home. I needed to be at home, psychologically, because I needed to be with my children, and seeing them go away every other weekend was too complicated, and if I didn't see them the rest of the time, it was... for me it was not possible. So it was the best compromise [...]. So I did this job, but knowing that it was temporary.

**Laëtitia** : C'était le seul métier [ASMAT] qui me permettait ben, de rester à la maison. J'avais besoin d'être à la maison, psychologiquement, parce que j'avais besoin d'être avec mes enfants, déjà les voir partir un weekend sur deux, c'était trop compliqué, si en plus je les voyais pas le reste du temps, c'était... pour moi c'était pas envisageable. Donc c'était le meilleur compromis [...]. Donc j'ai fait ce boulot, mais en sachant que c'était temporaire.

When her children were older, she began studying again (a *Brevet de Technicien Supérieur* at distance on social and family economy) to be able to work in the childminder agency. On the third visit At the Lebrun household, Laëtitia was telling me about her day when she summarised her work experience as following:

**Laëtitia**: Actually, I go to work in the morning to play with the kids, play with the little cars, and I eat and drink tea with the childminders, it's great. My mornings are like that: I play, I eat cake, I drink tea, I love it!

*Dinner 3*

**Laëtitia**: En fait, je vais au boulot le matin pour jouer avec les enfants, jouer avec les petites voitures, et je mange et je bois du thé avec les ASMAT, c'est génial. Mes matinées c'est ça : je joue, je mange du gâteau, je bois du thé, j'adore !

*Dîner 3*

There was some form of irony in her comment and her job was of course more than what she described here, but this revealed her relationship to childcare, which she described as being rather natural and inevitably enjoyable.

Both Pierre and Laëtitia talked about their life with their ex partners as being really difficult:

**Pierre**: With my ex, you would never have come. Oh no, no. I would never have let anyone into..., well, I would never have brought anyone into the energy that was there [...]. You cannot go into a family in conflict..., although I'm open [...]. When you're in a moment of discomfort, it's already complicated for you, how you want to explain that to someone outside?

**Laëtitia**: That's it. When it's complicated for you to go home, you don't want to let someone else in

**Pierre**: You're already trying to solve your problems internally, if you put someone else in the middle of it....

**Laëtitia**: For sure ...

**Pierre**: Even if it could be a good solution, you know

*Dinner 1*

**Pierre** : Avec mon ex, tu serais jamais venue. Ah non, non. Moi, j'aurais jamais laissé entrer quelqu'un dans..., enfin, j'aurais jamais emmené quelqu'un dans l'énergie qu'il y avait là-bas [...]. Tu peux pas entrer dans une famille en conflit..., même moi qui suis ouvert [...]. Quand t'es dans un moment de mal-être, déjà, c'est compliqué pour toi, comment tu veux expliquer ça à quelqu'un d'extérieur ?

**Laëtitia** : C'est ça. Quand c'est compliqué pour toi de rentrer chez toi, t'as pas envie de laisser rentrer quelqu'un d'autre.

**Pierre**: Déjà que t'essaie de régler tes problèmes en interne, si en plus tu mets quelqu'un au milieu....

**Laëtitia** : C'est clair...

**Pierre** : Même si ça pourrait être une bonne solution d'ailleurs, hein...

*Dîner 1*

Laëtitia mentioned her ex-husband did not do much at home, especially in terms of feeding the family. Pierre mentioned his ex-wife was not very engaged with the children, and therefore, he had to take on a more 'maternal' role:

**Pierre:** I was able to take the role of a father because I had a ..., the mother of my children who never took her place as a mother. And she [Laëtitia] replaced the lack of motherhood that existed for my children very quickly... and which already existed...

**Laëtitia:** ... well, I already had it. I did much more with the children than their mother...

*Dinner 1*

**Pierre:** Moi, j'ai pu prendre cette place de père parce que j'avais une ..., la maman de mes enfants qui n'a jamais pris sa place de maman. Et elle [Laëtitia] a remplacé le côté manquement maman qui existait de la part de mes enfants très vite... et qui existait déjà...

**Laëtitia:** ... enfin voilà, je l'avais déjà. J'ai fait beaucoup plus de choses avec les enfants que leur mère...

*Dinner 1*

Laëtitia and Pierre were in the first year of their couple and they were still adjusting to one another and to their new family life, but both of them demonstrated being happy to have found each other, especially because their previous conjugal life seemed to have been so difficult.

Pierre's father passed away when he was 13. Laëtitia's parents separated when she was 8 and she did not see her father for years after that. Her mother was struggling with mental illness.

Pierre mentioned that they spent most of their money on food (except for the house renovations). They regularly had friends or relatives over and Pierre particularly liked to have people over for a meal: 'never a lot of people, but people drop by, there is always family dropping by'. The Lebrun and particularly Pierre valued spontaneous forms of extraordinary and convivial commensality (with guests), which also explained why I was easily invited into their family for observations.

During the time of my fieldwork, Pierre and Laëtitia were hosting two of Pierre's nephews (Lucien: 21 and Arthur: 23) who helped with some of the renovations in the house and taking care of the children. Pierre acknowledged: "it drives my brother crazy, he goes mad' because he considered they needed to be pursuing their education and career rather than spending time at Pierre's. Pierre talked about his older half-brother (whom he called 'brother' and was 12 years older) and his career and by doing so, he revealed his own background and the type of life he was leading, as an adult : he was 'radically different from [him] in the way of living and being in daily life'. His brother was director of a research laboratory of chemistry (associated with a selective public school) and Pierre described him as being 'internationally renowned and with 5 doctoral students under his orders' (the later sentence, 'under his orders' might suggested a form of mockery or disdain, on Pierre's side, of his brother socially established position):

**Pierre:** Education and success are fundamental in terms of practice, even if they will tell you the opposite [...]. You had to succeed, that's it. Failure was not allowed on that side [...]. But in any case, that's my vision of things [laughter]! And this is not at all my way of seeing life.

**Pierre :** L'éducation et la réussite est quelque chose de fondamental en terme de pratique, chez eux, même si eux te diront l'inverse [...]. Fallait réussir, voilà. L'échec n'était pas permis de ce côté-là [...]. Mais en tout cas c'est ma vision des choses, [rire] ! Et ce qui n'est pas du tout ma manière de voir la vie.



He explained this difference by the fact his father (also the father of his half-brother) passed away when he was young. Pierre's mother was more 'rebel', 'feminist':

**Pierre:** [My] parents [were] very involved in political movements, but at the same time very standard and also very linked to success and the obligation to succeed. But not at all lax, like, you could say, having the age..., the archetype of a May 68. They were really..., they had the convictions of May '68, because they lived it, but not at all the baba cool approach that can be associated with it. It's more my sister and I who inherited that! [laughter]

**Pierre :** [Mes] parents [étaient] très engagés dans les mouvements politiques, mais à la fois très standards et très liés aussi à la réussite et l'obligation de réussite. Mais pas du tout laxistes, comme, on pourrait dire, avoir l'âge..., l'archétype d'un soixante-huitard. Eux, ils étaient vraiment..., ils avaient les convictions de mai 68, puisqu'ils l'ont vécu, mais pas du tout la démarche baba cool ou qui peut s'allier avec. Voilà, c'est plus ma sœur et moi qui avons hérités de ça ! [rire]

Despite Pierre's distance with the world he associated to his brother (academic research), he was well informed on what research was, and challenged my own knowledge and training by asking me question on the participants of my study, the recruitment, the biases, etc.

Pierre explained that he needed a break after work to be able to reconnect to family life, which working from home made more difficult for him. At the end of the third dinnertime, Pierre commented he had initially planned to prepare grilled meat and zucchinis. As he did not have time, his nephew prepared crepes, with the help of some children:

**Pierre:** No, but I'm not as ready to cook as I usually am, because I'm finishing my day, I'm at home, I don't have a break. And you're in a context. I mean, working at home is horrible! It really is! I find it hard to get out of work and say that I'm coming back home

**Laëtitia:** Yes

**Pierre:** I go to the pool. I spend half an hour in the pool, it cuts me off. I was there, but I can't say I'm at home, I'm at work. And there [when he is teleworking], in fact, I am there, at 4.30 pm, I say to myself, it's fine, I'll cut out, but no, I am unable to cut out because I am still in my office hours, I haven't cut out, and finally, I find myself working until 6.30, 7 pm [...]. So yeah, when you don't have that break, coming in and investing yourself in the life of the house, it's hard

*Dîner 3*

**Pierre:** Non, mais déjà, moi je suis moins prêt à faire à manger que d'habitude, parce que je termine ma journée, je suis à la maison, j'ai pas mon temps de coupure. Et t'es dans un contexte. Enfin moi, travailler à la maison, c'est horrible! Vraiment! J'ai du mal à sortir du moment du travail et à dire que je reviens dans la maison

**Laëtitia:** Oui

**Pierre :** Je vais à la piscine. Je passe une demi-heure dans la piscine, ça m'a coupé. J'étais là, mais je peux pas dire je suis à la maison, je suis au travail. Et là [lorsqu'il est en télétravail], en fait, je suis là, à 16h30, je me dis, c'est bon, en fait je vais couper, mais non, je suis dans l'incapacité de couper parce que suis toujours dans mes horaires de bureau, j'ai pas coupé, et enfin de compte, je me retrouve à travailler jusqu'à 18h30, 19h [...]. Donc ouais, quand t'as pas cette coupure, arriver et t'investir dans la vie de la maison, c'est dur

*Dîner 3*

### **3.8. *The Nimaga family, a multicultural, socially mixed and reconstituted household***

The Nimaga were a reconstituted dual headed household. Issa had three children (Lila: 5, Naya: 12, Moussa: 16, although Moussa did not take part in the study). Ana did not have any children at the time of fieldwork. They had custody of Issa's children every other weekend and half of the holidays. I knew this household before fieldwork (they were friends) and recruited them in person. Ana worked as a biostatistician and was also doing a PhD within the company she worked for. She also gave classes of educational support, for extra money. Issa was a welder and at the time of the interview, was on a temporary contract.

Ana was of Romanian origin: she arrived in France for her engineering studies. Issa is of Malian origin, and arrived in Europe (Germany) for his studies, which he did not finish. He worked for a stationary company for many year until he began a training as a welder. They lived together in an apartment owned by Ana. Ana practiced running and occasionally went to the gym. Issa did not mention any organised leisure activities, but he spent quite some time recycling bicycles, as a hobby. The TV was often on in their apartment and constituted a central cultural habit in their family life.

### **3.9. *The Rizzo family, maintaining an established intermediary middle-class position as a single father***

Guillaume Rizzo was a single father of a 10-year-old girl called Zoé. He lived alone with her and had shared custody of Zoé (one week out of two and every other weekend). Guillaume had been separated from Zoé's mothers since she was 3 years old. I had met Guillaume a few times at a climbing centre before I took part in the study. He worked as an artist and was an 'intermittent du spectacle'<sup>82</sup>. He directed his own company. He was a high school graduate. His annual net income after taxes was 33 000 euros. He was quite flexible in his working hours and there were times in the year when he did not work much, compensated by other periods when he worked more. He lived in the 7<sup>th</sup> district and was a tenant of his apartment.

Guillaume spent a lot of his free time climbing. He also practiced tango and on occasions, went to the theatre (although he mentioned he preferred 'hanging out' with people from the climbing community rather than with artists). His parents lived in Lyon as well and Zoé regularly spent time with them. He worked an extra month during the summer, in outdoor activity, in order to earn more money (some of it undeclared). Zoé went to a public school and had weekly theatre classes. Guillaume's parents

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<sup>82</sup> A particular public status in France for artists, which provides them with a monthly income, provided they produce a certain amount of activities.

came from a middle class background as well. His parents were born in Tunisia and were of an Italian background.

### **3.10. The André family, a lower middle class household with interrupted professional careers**

The André were a dual headed household with three children (Céleste: 4, Enzo: 6 and Lucas: 7). Angélique was not working at the time of the fieldwork interview. She then found a job as a secretary. She used to work for a translation company. Pascal was starting his own company (as a franchise) as a consultant in management of small companies. He had a professional training in pâtisserie (CAP) and worked 3 year in a pâtisserie. Then he was hired in a company fabricating jewelry. Pascal also worked in sales and in social housing. He went back to studying (Bac professionnel<sup>83</sup> + *Brevet de Technicien Supérieur* in commercial management) to be able to create his own company (franchised):

**Pascal:** My goal was to create a company, to be my own boss, my aim being to do business consulting with all the experiences I had had, so I thought that it's a job that interests me. So I had the opportunity to be part of a franchise that gave me the possibility to create my own business and to do business consulting.

**Pascal :** J'avais pour but de créer une entreprise, d'être mon propre patron, mon but étant de faire du conseil en entreprise avec toutes les expériences que j'avais eues, donc j'dis ça c'est un métier qui m'intéresse. Donc là j'ai eu l'opportunité de faire partie d'une franchise qui me donnait la possibilité de créer mon entreprise et de faire du conseil en entreprise.

At the time of the fieldwork, he did not have many clients. They declared a net annual income of 41 500 euros. They moved apartments into a social housing flat during the study, which they rented. A cultural practice they spontaneously mentioned was watching TV and movies.

## **4. Families from Adelaide**

### **4.1. The Bennet family, happy at work, extensive sports practice and traditional parental roles**

The Bennet were a dual headed household with two boys of 3 (Charlie) and 7-year-old (Henry). Vanessa was a public servant in housing and also a public servant and manager in social services (engineer in informatics). Both often worked more than full time (40 hours per week, full time being 37,5 hours). Their annual net income was in a range of 140 000 to 180 000 Australian dollars, which positions them as upper middle class. They both had a high school degree (uncertain if Vanessa had an additional training). They lived in a house in Wynn Vale, a suburb of Adelaide. Vanessa talked about offsetting her extra hours to take some time off to spend with the children. Both Craig and Vanessa's professional work arrangements gave them flexibility and they talked about being able to adjust their work hours

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<sup>83</sup> Professionalising A levels degree.

to the needs of the children. Vanessa, in particular, mentioned having a very understanding boss (woman) who let her accommodate her work hours so that she could take care of her children:

**Vanessa:** It's very satisfying [...]. We've got a really good leader, she's very personable, she's very compassionate, she's very family work/life balance. She's very supportive of working from home. And considering she doesn't have any children... [...]. If my kids are sick and I can't go to work, I feel bad. But it's nice to be reassured that..., you know, your family comes first [...]. So that kind of environment is more supportive in lots of different aspects of it that you kind of give that bit more because, you know, you give get back type of type of thing [...]. I've got that flexibility that I can have that balance with my personal life stuff and also being involved in various aspects with my children that I don't abuse that but, you know, if I need to put the kids to bed and do a few more things once they're finished, you know it doesn't bother me because I know that I had a two hour lunch break.

Both Vanessa and Craig's mothers regularly took care of their children. Henry as well as his parents had individual leisure activities planned throughout the week.

Table 9. Leisure individual activities at the Bennet household

**Leisure individual activities<sup>84</sup> of the Bennet**

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Henry					Cricket (5:30-6:30 PM)	Commitment	Commitment
Charlie							
Vanessa	Gym after work	Gym after work	Occasionally to the gym after work	Two sessions of gym after work			
Craig	Sports after work	Sports after dinner					

#### 4.2. The Brown family, happy at work and rather traditional parental roles

The Browns were a dual headed household with two children: a 6-year-old boy (Liam) and an 8-year-old girl (Ivy). Alison was a public servant three days a week and worked two days a week in a primary school as a School Support Officer, supporting kids with special needs:

**Alison:** I was actually thinking about going back and doing a teaching qualification, like going back to become a teacher so I thought that this would be a really good course to do and maybe get some work to get a bit of a feel for what it would be like in a similar environment. And I just happened to get a contract that was two days a week. So I thought, well, it's probably a good opportunity to learn and gain some skills and see if it's something I want to, you know, go back to Uni and study, stop doing what I'm doing, and then moving out. I haven't got to that point yet where I'm really to take the leap, so [laughter], yeah.

<sup>84</sup> The Australian households from this study had more organized leisure activities than did the households from Lyon, which could be presented in a couple of sentences only. The busy schedules of the families from Adelaide were better represented in tables.

Luke was a firefighter. Their annual net income was in a range of 140 000 to 180 000 Australian dollars. Alison had a Bachelor’s degree in Accounting commerce as well as an Educational Support Certificate and Luke did a training as a firefighter. Alison described her work as ‘challenging but rewarding’ and explained she generally liked going in to work. Yet, she described some difficulties to balance work and private life:

**Alison:** If you’ve had a really busy day and you’re a bit..., really focusing on something, sometimes it’s hard to break that. I sometimes do extra hours here and there if required. But generally it’s not, unless I’ve been..., like, last week I had to do a couple of hours from home on Thursday because someone else was off sick, but that was because...just to keep on top of some things. But I try not to. I’m a little bit of a workaholic, so it’s very hard to rate that... But I just have to get better [...]. So if I have to leave early to pick the children up, um, I’ll do a few hours from home to just get the, keep on top of the workload [...]. My hours are actually quite flexible. That’s why I like working there too. Like yeah, for me, I can drop the kids off from school and like today, I didn’t get into work until 9:45. And then some days I might work later [...]. Unless I’ve got a meeting there’s no real set time that I need to be at work for any specific reason.

They lived in a house in Burnside, a middle-class suburb of Adelaide. Alison and Luke’s mothers occasionally took care of their children, when they needed it. The family members had several activities planned throughout the week and weekend (*Table 10 Leisure individual activities of the Brown family*):

*Table 10 Leisure individual activities of the Brown family*

Leisure individual activities of the Brown family							
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Liam		Swimming until 4PM	Cricket before school	Robotics after school		Cricket	
Ivy		Swimming until 4PM		Dance after school			
Luke				Volunteer at fire brigade in the evening (every two weeks) + Sports			
Alison	Community garden two or three times a week						

**4.3. The Chapman family, demanding jobs, many organised leisure activities, and bringing up children with large age differences**

The Chapmans were a dual headed household living in house in a middle class suburb of Adelaide (Greenwith). They had three children aged 1 (Isla), 5 (Jacob) and 7 (Hannah). Amy Chapman worked full time over four days as a primary school teacher and Glen was a public servant and a manager (social services). He also worked full time. Their annual net income was in a range of 140 000 to 180 000

Australian dollars. Glen graduated from high school and had a TAFE certificate IV (tertiary study program with no conditions of entry). Amy graduated from high school and then did a TAFE certificate (children studies 2 year course). She then enrolled in a 4-year teaching degree at University. Amy described her job as ‘coming home with her’: she often worked from home but overall, she was satisfied with it:

**Amy:** It's a hard job, it's rewarding and exhausting. this year has definitely been a tough year of living through covid. There's been a lot of restrictions, the parents have been very uneasy with not being able to come into the school.

Glen described his job as being very stressful, but seemed to manage, most of the time, to disconnect when getting home:

**Glen:** I don't have any devices that I have to take home. Like I don't have a laptop or a phone with me that's work [...]. So, I'm pretty lucky that I can switch off and I mean, having a 45-minute drive home as well, it sort of calm and forget about it. I'm pretty good at leaving work at work [...]. There was a few times, more so when I was dealing with customers, something might sit with me a little bit: it might have been something that I've realised I've done wrong, and I can't wait to ring them back tomorrow to say: "Look, I'm sorry, I've sorted this for you, and now I've fixed this". Or a time when I just can't fix something, and you see someone walk out and get into their car where they're sleeping that night, and you just, there's nothing, you know there's nothing you can do. But yes, it sometimes sits with you a little bit.

He managed his own work time and was able to adjust it to his family life (such as dropping and picking up children). Amy's parents took care of some of the children on a weekly basis. Their children and particularly Hannah were enrolled in many organised leisure activities (*Table 11 Leisure individual activities of the Chapman family*):

*Table 11 Leisure individual activities of the Chapman family*

Leisure individual activities of the Chapman Family							
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Hannah		Swimming until 4PM	Netball until 6PM		Netball at 6PM	Ballet	
	Girl guides						
Jacob		Swimming until 4PM					
Amy	No organised activities						
Glen	No organised activities						

**4.4. The Davies, over worked, exhausted and caring parents**

The Davies family were a dual headed household with three children: 5-year-old twins (Abigail and Oliver) and 7-year-old girl (Lily) living in Golden Grove, a middle class neighbourhood. Sally was an executive assistant at a University as well as an independent marriage celebrant. She considered she

was 'probably working close to two full-time jobs' and regularly worked on weekends and evenings: 'I just got a cleaner, because I just don't have time to keep on top of that'.

**Sally:** I've always had an admin job, and then I was building up the celebrant business, with the aim that that would be my full-time job, and I'm doing enough weddings for it to be full-time, but I also love the stability of a stable income and this opportunity came up [the University] for two days a week. Well, it was supposed to be one day and then it quickly turned into two days. So yeah, it's just been nice, ah, meanwhile I'm running myself ragged, yeah, just to really have a, a regular fortnightly income when celebrant money can come at any time.

Adam was a public servant youth worker. He worked full time and was a shift worker, which meant he either started work very early or came home late. Their annual net income was in a range of 100 000 to 140 000, so they had the lowest income of the group of four households from Adelaide.

Sally started working after she graduated from high school and years later, she returned to studying (Diploma in Event Management and a Cert IV in Celebrancy). She lived in England for six years and travelled in Europe. Adam had a 4-year trade qualification for air conditioning and a certificate IV in child youth and family intervention. He was highly unsatisfied with his work situation and was searching for another job:

**Adam:** Like, AM shift today, I was up 4:30 this morning to leave and get to work to be there by 6:00. What's the time now? It's 6:30 now. They'll be in the bath soon, and by the time we've had dinner, unwind and in bed, it's 10:30-11:00. And every day is the same. Even when I'm on a late shift, I'm finishing at 10:30, I'm home at 11:30-11:45. By the time you unwind, you're going to sleep about 12:30-1:00. Then with the kids, you're up at 7:00-7:30 the next morning.

**Adam:** It's very dif-, very, very hard. We don't feel supported enough. So, there are days I enjoy the colleague I'm working with and the stuff that we do, but I don't enjoy other people I work with, because they just make our job harder [...]. Every day I come home, like, mentally and physically exhausted, drained. I try not to bring the frustration home. I try and leave it, when I get to the carpark and I get in the car, I try and leave it there, but sometimes it does come home a bit. It's just you get frustrated, you have all this enthusiasm to do your job, and you just get roadblock after roadblock [...]. If I'm on an AM [shift], Sally's, like today, she's been at home all day with the kids: I've come home, it's straight into it, I let Sally go out and, you know, have some time by herself, have to remove the dishwasher, because it's broken, get dinner, bath time, bed time. So, it's just a full-on process. See, with kids, there's no time, there's no downtime really.

Sally's and Adam's mothers regularly took care of their children on weekends.

## 5. The everyday family rhythms and routines

Grignon encourages us to investigate domestic commensality in light of the household's social rhythms, which can create constraint on commensality:

'In the case of the present-day Western family, the intensity of domestic commensality may be considered an indicator of the integration of the family group, of the degree to which family life resists the pressures from parents' occupations and children's schooling. From this point of view, the study of commensality relates to the study of the family group chronology in its relations to schedules prescribed from outside.' (2001, 25)

He encouraged us to question whether family members are free to coordinate their own schedules to define a family schedule. I describe in the following section the everyday routines within the household as well as engagements of family members outside the household that ultimately influenced the time and duration of family meals. Time is socially and gender constructed in its experience and management (or lack of) (Mehta et al. 2019; Dupuy and Rochedy 2018) and it constitutes, like income, a social determinant of health (Strazdins et al. 2016). Food work therefore needs to be analysed in relation to the time available by the food providers but also according to 'timestyles' (the way parents construct time, their rationales for their perception of time and their daily activities) and time management strategies (such as planning, coordinating, prioritising) (Jabs et al. 2007; Devine et al. 2006; Beshara, Hutchinson, and Wilson 2010).

The attention paid to the health and balance of children through mealtimes was inscribed in a larger considerations about children's global health, which was reached in particular by good sleep and proper meals, both in terms of scheduling, duration and quality. For the parents of this study, in Lyon and in Adelaide, the imperative of getting children to bed at a regular hour, and not too late determined the duration and ending of family mealtimes, along with family members' public social life engagements (parents' work hours and children's school and childcare schedules). The health imperatives of appropriate sleep and meals were also affected by other domestic occupations, such as educational and recreational activities and hygiene routines (children's homework, playtime, bedtime story telling, bathing).

### **5.1. *Cultural and social differences in the children's bedtime hours***

The parents from both cities mentioned they adjusted the mealtime hour and duration as well as the whole evening schedule and rhythm to children's bedtime, so that they could have a long night's sleep and of good quality. Nevertheless, children's bedtime hour varied across the households, between the groups of families from the two cities, over the days of the week and even over the period of the year.

The bedtime hours of children in Lyon reported by their parents varied from 8 to 9:30 PM. Lea (7) and Hugo (10) Comescu (up. class) went to bed the earliest, at 8 PM. Irina explained this was a strict hour and it was respected for the four visits I did at their home. The Bourdon (up. class), Imbert (up. class) and Obecanov (int. mid.-class) parents reported bedtime hours for their children between 8 to 8:30 PM (Louise Imbert, 8, could read until 9PM if there was no school the next day), which was also the case when I visited. The children from the Lebrun (int. mid. class), Franquet (up. mid. class), Ferret (up. class) and André (low. mid.-class) households were expected to be in bed by 8:30 to 9 PM. Zoé Rizzo (10, int. mid. class) had the latest bedtime hour (reported by her father and observed during the visits), between 9 and 9:30 PM. The earliest bedtime hour of children in Adelaide was a bit earlier than in



Lyon: between 7:30 and 8 PM at the Chapman household (int. mid. class) and the Davies (low. mid. class) households. The children from the Bennet (up. mid. class) and the Brown (up. mid. class) households in Adelaide had to be in bed by 8 or 8:30PM (8 PM for Charlie Bennet, 3 years old and until 8:45 for Henry Bennet, 7 years old). These schedules showed the children from the upper classes and the upper middle classes had to go to bed a bit earlier than did the children from the intermediary or lower middle class households:

Children's bedtime hours at the Bourdon, Imbert and Comescu households (up. class) were more regularly followed than at the other households (during the visits). Some delays were observed at the Lebrun household (past 9:30 PM, int. mid. class) from Lyon because of it being a summer evening (with school the next day). For the third visit at the Rizzo household (int. mid. class), Zoé went to bed after 10 PM, on a school night. For this dinner, a friend of Guillaume, the father, had been invited over and it lasted longer than usual. A couple of observations at the André household (low. mid.-class) showed children going to bed after 9:30 PM, on Tuesday and Friday evenings. In Adelaide as well, there was more variation for the children from the lower middle class household. For Sally Davies (low. mid. class), this was not a matter of flexibility but rather an impossibility to get children to bed earlier, because of time constraints:

**Sally:** They go to bed, ideally by 7:30. Sometimes 8:00 if we've had a later night and Lily is at school, so we've got a bit of homework where she has to practice some words and things. And then by the time we get in to each of the twins, it could be like 8:00, 8:30 [...]. So it's only if it's..., we've gone to bed late. Like for Thursday or a Friday, it's a bit hectic and they get to bed about, like, 9:00, 9:30, that's the only time they'll stay [up a bit longer to play]. But no, their playtime is pre-dinner. And then yeah, it's dinner, bath, dressed, teeth,...

The scheduling and adjustment of the mealtime to the bedtime varied according to the day of the week and the period of the year. When children did not have school the following day (Tuesday, Friday and Saturday evenings in Lyon and Friday and Saturday evenings in Adelaide), there was more flexibility and children were sometimes allowed to go to bed a bit later as they could sleep in the next morning (Angélique André (low.mid.-class): 'Tuesday, it's usually a bit more relaxed', Dîner 1).

Nevertheless some parents tried to keep a consistent bedtime schedule over the whole week (Comescu: up. class; Obecanov: int. mid. class), as their children would naturally wake up at approximately the same hour every morning:

**Sophie Obecanov:** So when it's just the three of us, we try to keep a weekday rhythm, if only for bedtime. Sometimes it shifts a bit, but we still try to eat at a good time so that bedtime isn't too late either. Because it's not because you're going to put her to bed later that she's going to get up later, it doesn't work, well not with Elisa anyway, so there you go.

**Sophie Obecanov:** Alors quand on est que tous les trois, on essaie de garder un rythme de semaine, ne serait-ce que pour le coucher. Des fois ça se décale un peu, mais on essaie quand même de manger de bonne heure pour que le coucher se fasse pas trop tard non plus. Parce

que c'est pas parce que tu vas la coucher plus tard qu'elle va se lever plus tard, ça ne fonctionne pas, enfin pas avec Elisa en tout cas, donc voilà.

Mealtimes were also delayed because of the additional daylight, in summer, as for instance at the Obecanov and the Lebrun household (int. mid. class):

**Sophie Obecanov:** In winter, as we get home earlier [because they don't necessarily go to the park], in general, at 8PM, she's already in bed and we're reading her the story. We're coming up on a period, taking into account the context, which is a little bit particular [because of health restrictions], we hang out a little bit more in the evening, we go to the park a little bit. In our attitude, we hang out more, because as it's not night time. In general, as long as she goes to school, we make sure that by 8:30 we're out of her room, story read, at most [silence]. I mean, more or less.

**Sophie Obecanov:** L'hiver, comme on rentre plus tôt [parce qu'ils ne vont pas forcément au parc], en général, à 20h, elle est déjà au lit et on est en train de lui lire l'histoire. Là on arrive sur une période, compte tenu du contexte en plus, qui est un p'tit peu particulier (à cause des restrictions sanitaires), on traîne un p'tit peu plus le soir, ... on va un peu au parc... Nous aussi on traîne ..., enfin, nous aussi, dans notre attitude, on traîne plus, car comme la nuit tombe pas, on traîne un peu plus. En général, tant qu'elle va à l'école, on fait en sorte que, à 8h30, on soit sortis de sa chambre, histoire lue, au grand maximum [silence]. Enfin, à peu près.

At the fifth dinner at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class), on an early summer school night, the adults were lingering on at the table on the patio at the end of the mealtime, while the children were playing in the garden. It was a school night, parents were at their work during the day but children did not have their usual weekly extracurricular activities. The parents reflected on their experience of the evening:

**Laëtitia:** Honestly, it's not speed at all, I didn't expect the evening to go like this!

**Pierre:** ... I didn't understand why you ... [why Laëtitia was stressed with time when she came back from work and worked hard to prepare the children's lunches for the next day, the canteen being exceptionally closed].

**Laëtitia:** Well because we came back from work, the children had school, we had to manage the picnics, the stuff

**Pierre:** There were only the extra picnics to manage. Usually, it's never speed, we have time, right?

**Laëtitia:** [...] It's especially that it's 8:40PM, but it's still light outside, we were used to it, at 8:40PM, the children had already brushed their teeth, were in pajamas, reading before going to bed.

**Pierre:** Yes

**Laëtitia:** Usually, it was 8:45M so obviously, it changes a lot of things in fact

**Pierre:** Yeah, because it's summer [...]

**Laëtitia:** For me, it's not an evening like usual, tonight. It is, but it's a summer evening

*Dîner 5*

**Laëtitia:** Franchement, c'est pas speed du tout, je m'attendais pas à ce que la soirée elle se passe cool comme ça!

**Pierre:** ... j'ai pas compris pourquoi tu ... [pourquoi Laëtitia était stressée par le temps, en rentrant du travail et s'est activée pour préparer rapidement les déjeuners des enfants pour le lendemain, la cantine étant exceptionnellement fermée]

**Laëtitia:** ... ben parce que on rentrait du boulot, les enfants avaient école, il fallait gérer les pique-niques, les machins

**Pierre:** Y'avait que les pique en plus à gérer. D'habitude, c'est jamais speed, on a le temps hein  
**Laëtitia:** [...] c'est surtout que là, il est 20h40, mais il fait encore jour dehors, on avait l'habitude, à 20h40, les enfants ils avaient déjà les dents brossés, en pyjama, en train de lire avant d'aller se coucher. Là, ils vont plutôt aller se coucher à 21h30.

**Pierre:** Oui

**Laëtitia:** D'habitude, c'était 20h45. Donc forcément, ça change beaucoup de choses en fait

**Pierre:** Ouais, parce que c'est l'été [...]

**Laëtitia :** Là, pour moi, c'est pas une soirée comme d'habitude, là, ce soir. Enfin si, mais une soirée d'été

*Dîner 5*

It was notable that Laëtitia was the one reminding Pierre that they had gone past their children's bedtime. This suggests that Laëtitia hurried when coming home from work because she wanted their children to go to bed at an appropriate time (8:45 PM) and not respecting this hour meant that, indeed, they could experience a relaxed evening. This also meant that, between the moment when Laëtitia came home from work and the end of the meal, she gave up on the appropriate bedtime imperative. Nevertheless, she seemed to have kept an attention to time during the meal. She asked some of the children if they had prepared their school bags for the next day. It was also she who reminded Chloë not to take too long to eat her dessert and who asked them to clear the table. Pierre did not appear to be preoccupied by the time management before, during and after the dinner. It was also notable that Pierre said he never experienced time stress in the evenings. Laëtitia was therefore the one bearing the mental load of watching over time, and was also connected to Pierre's positive experience of evening meal preparation, as I will describe later on.

My presence could have delayed children bedtime as well, as I observed some children beginning their bedtime routine a bit later than what parents had announced. On most school nights, though, parents were quite adamant on getting children to bed at their usual time. This sometimes meant having to rush through dinner, especially if it began later than usual:

**Sébastien Cellier** (*unknown social class*): Six thirty [the time at which they get home] that leaves... well, generally I put them to bed at eight in the evening [...]. You have to do their homework, you have to wash them, you have to cook, you have to eat, you have to be in your pyjamas, you have to have a bit of time to talk too [during the meal]. On the other hand, if beforehand we took a lot of time to do the homework, to wash, etc., then this inevitably becomes a bit of an adjustment variable in order to get the right amount of sleep.

**Sébastien Cellier** (*classe sociale inconnue*) : Dix-huit heures trente [heure à laquelle ils rentrent à la maison] ça laisse... enfin voilà en général je les couche à huit heures, le soir [...]. Faut faire les devoirs, faut les laver, faut faire à manger, faut manger, faut être en pyjama, faut avoir un peu de temps pour discuter aussi quoi [pendant le repas]. Par contre si avant on a pris beaucoup de temps pour faire les devoirs, pour se laver etc., du coup, forcément, ça devient un peu la variable d'ajustement pour arriver au temps de sommeil qui va bien.

They would spend less time at the table, would sacrifice some dimensions of family mealtimes to be able to get children to bed by the proper time they have set. Vanessa Bennet (up. mid. class), from Adelaide explained how, as some post mealtime activities appeared to be inevitable, if the dinner began later than usual, there was no other choice than to rush through the mealtime as well:

**Vanessa:** So it depends on what time it is that we have dinner as well because that can obviously contribute. If it's a bit later than normal it kind of is a bit rushed because we don't have dinner till seven o'clock, it's like by the time they've then finished eating and then we got to get them ready for bed and then we've got to get Henry to do reading still. And then, you know then they might want a piece of

fruit or something else to eat, like fairy bread or some dessert thing, they might want an ice-cream or something afterwards, then it's kind of like: 'well now it's time to clean your teeth and get ready for bed'...

For Vanessa, it was also important to get children to bed early enough, before they went hungry again.

In some families, the bedtime hour was much stricter than in others. At the Comescu household (upper class), in Lyon, the lights were turned off in children's bedroom at 8 PM at the latest:

**Irina:** Meals last much longer on weekends than during the week. Because during the week, the kids go to bed at 8PM, we turn off the lights in the rooms.

**Fairley:** Is that something you manage to keep?

**Irina:** Oh yes yes, ... yes. So, at the latest at 7.30 we get up from the table, but well, if we really start at 6:30, at 7:15 we're done. So they have time to brush their teeth, to read, and at 8P we turn off the lights

**Irina:** Les repas durent beaucoup plus longtemps les weekends que la semaine. Parce que la semaine, nous, les enfants se couchent à 20h, on éteint les lumières dans les chambres.

**Fairley:** C'est quelque chose que vous arrivez à tenir, ça?

**Irina:** Ah oui oui, ... oui. Donc voilà, au plus tard à 7h30 on sort de table, mais bon, si vraiment on se met à 6h30, à 7h15 on a fini. Donc ils ont le temps de se brosser les dents, de lire, et à 20h on éteint les lumières

To be able to reach this, their hour for beginning the mealtime was set in stone, between 6:30 and 6:40 PM. Because of this, when Laurent, the father, worked from Lyon instead of Paris (he worked from Lyon 2 days a week), they started dinner without him and he joined them when he arrived home, at 7 or 7:15 PM. In this family, the dinner was also more rushed than on the weekends, because of this imperative of reaching the appropriate sleep time for children.

During the lockdown, the articulation of the mealtime with the bedtime could be disrupted:

**Bianca Armand** (*unknown social class, probably upper middle class*): Our evening meals are generally the same as before the lockdown (all together, no TV etc.), but we eat at less fixed times, we sit down at the table between 7-8PM, rather than around 7PM. The reason for this is that the children go to bed much later, and we let them sleep as much as they want in the morning.

*Food diary during the lockdown*

**Bianca Armand:** Nos repas du soir se déroulent globalement comme avant le confinement (tous ensemble, sans télé etc.), mais nous mangeons à des horaires moins fixes, on se met à table entre 19h-20h, plutôt que vers 19h. La raison pour ceci : les enfants se couchent beaucoup plus tard, et on les laisse dormir autant qu'ils veulent le matin.

*Food diary during the lockdown*

The time and duration of sleep was constructed as a historical and social norm (Ekirch 2001; B. Schwartz 1970) and sleep, like other social and health norms, is associated with socio-economic inequalities (Barazzetta and Ghislandi 2017). As with other domains of social life, sleep is subjected to a medicalisation process and is constituted as a health norm, especially for children (Williams 2002). B. Schwartz argued that 'the effective scheduling of sleep requires the regulation of not only those activities which inhibit sleep but also of activities which facilitate it' (1970, 488). The shared family meals were considered by some parents of this study as an activity that facilitated sleep – through

regulation of the amount and type of food consumed – but were also viewed as a variable to monitor so it would not affect the appropriate sleep. Sleep patterns within the family also represent and support hierarchical relationships between parents. But parents’ orchestration of their children’s sleep schedule may also reveal other intentions, as B. Schwartz argues:

‘At the edge of every power relationship, of course, hangs the possibility of exploitation. Instead of going to sleep themselves, for example, parents may attain some relief from public demand by commanding their public to sleep. Children may therefore be put to bed at an early hour not only by reason of their age and need for sleep but also because they must be gotten rid of’ (1970, 497).

As family meals required significant efforts from parents and most parents from this study were under time stress, getting children to bed early enough would also be associated with parents’ desire and need to unwind at the end of their day. It was a means for them to have some conjugal time, or some alone time, which were also the only moment in the day they could afford to do so. This also seemed to be factored in as a health imperative for them, in the general meaning and global health, wellbeing and fulfilment:

**Sophie Obecanov** (int. mid.-class): We've never had a problem putting her to bed, that's one of the big advantages. At night, well, she has her story, she goes to bed, it's no problem. So it's cool, it gives us time for ourselves too [laughter].

*Dinner 1, video conf.*

**Sophie Obecanov** (int. mid. class): On n'a jamais eu de problème pour la mettre au lit, c'est un des gros avantages. Voilà, le soir, bon, elle a son histoire, elle va au lit, c'est sans difficulté. Donc c'est cool, ça nous laisse du temps pour nous aussi [rire]

*Dîner 1, video conf.*

The Obecanov parents explained why they were bothered by their daughter taking that much time to eat. It encroached upon their time to decompress once she had gone to bed. Here again, mealtime were considered by parents within a larger frame of individual’s global health, in this case their own wellbeing:

*Sophie and Viktor are lingering on at the table, at the end of the fifth dinnertime, while Elisa (6) has left the table and is getting ready for bed:*

**Sophie:** Well, you see, by that time [around 8.30 pm], we only want to settle down, or do something else, if we have something else to do, you know [...]. But it's true that there comes a time when you want to...So, we're also at a different pace with the... [COVID-19 health restrictions: Elisa has less extra-curricular activities, parents work from more often]

**Viktor:** ... then it's short. So, we're a bit of a mess at the moment, so you don't want to stay up too late. But you want to have two hours where [Elisa calls him from the bathroom] and you can't actually do... [...]. If I come home late, I need time to switch off.

**Fairley:** Okay

**Viktor:** And this disconnection, it can be the TV, it can be the computer, it can be a book, ... And you don't have time to disconnect, you know

**Fairley:** Well, if the meal lasts that long...

**Sophie:** Yeah, so...

**Viktor:** What's up Elisa?

**Fairley:** But you still try to stay until the end [of the meal, as Elisa often finishes eating last]?

**Viktor:** [to Elisa] I can't hear

*Elisa speaks to him from a distance [inaudible]*

**Viktor:** Well, brush your teeth

**Sophie:** Usually, one of them gets up and clears the table...

**Viktor:** ... but, that's what we'll do.

**Sophie:** But if it's really too long, one of them gets up and starts clearing away. Or, if I'm done, I'll get up, I'll go and hang out the washing, but because there are times when ... [she suggests she is tired of Elisa lingering at the table for so long].

*Dinner 5*

**Sophie:** Enfin, tu vois quand arrive cette heure-là [vers 20h30], nous, on a qu'une envie, c'est de se poser, ou faire autre chose, si on a autre chose à faire, tu vois, pouvoir, des fois préparer là [...] Mais c'est vrai qu'arrive une heure où toi, t'as envie de... Alors, on est aussi à un autre rythme avec le... [COVID-19 : Elisa a moins d'activité extra-scolaires, les parents télé-travaillent davantage]

**Viktor:** ... puis ça fait court. Alors, nous on est naze-là, en ce moment, donc faut pas se coucher trop tard. Mais t'as envie d'avoir deux heures où [Elisa l'appelle depuis la salle de bain] et en fait, tu peux pas faire... [...]. Si je rentre tard, il me faut du temps pour déconnecter

**Fairley:** D'accord

**Viktor:** Et cette déconnexion, ça peut être, ça peut-être la télé, ça peut être l'ordinateur, ça peut être un livre, ... et t'as pas le temps de déconnecter quoi

**Fairley:** Ben, si le repas dure si longtemps...

**Sophie:** Ouais, du coup...

**Viktor:** Qu'est-ce qui y'a Elisa?

**Fairley:** Mais vous essayez quand même de rester jusqu'à la fin [du repas, car Elisa finit souvent de manger en dernière]?

**Viktor:** [à Elisa] J'entends pas

*Elisa lui parle de loin [inaudible]*

**Viktor:** Ben, brosse toi les dents

**Sophie:** En général, y'en a un qui se lève, qui débarrasse...

**Viktor:** ... mais, c'est ce qu'on va faire

**Sophie:** Mais si vraiment elle a trop trainé, y'en a un des deux qui s'est levé, qui a commencé à débarrasser. Ou, je sais pas, je dis n'importe quoi, mais si moi j'ai finis, je vais me lever, je vais aller étendre le linge, mais parce que y'a des moments où euh... [elle fait mine d'être lassée qu'Elisa traîne aussi longtemps à table].

*Dîner 5*

Sophie and Viktor revealed how Elisa's bedtime schedule, which was in itself constructed around health concerns for Elisa, was intertwined with their attention to their own wellbeing. Parents needed time without Elisa to relax from their day, they needed time for their couple, but they also needed time for themselves, as individuals within the family (Singly 2000).

## **5.2. Differences in the social life rhythms between Lyon and Adelaide**

Some of the families from Lyon had significantly different social rhythms across their daytime than did some from Adelaide (*Table 12. Schedules of the families from Lyon* and *Table 13 Schedules of the families from Adelaide*). By social life rhythms, I mean all the activities that family members take part in over the week, outside the household (professional work, school, extracurricular activities, etc.). These differences resulted from variations in parents' work hours and the time children were dropped off and picked up from school and from childcare but also from the time children were taking care off by grandparents or domestic help:

Table 12. Schedules of the families from Lyon

Families from Lyon	Morning schedules	Evening schedules
<b>Bourdon</b> (up. class)	Marie-Cécile worked in the suburbs (45 minutes of driving). Benoit left for work (which was in the suburbs as well) at 7:15 AM, except when Marie-Cécile needed to leave for work at 7 AM (occasionally). Marie-Cécile dropped the children off at school most of the days	Marie-Cécile arrived home from work between 6 and 6:30 PM. Benoit Bourdon got home from work between 7 and 7:15 PM. The Bourdon children were picked up at childcare at 5:30 by the baby sitter
<b>Imbert</b> (up. class)	Magali began work at 9 AM, in the suburbs of Lyon. Magali dropped of their daughters at school. Stéphane left for work “early” (also in the suburbs of Lyon), when his daughters were having their breakfast.	Stéphane left work to get his daughters from school at 4:30 PM. Magali arrived home from work around 7 PM.
<b>Franquet</b> (up. mid.-class)	Lucas began work at 9 AM, in Lyon. <i>(unknown for Nathalie, but she mentioned leaving early)</i>	Lucas left work at 6 PM. Nathalie arrived home from her work (Lyon) between 6 and 7 PM.
<b>Comescu</b> (up. mid.-class)	<i>(Unknown)</i>	Diana ‘arrive[s] home late’, but in time to get dinner ready and eat at 6:30-6:45, at the latest. Hugo and Lea finished school at 4:45 and arrived home at 5, regularly alone. Laurent Comescu arrived home from work, in the outskirts of Lyon around 7PM. He was away 2 evenings per week
<b>Ferret</b> (up. mid.-class)	Jérôme was without work at the time of the fieldwork. He mentioned he dropped their daughter off at school <i>(Unknown for when Mélanie left for work)</i>	Céline usually arrived home at 6:30 PM and mentioned getting her daughter from school at time.
<b>Obecanov</b> (int. mid.-class)	Sophie had irregular work hours over the year: she rarely worked early in the morning but could have work appointment in the evening. She did not work on Wednesday to take care of Elisa. Viktor had irregular hours over the year: he could give classes at 8 AM and until 7 PM and at other periods, could leave later and come home in the middle of the afternoon. Elisa was picked up from school on most days at 5:30. Both parents mentioned picking her up.	
<b>Lebrun</b> (int. mid.-class)	Pierre worked ‘long hours’ when he did not have custody of his children (8-9h day, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday) and worked shorter days (6-7h, Monday, Tuesday) to get his children from school when they were staying with him. Pierre picked up his children at school on Mondays and Tuesdays. <i>(Unknown for Leätitia)</i>	
<b>Nimaga</b> (int. mid.-class)	Issa had custody of his children on weekends only (one out of two) when he did not work	
<b>Rizzo</b> (int. mid.-class)	Guillaume and Zoé leave their home at 8:15.	Guillaume had irregular work hours. His parents took care of Zoé if he was away with work. Guillaume picked up Zoé at school at 5:30. They usually arrived home at 6 PM.
<b>André</b> (low. mid.-class)	Angélique was unemployed, but mentioned still having busy day, taking care of domestic chores. Pascal worked from home and beginning around 8 AM.	Angélique picked them at school at 4:30 PM Pascal mentioned finishing work between 6 or 7.

In Lyon, the parents who got home first and picked up the children from school or childcare rarely arrived home before 5:30 or 6 PM and the latest the second parent would arrive would usually be 7:15.

The rhythms reported above represent parents and children's schedule before the first lockdown in France. During the first lockdown, when I interviewed most of the parents, they worked from home (except Stéphane Imbert and Issa Nimaga) and children were home schooled. At the time of the fieldwork, depending on the period and the family, some of the children had gone back to school and parents were still working partially from home.



Table 13 Schedules of the families from Adelaide

Family from Adelaide	Morning schedules	Evening schedules
<b>Bennet</b> (up. mid.class)	Vanessa went to work after dropping the children off at school. She benefited from flexible work hours arrangement. Craig usually arrived at work at 7 AM but benefited also from flexible work arrangement (he can drop of the children at school if needed but rarely does).	Craig got home around 3PM on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays. He left work at 5 PM on Wednesdays and Thursdays. The children were picked up by Craig at 3 PM on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays and around 5 PM on Thursdays. Vanessa usually left work at 4:45 and usually went to the gym after work. She picked up the children at school/childcare on Wednesdays and they arrived home around 6-6:30 PM.
<b>Brown</b> (up. mid.class)	Alison went to work after dropping the children off at school. She benefited from flexible work hours arrangement. Luke was a shift worker: he worked 10 hour days followed by two 14 hour nights and then 4 days off (8 day cycle), which meant his hours changed every week.	Alison leaves work "early" ( <i>hour unknown</i> ) three days a week, when she worked for the government, to pick children up from school. The other two days, Luke or Alison's mum picked the children up from school.
<b>Chapman</b> (int. mid.class)	Amy left for work at 7:15 AM, except on Friday when she did not work. Glen left home at 7:15 AM except on Monday, when he left at 8:30 AM to drop the children off at school.	Glenn got home most night at about 5:30-5:45. Amy got home a bit earlier, between 5 and 5:30. Amy got home at 5 PM on Monday with Isla and Jacob, then went out at 6:30 to get Hannah to Girl Guides. Amy's mother picked up Jacob and Hannah at school on Tuesday nights. Amy picked them up and put them straight to bed. Amy picked up Isla at childcare on Tuesday. On Wednesdays, Amy got home with Hannah at 6. Amy picks up all the children from school/childcare on Thursdays. Amy brought Hannah to her netball game at 6 on Friday nights.
<b>Davies</b> (low. mid.class)	Sally worked irregular hours for her own firm, regularly on evenings and weekends. Adam was a shift worker: he usually worked 4 days of morning shift (6:30-2:30PM), has one day off then worked the evening shift till 10:30 PM. They rarely had help from the grandparents during the week but Adam's mother regularly took care of the children during the weekend.	

The parents work hours described above did not always represent their actual hours spent working, as some of them mentioned working from home in the evenings (in Adelaide, Alison Brown, Vanessa Bennet: up. mid. class. and Amy Chapman: low mid class), which meant their professional and domestic work activities could be pretty intertwined:

**Vanessa:** I'll work from home tomorrow so that I can..., I log on in the morning while the kids are still in bed, I do things for maybe an hour and then I'll go and get the kids up, I'll get them breakfast, I will take Henry to school. Tomorrow Craig's mum is going to have Henry for a couple of hours. So I drop Henry off at school, I come home, I do a bit more work, go and pick Henry up from school. Some Tuesdays my mum has Cade.

### **5.3. Later and longer family dinners in Lyon than in Adelaide**

The families from Lyon that took part in this study began their dinner at the earliest at 6:30 and until 7:30 or even 8 PM. The Chapman family (int. mid. class) had their dinner the earliest (6:30-6:45), followed by the Bourdon family (7:15-7:30), the Imbert (up. class), Ferret (up. class), Obecanov and Lebrun families (int. mid. class, around 7:30) and, finally, the Franquet (up. mid. class), Nimaga (int. mid. class) and André (low. mid. class) families (7:30 or later).

The parents from this study had different approaches to their ideal mealtime hour they set for their household. The André (low. mid. class) planned to have dinner at 7:30 but Angélique adopted a rather 'spontaneous timestyle' (Jabs et al. 2007), demonstrating a feeling of lack of control over their daytime schedule:

**Angélique André:** Seven thirty would be a good Dîner time hour but, well, it does not always work like that

**Angélique André:** Dix-neuf heures trente ça serait bien [comme heure pour diner] mais bon, ça marche pas toujours comme ça

This differed, for instance, from Stéphane Imbert's (up. class) attitude towards time and its management, which can be characterised as rather 'reactive' (Jabs et al. 2007):

**Stéphane:** In fact, [dinnertime] will depend on the time Magali comes home. I take care of the girls. They do their homework, they play a bit. Roughly speaking, I finish the bath, well the bath, the shower at 6:30, 6:45PM. From then on, either Magali has arrived, she's already at the stove preparing food, or I'm the one who'll go and prepare the food.

**Fairley:** Okay. So that it's ready at 7pm?

**Stéphane:** The idea is to make the girls eat not after 7.30 pm. That means that, once it's finished, Magali phones to say when she'll be back or not, depending on the time, I'll try, we'll manage so that we can eat around 7:30PM maximum.

**Stéphane :** En fait, [l'heure du dîner] va dépendre de l'heure à laquelle rentre Magali. Euh, moi je m'occupe des filles, on leur... Elles font leur devoir, elles jouent un p'tit peu. Grosso modo, je finis le bain, enfin le bain, la douche sur les coups de 18h30, 18h45. A partir de là, soit Magali est arrivée, c'est elle qui est déjà au fourneau en train de préparer à manger, soit c'est moi qui vais y aller, qui vais préparer à manger.

**Fairley** : D'accord. Pour que ce soit prêt à 19h?

**Stéphane** : L'idée c'est de faire manger les filles pas après 19h30. Ce qui veut dire que, une fois que c'est terminé, Magali elle téléphone en fait pour dire quand est-ce qu'elle rentre ou pas, en fonction, je vais essayer, on va se débrouiller pour qu'on puisse manger vers 19h30, maximum.

The mealtimes in Lyon seemed to last for longer than did those from the families from Adelaide. In Lyon, only Guillaume Rizzo (int. mid. class) reported having their dinnertimes under thirty minutes and this was possibly due to the fact they were a single headed family with an only child. Otherwise, most families reported taking between thirty minutes and one hour to eat together. In most of the upper class households (Imbert, Bourdon, Comescu), the upper middle class household (Franquet) and the lower middle class household of Lyon (André) this duration was confirmed during the visits. For the intermediary households, the dinnertimes usually lasted for longer than announced, especially for the Obecanov, Lebrun and Rizzo households (int. mid. class), which was probably due to my presence and the great importance for these households to have a nice and relaxed moment at the mealtime.

The families from Adelaide had their week mealtimes significantly earlier than the families from Lyon. In Adelaide, parents reported having dinner between 5 and 6:30PM. The Chapman (int. mid. class) and the Davies (low. mid. class) aimed to have dinner between 5:30 and 6 PM, or even 5 PM for the Chapman family. The latest mealtime hour reported by parents from Adelaide corresponded to the earliest mealtime hour in Lyon. The Bennet and the Brown families from Adelaide (both up. mid. class) strived to have their dinnertime during the week between 6 and 6:30 PM.

The parents from Adelaide reported shorter dinnertimes than did the parents in Lyon. They described eating together between ten to thirty minutes. Otherwise, they generally tried to keep the dinnertime under half an hour, as the parents wanted to move on to the next domestic activity (bathing children, getting them to do their homework, getting them to bed). However, Glen Chapman (int. mid. class) reported taking approximately forty-five minutes to have dinner:

**Glen**: By the time they've eaten, and then there's usually, they'll want something else, and so we'll, you know, we'll cut the fruit up or get their sort of second little serving, um, down, and then once we're done, it'll, we sort of, everyone gets up and goes and has a bath.

For his wife, Amy, their dinnertimes took between twenty to thirty minutes only: "Yeah, probably, but that includes eating dinner, having maybe a 5-minute break, and then having the next thing, so whether that's the fruit or the yogurt or something like that, so that's that whole process involved." At the Davies (low.mid class), observation materials (self-produced videos) showed the children having their dinner for longer than thirty minutes (two video showed an hour dinnertimes) and this happened while they were watching TV shows. However, Sally Davies reported they usually tried to keep their dinnertimes under half an hour.

Earlier studies have already noted the social differentiation in the mealtime rhythms of children. Gojard has observed that variations in the mealtime schedules of infants under three years old and revealed how these schedules depend on the household's social conditions as well as on contrasted definitions of childhood (Gojard 2001). Children of working class households ate predominantly according to irregular schedules, which was connected to irregular work hours of parents or the absence of professional constraints. Children of middle classes ate at fixed hours during the week, and according to more flexible schedules during the weekend, which was associated with parents' constraints in terms of professional work and children's childcare schedules. Children from working class background were not required to follow adults' social rhythms until later on in their life, whereas children from upper class were expected to internalise the mealtime rhythms of adults earlier on, from 2 year old (guided by a concern for children's precocity).

The bedtime hour was connected to the mealtime in different ways. It was not only a question of having enough time to have dinner and for the domestic activities before bedtime. In Adelaide, Alison Brown (up. mid. class) and Amy Chapman (int. mid. class) were concerned that their children's snacking habits will prevent them for eating their dinner:

**Alison:** And we want to feed them as early as possible because otherwise they go and eat everything after school and then they won't eat their dinner, so that's probably the biggest issue.

**Amy:** We get home and within 20 minutes the kids need to eat ... or Isla's losing it, Jacob is trying to get into the pantry and eat every snack there is, so we've got like a 20-minute, half an hour at absolute max, bracket where that meal has to be done ...

Amy Chapman was also concerned with the amount of food her children ate during the mealtime so that they would sleep well:

**Amy:** And so yeah, it is very guided, and I need to know that they're going to eat, because if they don't, by the time bedtime comes around, they're back in the pantry ... looking for snacks, so it is, it might not always be the healthiest choice ... but it is something that I know will fill their stomachs ... um, so then they have a good night's sleep.

Amy, like Vanessa Bennet (up. mid. class), also wanted to restrict her children to eat within the frame of the mealtime, which meant having the meal early enough but also getting children to eat (filling) food so that they would not want to eat more in the evening, which would delay the actual bedtime:

**Vanessa:** We normally start to get them ready for bed at 8 o'clock at night. Craig puts Henry to bed and I put Charlie to bed. Henry will sometimes, you know, 10 or 15 minutes, depending what day of the week it is, how busy he's been, will fall asleep quite easily. Henry will be: "I'm still hungry, I need something else to eat". And then will be like: "can I help you make lunches?" [for the next day]. He feels that anything that he could do to stall having to go to bed. So that's why we start at like 8/8:15... because by the time he gets to bed it's, you know, 8:45 and then you'll be like we're taking you to bed in half an hour and you haven't even cleaned your teeth yet, so...

**Fairley:** Would you have dessert as well [during the mealtime]?

**Craig:** Uh, no, no.

**Fairley:** No?

**Craig:** No, so not too often. Every now and then we might have some ice cream, but yeah, very few and far between with deserts. So yeah. Generally the kids are raiding the lolly, lolly jar after dinner. [laughter].

**Fairley:** Okay. Would they eat something after dinner?

**Craig:** Gen-, generally Henry likes to eat just before he goes to bed. Like we tell him: "it's bed time, time to go bed", and he's like: "but I'm hungry still". So then he'll probably have his, Vegemite and sprinkles on toast, on bread... .. is generally his favourite, or he might eat, um, a yoghurt or have some custard.

**Fairley:** Okay. And would you, would the rest of the family also have something to eat?

**Craig:** Vanessa won't. She's generally pretty good, unless she's having her cup of tea with her normal biscuit. And I might just snack on some chocolate or open some nuts and chips that I get in trouble for, but that's okay.

When Craig said about his wife 'she's generally pretty good', he was implying that him and his children's post mealtime evening eating habits were unhealthy ones, contrary to the kind of food they have at dinner. At the Bennet household in Adelaide, it seemed Vanessa was more concerned than Craig was about the appropriate bedtime hour, and about eating within the mealtime setting.

The discourses from these three mothers from Adelaide revealed they preferred their children to eat during rather than outside of mealtime, probably because it was more difficult to control the type of food children wanted to have a snack, but what is revealed is also the difficulty to control this extra-commensal eating. The parents from Lyon rarely talked about children's afternoon or post mealtime snack in relation to mealtime, and this therefore did not seem to be an extra variable that they had to take into account when scheduling and preparing family meals.

#### **5.4. *Priority of children's extracurricular activities over mealtimes***

In some families, mealtimes were more easily adjusted to the other scenes of family life, or to family members' separate activities, including work and organised leisure activities. At the Brown household (up. mid. class) from Adelaide, the children's weekly swimming activities on Tuesday implied the evening food work and other family routines needed to be rushed, if they wanted to respect their mealtime hour:

**Alison:** Now that Ivy and Liam do swimming on a Tuesday night, for example, so we don't get home from swimming until 4:00, then they have to have showers, and you know, get their PJs, and get ready. And then like by then doing that, we go and cook, so it is a little bit hectic in that respect where you try to get things done.

Hannah Chapman (int. mid. class) was engaged in multiple activities (Hannah had netball<sup>85</sup> every Wednesdays and Fridays, as well as ballet on Saturday mornings, and girl Guides on Mondays), which affected the way mealtimes were experienced:

**Amy Chapman:** So Friday nights, so I always do dinner early. So we'll eat dinner at 5:00 because Hannah's gotta go off by 6:00 to her netball games. So again it's revolved around her and her schedule.

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<sup>85</sup> A popular game in the Commonwealth countries, which is derived from basketball.

**Amy Chapman:** Dinner prep was pretty easy and not stressful as I didn't go to work today (don't work Fridays) and we didn't have to rush out for Hannah's netball due to it being canceled because of covid.  
*Food diary, Friday*

**Glen Chapman:** Thursday night was a bit of a rush as Hannah was performing in a ballet concert. Amy was home first and made some chicken and salad wraps for all of us. Kids ate at the counter, I ate standing with them and Amy ate as she was getting ready to take Hannah.  
*Food diary, Thursday*

**Amy Chapman:** So sorry for the late diary entries - life has been so crazy. Friday night for dinner we had a quick dinner as Hannah had to go out for a movie night. I was home from work as I don't work Fridays so it wasn't rushed or stressful. I just choose a simple dinner as the weather was hot and I didn't want to heat the house up anymore than it was. We had sausages, plain pasta and steamed broccoli. The kids ate at the counter. No TV or iPads as I needed Hannah to focus on eating quickly to get organised and out the house for her movie night. Jacob was not impressed with dinner and refused to eat it. Isla was in the high chair and not a huge fan either. I had a big lunch so didn't eat dinner and Glen ate when he got home from work. Glen ate his dinner at the table with Isla next to him while I took Hannah out. Definitely wasn't a family meal together 😊  
*Food diary, next Friday*

Children's extracurricular activities affected family meals in several manners: it led parents to be even more rushed than usual in their evening domestic activities, including the food work. The mealtime hour could be advanced (implying additional stress for the food preparation) or pushed back (which meant jeopardising the bedtime). The centrality of extracurricular activities in the Adelaideans households also led family members to eat separately, which, as Amy wrote, was a source of additional guilt and feeling of failure.

### **5.5. Homework and bathing temporalities were inverted between Lyon and Adelaide**

In all the families from Lyon, the routine would be to have children showered or bathed and into their pyjamas before the mealtime, so that the only imperative left to do before the bedtime would be for them to wash their hands and face and brush their teeth. Only once was this not the case, at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class), when one child did not bath before the mealtime, which was lightly reprimanded by Pierre, the father. In Lyon, most parents tried to get children to do most of their homework on the weekends:

**Fairley:** Is it bedtime now?

**Irina Comescu (up. class):** Yes

**Fairley:** It's late, even?

**Irina:** It's 8.10, that's the time. We thought we wouldn't be able to do it, with Hugo having to do a lot of homework, but we're getting ahead of ourselves on the weekend and Laurent, sometimes, even between noon and two

*Dinner 4*

**Fairley:** C'est l'heure du dodo là?

**Irina (up. class):** Oui

**Fairley:** C'est tard même ?

**Irina:** C'est 8h10, c'est l'heure. on pensait qu'on allait pas pouvoir le faire, avec Hugo qui a quand même pas mal de devoir, mais on s'avance bien le weekend et Laurent, des fois, même entre midi et deux  
*Dîner 4*

In Adelaide, these activities happened after the dinnertime. This meant that, in Lyon, parents were usually making dinner while supervising their children having a bath or showering, which added extra complication to the food work process but also provided them with extra time to get dinner ready. For the third dinner at the Bourdon household (up. class), on a Wednesday, Marie-Cécile was preparing the mealtime. She worked at home the morning and took care of domestic paperwork in the afternoon. The children spent every Wednesday at day camp until 5PM when Marie-Cécile fetched them:

**Marie-Cécile:** It's good, it gives me a good day to do a lot of things, but when I have to do homework, Pokemons, baths, shopping... uh, pffff [sigh = exhausting], it's a bit... [exhausting].

**Marie-Cécile:** C'est bien, ça me fait une bonne journée pour faire plein de trucs, mais quand il faut faire les devoirs, les Pokemons, les bains, les courses... euh, pffff [souffle = épuisant], c'est un peu... [fatigant].

For the five other days of the week, at the Bourdon household, a baby-sitter took care of these care activities, which considerably alleviated the parents' evening load. For the third dinner at the Bourdon household, Marie-Cécile was preparing from scratch a cauliflower gratin, as often on Wednesday, with the help of a cooking robot for the béchamel sauce. Benoit was not home yet. In the meantime, Marie-Cécile was also supervising the children who were taking their bath. She explained that, as her children were now older, they usually did not require too much supervision during their bathing. Nevertheless, she still went back and forth from the kitchen to the bathroom while preparing the meal:

**Marie-Cécile:** Hey, we're not hanging around here. Talk nicely please. Do you want me to set the temperature? Don't stick your hands in the door!

**Lucie:** I know how to do it!

**Marie-Cécile:** And speed up, we don't dawdle in the shower, because we're going to eat shortly.

*Marie-Cécile is back in the kitchen, and is preparing the semolina in the kitchen*

**Lucie:** Okay

*She goes back to the bathroom a few minutes later*

**Marie-Cécile:** Hey, let's wash up! No, we're not playing, we don't have time. Let's wash our hair. Let's wash up, both of us, now

*Lucie repeats what her mother tells them. Marie-Cécile comes back into the kitchen and takes out the cutlery for the meal.*

**Marie-Cécile:** So who sets the table? It's me. Because it's not them, they're still in the shower [reproachfull tone].

*Dinner 3*

**Marie-Cécile:** Eh eh, on traîne pas là. On parle gentiment s'il vous plaît. Est-ce que vous voulez que je règle la température? tu me coinces pas les mains dans la porte!

**Lucie:** Je sais le faire!

**Marie-Cécile:** Et on active hein, on ne traîne pas dans la douche, parce qu'on va passer à table dans pas longtemps.

*Marie-Cécile est revenue dans la cuisine, et est en train de préparer la semoule dans la cuisine*

**Lucie:** d'accord

*Elle retourne dans la salle de bain quelques minutes plus tard*

**Marie-Cécile:** Eh, on se lave! non, on joue pas là, on a pas le temps. On se lave les cheveux. On se lave, tous les deux, maintenant.

*Lucie répète ce que sa mère leur dit. Marie-Cécile revient dans la cuisine et elle sort les couverts pour le repas.*

**Marie-Cécile:** Parce que qui est-ce qui mets le couvert? C'est moi. Parce que du coup c'est pas eux, ils sont toujours à la douche [reproche]

*Dîner 3*

Marie-Cécile already knew what she was going to prepare (cauliflower gratin was a regular dish for Wednesday dinners) and she benefited from the help of a cooking robot but despite these facilitating elements, I felt she was a bit stressed, which was accentuated by my presence which slowed her down.

In Adelaide, children usually had their shower or bath after the mealtime, except on exceptional evenings, when the children came back from the swimming pool (Brown, up. mid. class). This meant that parents could feel even more rushed during the dinnertime, because there were still many activities to be done before getting the children to bed:

**Sally Davies** (low. mid. class): So after dinner, it's straight time for a shower or a bath. If it's a shower, one will go in at a time. While one's in I'll get the pyjamas ready. Then I'll swap over. While that next one's in I'll be dressing the first one, and then whilst ... then get the next one out, the next one gets in, the other one's brushing their teeth. Bit of a cycle like that.

And then yeah, usually try to go Lily first, for her sight words and homework and things. Or, depending on the night, if we're not doing that, I might get them all in her room to read a book, and I'll just read three books and that's one, technically for each. Their playtime is pre-dinner. And then yeah, it's dinner, bath, dressed, teeth, bed.

At the Chapman household (int. mid. class) as well, children were bathed after the dinnertime:

**Amy Chapman:** I like the dinner to be cleaned while the kids are in the bath so that job's getting done. At the same time as that job is getting done, and then the dishwasher can go on, and then the kids get dressed and we can all just sit down. There's no more job to be done. It's now our rest time. The kids will have a show. They'll go to bed, and it means that we are not in the kitchen once they're in bed, trying to clang and bang and all sorts of stuff, that job's done.

Amy also acknowledged that this was an ideal and that, in fact, other family activities came in the way – such as picking up a child from an extracurricular activity, for example – but her comments showed how she did not unwind from her day until children were bathed, after the mealtime. Glen Chapman's description of the post bathing time activity was similar:

**Glen:** [We have dinner at] about 5:00, yeah, 5:00, between 5:30 and 6:00. It wouldn't be any much later than 6:00, because it just pushes everything else back then, because we've got to bath them and homework and get them to bed and all.

**Glen:** [After dinnertime, bathing, getting into pyjamas] we'll go into the lounge room and we're probably in there, depending on the time, for an hour altogether [...]. Yeah, it's usually just sort of sitting back. By that time, Isla's cracking it, so we're sort of playing with her a little bit, but if it's earlyish, we'll have a bit of a play around and a bit of, you know, throw some balls around and that sort of stuff, or it could, if the kids really need that wind-down time, it'll be: "All right, let's sit down. You can have, you know, you can have one or two shows, and then we're going to brush our teeth and go to bed" [...]. But I mean, we want the kids in bed and asleep [laughter] by 8:00, so that's why we sort of have [dinner] a bit early [around 5-5:30] so we can start the whole, let's get them in bed.



In Lyon, the children had to go to bed very shortly after dinner. They usually only had the time to wash their face, brush their teeth and for the eldest ones, read a little bit. The proximity of the mealtime and bedtime led parents to use the bedtime as a blackmailing tool to get children to eat their food or children to slow down their eating rhythm or ask for more food to delay having to go to bed.

## **6. Conclusion**

Among these two groups of households, some of them bore many similarities. In terms of income the Bourdon and the Imbert (both up. class) had very comfortable financial situations, which, as both Marie-Cécile and Magali mentioned, facilitated their domestic life (being able to hire a cleaner and a baby sitter, for instance) and enable them to have various their leisure activities (being able to travel in France and abroad, enrolling children in various activities, for example). As they did not have any financial difficulties, the later spent of lot of money on food, buying expensive, quality products. Their homes were also both well equipped in terms of kitchen appliances and other electronic devices and were comfortable in terms of space and furniture. This was the case with most of the participating households, except the Rizzo (int. mid. class) and the André (low. mid. class): Guillaume Rizzo mentioned he needed to change his kitchen appliances as they were not functioning very well any more and the André mentioned their home was a bit small. At the Comescu household (up. class), the Obecanov and the Nimaga, the cultural origins of one of the parents significantly influenced the conjugal and family life dynamics. Several parents, from Lyon and from Adelaide had two jobs to bring in more money. This was the case for Ana Nimaga, Guillaume Rizzo and Sally Davies (low. mid. class). In Adelaide, the Bennet, Brown (both up. mid. class) and Chapman (int. mid. class) families had many organised leisure activities planned for the children and for themselves, which greatly affected their family life schedule. Adam Davies (low. mid. class) and Luke Brown were both shift workers. Several mothers from Lyon had reduced their work hours or compressed them over fewer days (Céline Ferret, Nathalie Franquet, Marie-Cécile Bourdon) in order to meet childrearing needs and balance out the workloads of professional and family life. A couple of mothers explicitly mentioned having shifted careers to be able to take care of their children (Marie-Cécile Bourdon and Laëtitia Ferret). In Adelaide, the grandparents were more involved, weekly, in the children rearing than for the families from Lyon.

Some households were also singled out by particular characteristics and living situations. The Franquet (up. mid. class) family had a boy with Crohn's disease and this constituted a major challenge for the whole household. Angélique and Pascal André both experienced professional difficulties and interrupted careers. The Davies had twins, which, combined with their parents highly busy and difficult (for Adam) jobs, led them to be quite exhausted. The Chapmans were the only household with a one-

year-old child (Isla) which meant the parents had to deal with contrasting rhythms and needs between Isla and the two eldest children. Marco (10) and Jules (12) Franquet (up. mid. class) were the only children from the two groups in middle school and they were actually in their (pre-)teenage period of life. The Lebruns (int. mid. class) were the only family from Lyon who lived in a suburban house, and they had a garden and a pool. Guillaume Rizzo (int. mid. class) from Lyon was the only single father, with the challenges inherent to this situation, although his life had some similarities with the other reconstituted families in the study.

These portraits of the different participating households provide a frame for the lecture of their varying family food and commensal practices as well as experiences. The results described in the following chapters enabled us, in return, to develop and complement these portraits, as family food practices also shape family life.

# Chapter 4. The unequal circumstances behind family mealtimes: pressure and pleasure in the kitchen

## 7. Introduction

In this chapter, I investigate the contrasting modalities according to which the mothers and fathers of this research engaged in the activities to get family meals ready on time, from the food preparation, to its organisation and mental load. I look at how these different engagements in domestic food work affected family relationships as well as the family members' state of mind and experience of mealtimes. Contrasted types of experiences and responsibilities of fathers and mothers in the process of feeding the family were indeed observed within the participating households, from a high involvement to a nearly complete disengagement and a seemingly equal share of the food work:

**Jérôme Ferret** [father, upper class, Lyon]: It's often that Melanie comes home late, so we sit down for dinner straightaway. But 99%, Melanie prepares. And it's true that sometimes, Melanie says: 'I'm alone [cooking in a separate room], and if I'm not doing something with Noémie [7 years old] like homework, I come into the kitchen, we talk, I help her prepare stuff. And after, concerning the preparation, she is exhausted, she says: 'Here, there is this to heat up, you take care of it', there. So I take care of it, it doesn't bother me to help her, executing. Or else, if it's doing the cooking, she tells me 'reheat this', 'do this', 'do that'. 'Yeah, okay', but don't ask me to do the recipe! Melanie, she likes to cook and she likes to eat. I like to eat, I don't like to cook. To each their own.

**Jérôme Ferret** [father, upper class, Lyon]: C'est souvent que, Céline, elle rentre tard [habituellement autour de 18h30] donc quand elle arrive, on passe à table aussitôt. Mais à 99%, c'est Céline qui fait, qui prépare. Et c'est vrai que, des fois, Céline elle dit : ' je suis toute seule ', [à cuisiner, dans une pièce séparée]. Et si j'suis pas en train d'faire un autre truc avec Ombeline [7 ans] comme les devoirs, je viens dans la cuisine, on discute, je l'aide à préparer des trucs. Puis après, sur la préparation, elle est crevée, elle dit : ' Tiens, y'a ça à faire réchauffer, tu t'en occupes ', voilà. Donc je m'en occupe, ça me dérange pas trop, de l'aider dans l'exécution. Ou alors, si c'est faire de la cuisine, elle me dit ' tu fais chauffer ça ', ' tu fais ci ', ' tu fais ça '. ' Ok, d'accord ', mais me demande pas de faire la recette ! Céline, elle aime cuisiner et elle aime manger. Moi, j'aime manger, j'aime pas cuisiner. Chacun son truc.

**Benoit Bourdon** [father, upper class, Lyon]: There are time when I spend my day in the kitchen. I mean, the weekends when I spend my day in the kitchen. Even I want to go outside.... For Marie-Cécile, it's so much a done deal that she does not care about the meal, inevitably. And not because she does not want to, but because she knows that I take care of it, so that's it. And so sometimes, there are occasions when it's a burden, when I realise that, if I don't do it, it won't get done. But, you know... No, no, I think we have found a good balance. And there is also the fact that, if we don't do it, we are stuck with pre-prepared meals, we don't really know what is in them...

**Marie-Cécile** [mother]: Yeah, and you also have a blast in the kitchen !

**Benoit**: And, yeah... We like fresh vegetables, you know, things like that. And I think that I got this from my mother, who also did that. And it's also a thing that we want to transmit, the fact 'Lucie, what do you want to eat?': 'Green beans', it's really a victory!

*Dinner 2*

**Benoit Bourdon** [père, classe supérieure, Lyon]: Y'a des moments où je passe ma vie en cuisine. Enfin les weekends où je passe ma vie en cuisine, même moi j'ai envie de mettre le nez dehors... Pour Marie-Cécile, c'est tellement plié qu'elle se soucie pas du repas, forcément. Et pas parce qu'elle a pas envie mais juste parce qu'elle sait que je m'en occupe, donc basta. Et donc du coup, y'a des moments ça peut me peser, quand y'a des moments où je me dis, si moi je le fais pas, ça va pas le faire. Mais bon... Non, non, je pense que on s'est trouvé un équilibre qui est bien. Et puis y'a le fait aussi que, si on fait pas ça, on est coincés avec des plats préparés, on sait pas trop ce qui a dedans...

**Marie-Cécile Bourdon**: Ouais, et puis là, tu t'éclates vraiment dans la cuisine!

**Benoit**: Et puis, ouais... on aime bien les légumes frais, voilà, les trucs comme ça... et je pense que moi, j'ai chopé ça du fait que ma mère le faisait... et c'est aussi un truc qu'on veut transmettre, le fait que : 'Lucie, qu'est-ce tu veux manger?' "Des haricots verts" C'est une victoire quoi!

*Dîner 2*

**Vanessa Bennet** [mother, upper middle class, Adelaide] [Preparing vegetables in advance, on the weekend] is easier with working. Like, so for example, tonight I only logged off literally five minute ago, I was working at six o'clock still and Craig's like, the chicken was defrosted in the fridge and he's like, 'what's tonight's dinner?' And I'm like: 'chicken curry'. So he knows that the vegetables are already cut up in the fridge and he just empties them into the steamer. Because normally I would be at the gym, he got home from work, he went for a bike ride, the kids just got dropped off or he picks the kids up and then it's: walk in the door, chuck the veggies and chuck the chicken and cook it and within 15 minutes dinner's done [...]. And we kind of tag team. So if I'm going to the city and I go: right, my gym class is at this time, I know that everything's already prepared and Craig can put the vegetables in a saucepan, cook whatever the meat is and when I walk in the door sometimes the kids have already had dinner with him, other times we're about to sit down and eat dinner.

**Craig Bennet** [father, upper middle class, Adelaide]: [Preparing meals in the evening] is very easy. Because we've got all the veggies cut up, ready to go. It's just: grab them from the fridge, throw it into the saucepan. Or if we're doing salad, the salad is already made, all cut up, ready to go. And then just cooking whatever meat we're having, pretty much [...]. I just do my fair share in those sorts of chores and stuff [...]. I guess it's just one thing that we need to do [meal planning and pre-preparing some vegetables in advance] because, just, of our busy life. Like sometimes we don't finish until five o'clock at night, we're not getting home until quarter past six, half past six. So if we were to come home and then have to prepare all our meals, it could be 8-8:30 before actually eating dinner, whereas now we know that our meal's prepared when we get home, come in, half hour later we're eating dinner.

Jérôme Ferret (up. class) conveyed Céline and him were inscribed in rather traditional roles in terms of producing family meals: she took care of finding out the menus and cooking, while Jérôme occasionally helped, without bearing the mental load of the food work. Céline's efforts enabled them to sit down together for dinnertimes quickly after they came home. The conversation of the Bourdon couple (up. class) revealed they had inverted – yet also reproducing – traditional gender relationships: Benoit took care of most of the food work and it was especially he who was in charge of finding out and creating healthy menus and he provided family meals because he enjoyed cooking. Benoit's efforts in the kitchen also paid off at the table as they resulted in the children's enjoyment of healthy food. The Bennet's discourse suggests a rather balanced share of the evening work to get meals ready and have dinner on time also resulting in them being able to eat together shortly after they got into the door.

The activity of feeding the family has been studied extensively (Middleton et al. 2022; Mehta et al. 2019; Fielding-Singh 2017a; Wright, Maher, and Tanner 2015; B. Beagan et al. 2008a; DeVault 1991), whether scholars name it work, care, leisure or a combination of all of these. This topic far exceeds the restricted frame of a manuscript chapter. We do lack, however, recent research on the planning and the making of family meals from a rather holistic perspective. This chapter focuses on the planning and the cooking in relation to everyday domestic commensality, looking at the way the family meal planning and preparation affected mealtimes and the family members' experience of them. The focus was both on fathers and mothers (as well as children if they were involved) and the meal planning and preparation was investigated over several days or weeks. The food shopping was left out, in order to restrict the focus to the homes, although food work extended to the food shopping, and constitute a significant dimension of the activity.

The previous chapter described the various competing imperatives parents had to deal with in their daily family life. Many of these related to health and wellbeing aspects of the family members. In this chapter, I move on to the production of family meals (that is the food work dimension), focusing in particular how parents organise themselves to provide healthy meals and how this experience varied between the mothers and the fathers of this study. I focus, in particular, on how traditional gendered roles in terms of feeding the family were reinvented through more complex forms – which made them all the more difficult to recognise – and the experiences and roles of the mothers and fathers of this study remained unbalanced in terms of responsibility, stress, family care and pleasure.

In Canada, for example, sociologists Brenda Beagan and her colleagues (2008a) have shown how, despite unequal share of the food work between mothers and fathers among various social and cultural groups, with mothers continuing to do the lion's share of it, family members perceived this division of labor as fair and mothers justified their greater engagement by rationales that they presented as detached from gender constructions. The authors observed:

'For decades, scholarship in the area of domestic labour has assumed gender inequities will diminish over time, yet this does not appear to be happening. Rather, traditional gender roles seem to reinvent themselves in new guises. While it is no longer acceptable in many sociocultural groups to assume domestic work is inherently women's work, the same gender expectations persist in more complex forms, couched in terms of individual choices, standards, and preferences' (2008a, 668).

First, I describe the way parents organized themselves between each other and over the weeks to provide proper meals to the best of their abilities and have dinner at appropriate times. This food work organisation depended on the various representations of parents of healthy meals but were also based on varying representations and management of domestic time. Then, I detail the rationales that guide some the organisation of food work which enable us afterwards to analyse the parents different experience of providing family meals and the logics that underlid them.

## 8. The rationales for providing family meals

All the parents of this study beard in mind various health imperatives for producing family meals. On top of eating at the appropriate hour as described in Chapter 3, they strived to prepare family meals that were healthy, varied over the days of the week that all and especially the children would accept to eat. Additionally, parents were preoccupied with serving food that everybody would enjoy eating. The external constraints the parents had to deal with, as described in the previous chapter, as well as the highly demanding aspect of producing family meals increased parents' feeling of time scarcity and stress.

### 8.1. Time scarcity and stress

The most common reason reported by parents who undertook anticipation strategies was lack of time in the evening to shop, prepare food and serve dinner at an appropriate hour. This time stress parents were under resulted from competing imperatives: parents' professional work, parents and children's individual leisure activities, children's homework, getting the meal ready in time to eat at an appropriate hour, children's hygiene routines and as well as getting them in bed at an appropriate hour (Chapter 2):

**Nathalie Franquet** (up. mid. class): Before doing this meal plans, it was a mess [laughter]! Well, especially because every evening it was stressful, thinking: "I need to cook for everyone" ... No, not stress but if you are... Yeah, no, for me, it was less agreeable, you know. We always had to think, in the evening. I mean, after work, I don't want to have to trouble myself, and think about what I had to cook, and then I was obliged to do so [...]. We realised it made us save a lot of time, afterwards, in our quotidian. The constraints for us are time related. That is to say, we look at what time we come back in the evening, if we have time to cook or not [...]. Because at 7PM, when we get back, well the children are hungry... We don't necessarily have the time to do groceries and cook [...]. The idea was really to save some time. That is not to say that we eat badly, etc. The point is to do a minimum in the kitchen to avoid wasting time.

**Nathalie** (up. mid. class) : Avant ces menus, c'était plus le bazar [rire] ! Non c'est surtout que tous les soirs c'était stressant de se dire 'faut faire à manger pour tout l'monde'.... Non pas l'stress mais si t'es... ouais non pour moi c'était moins agréable quoi. Fallait toujours réfléchir le soir 'fin à la sortie du boulot j'ai pas envie de prendre la tête et de réfléchir à c'que j'dois faire à manger et là j'étais obligée de le faire [...]. On s'est rendu compte que ça nous faisait gagner beaucoup de temps après au quotidien. Les contraintes pour nous c'est l'temps. C'est à dire qu'on regarde à quelle heure on rentre le soir, si on a le temps de cuisiner ou pas [...]. Parce qu'à 19h quand on rentre, bah les enfants ils ont faim... On a pas forcément le temps d'aller faire les courses plus faire à manger [...]. L'idée c'est vraiment de gagner du temps, c'est pas pour autant qu'on mange mal et tout ça. Le but c'est de faire un minimum en cuisine pour essayer d'éviter de perdre du temps.

Meal planning enabled Vanessa Bennet (int. mid. class) from Adelaide to get more work done and go to the gym: 'I think if I didn't do all that on a Sunday, I wouldn't be able to finish work and go to the gym and do my exercise and Craig wouldn't be able to do his exercise'. Craig also benefits from Vanessa's anticipation strategies:

**Craig Bennet** (up. mid. class): Just, obviously it makes it easier for us as we have a pretty busy, busy schedule with work and the kids, it just makes it easier.

Natahlie Franquet (up. mid. class), Craig Bennet and Luke Brown (up. mid. class) also mentioned meal planning implies having more time for children in the evenings:

**Nathalie:** It's very straightforward when we get home in the evening, we can dedicate our time to the children in the evening.

**Nathalie :** Y'a pas de questions à s'poser quand on rentre le soir on peut se consacrer aux enfants quand on rentre le soir.

**Craig:** It just frees up our time to, um, do stuff with the kids after we've had dinner and whatnot.

**Luke:** Depending on what happening, what I'm doing for work. If I get the chance during the day, I might try and pre-prepare something to get it to the point where we just have to reheat it or just have to cook it at night, just to save on time when everybody's home from school and we're trying to get the kids to do their homework and have baths and get changed and get ready. Whereas other times we'll get home, by the time we finish with the kids' sport or something after school, we'll get home late and then have to, have to start from scratch then. If that's the case, if you know you're going to be starting late, we'll probably tend to get something that's a bit easier than other times.

These discourses give the impression that meal planning made the work of providing family meals easier for both parents, allowing them to be able to coordinate the different professional and domestic imperatives. Yet, looking at the bigger picture over the week, it had its perverse effects in terms of gender equality in the share of food work. Most of the mothers from this research were the ones bearing the mental load of food work, which became encapsulated into the meal planning and was displaced over the weekends.

## **8.2. The healthy meal imperative**

All parents were concerned about having healthy meals on a regular basis, and most of them shared similar notions about what this meant: serving enough vegetables, not too much carbohydrates (especially in the upper class families), not too much red meat nor meat in general (for the upper class families in Lyon), avoiding deserts and drinks that were heavily sweetened. They aimed as well at not eating too much of a single ingredient within the frame of a day, a week and even over several weeks (for the upper class households). Finally, the parents paid attention to the quantities eaten, focusing on providing enough food, all while being careful that family members did not eat too much. Overall, the parents and especially the mothers of this study had in mind the meal balance (in terms of ingredients and quantity) and the variety over several meals. Nathalie Franquet (up. mid. class), Bianca Armand (*unknown social class*) from Lyon, Vanessa Bennet (up. mid. class) and the Brown (up. mid. class) families from Adelaide talked about the multiple dimensions they factored in their decision process for providing healthy meals. Bianca had in mind the variety of menus throughout the week,

but she also provided meals to possibly compensate for children not eating enough or sufficiently varied at the school canteen (because of disliking certain dishes served):

**Bianca:** [I try to] look out for balance over the week [...]. And also if the children do not eat as well at the school canteen.

**Bianca :** [Je chercher à] veiller un p'tit peu à l'équilibre sur la semaine. [...]. Et puis aussi si jamais les enfants ils mangent moins bien à la cantine et tout ça.

For Nathalie Franquet (up. mid. class) the important was not only finding a meal that was varied in itself, one meal at a time, but also throughout and over the weeks:

**Nathalie:** We do regularly recycle the recipes, that is to say, we look at some of them of the past weeks, we keep them to get new ideas for the next times. In fact, we try not to do the same twice.

**Nathalie :** Les recettes reviennent quand même régulièrement, c'est à dire que on regarde quelques-unes ces dernières semaines, on les garde pour se redonner des idées pour les fois d'après. En fait, on essaie de pas refaire deux fois la même semaine.

Lucas Franquet was aware of Nathalie's concern for having a balanced diet throughout the week:

**Lucas:** It's more her who has the ideas, who will propose things that are a bit diversified. So it's more her who will look on internet. Or we have quite a lot of recipe book, so it's more her who looks in those to try to diversify, let's say, or diet. Try to have balance things, also.

**Lucas :** C'est plutôt elle qui a des idées, qui va proposer des choses un peu diversifiées. Donc c'est plutôt elle qui va chercher sur internet, ou on a pas mal de livres de cuisine, donc c'est plutôt elle qui va chercher là-dedans pour essayer de diversifier, on va dire, notre alimentation. Essayer d'avoir des choses un peu plus équilibrées aussi.

**Vanessa:** [We meal plan] to be having healthy food. We're at least having meat and vegetables for, you know, five nights of the week kind of thing. So it is, it is time consuming but at least we're eating healthy food. So it is time consuming but it's kind of satisfying when we're having healthy, nutritional food.

Luke Brown's description of their menus shows how meal planning was also based on a longer term approach for sustaining health than a logic based on one each isolated meal. This was the case with the reduction of red meat consumption over the weeks:

**Luke:** Trying to have a bit of a variety. I think, before the children we probably had a bit of a rotation where we'd go, sort of, red meat, chicken or fish, vegetable, like on a three-night cycle. But I'd say now we probably do red meat maybe once every one to two weeks, chicken once or twice a week, something fish, probably every week, and then a couple of just vegetable meals. And that didn't really add up to seven, but it's a bit of a guide. So, we've certainly cut back on the red meat. But yeah: generally try and unload with veggies most nights.

Parents were anxious about providing for healthy meals for the whole family and in particular for children. They also factored in their own dietary concerns when preparing the meal plans; which meant they had to combine their own health imperatives with those they had for their children, which did not always align. Several parents spontaneously mentioned having followed or currently being on a diet to lose weight (Magali Imbert, up. class; Sophie Obecanov, int. mid. class; Laurent Comescu: up. class; Guillaume Rizzo, int. mid. class) or watching over their eating habits in order to prevent gaining weight (Sophie Obecanov, Viktor Obecanov, Vanessa and Craig Bennet). Some parents were also



concerned with exercising enough on a regular basis (in Adelaide: Vanessa and Craig; in Lyon: Viktor and Sophie Obecanov, Lucas Franquet, and Guillaume Rizzo). Of all the parents from both groups, only Bianca Armand mentioned watching over a potential body size issue that she imagined for her daughter. She compares her feeding practices to those of her childhood, during which she was encouraged to eat 'a lot', it was 'the Italian way... a feast':

**Bianca:** [My approach is to aim for] balance, and most of all..., how to put this, an approach that is, I don't know if healthy is the right word... But for instance, my daughter who is eleven years old and who is really slim and eats like four..., we watch her curve, thinking one day her metabolism might change and she will not be able to eat as before: how do we get her to understand that is it not a question of being fat, but it is a question of being healthy, and things like that. The image, the relationship to how much we eat, that's it.

**Bianca :** [Mon approche est de chercher l'] équilibre, et surtout, comment dire, une approche j'sais pas si saine est le bon mot, mais par exemple ma fille qui a onze ans et qui est mince comme tout et qui mange pour quatre..., on surveille sa courbe en disant si un jour son métabolisme change et qu'elle peut plus manger autant, comment est-ce qu'on va lui faire comprendre que c'est pas une question de pas être grosse, mais une question d'être en bonne santé... et des choses comme ça. L'image, le rapport à combien on mange, c'est ça.

Bianca distanced herself from body size stigma, building her discourse around preventive health practice imperatives, yet she was also concerned about socially desired body image and proper eating practices for a girl. Other than Bianca, no parents mentioned adapting their food preparation and feeding practices for this reason and none of the children had apparent over weight issues.

Nathalie Franquet (up. mid. class) factored in her own dietary considerations in their meal planning:

**Nathalie:** I think the menus were also less varied. In winter, it was a big bowl of pasta and one evening, some soup, that was usually about it. I am caricaturing it, but we were nearly at that. Because the aim was not to think too much about it in the evening, and in the end, we really always ate the same thing. Now, yeah, it is more varied with the meal plans, because we look at a week, so that is it more balanced, and so that there is a bit of everything, you know. Yeah, it's quite limited. Maybe the children a bit more, because they are hungry, so we need to complement. But I think that my husband and I, not more than once a week.

**Nathalie :** J'pense que les menus étaient moins variés aussi. L'hiver c'était en gros un soir des pâtes et un soir de la soupe quoi, c'était plutôt ça. Je caricature un peu mais on en était quasiment là. Par ce que le but c'était de pas se prendre la tête le soir et puis au final on mangeait vraiment tout l'temps la même chose. Là ouais c'est plus varié avec les menus, par ce que on regarde sur une semaine pour que ce soit à peu près équilibré et qu'il y ait un peu de tout. On mange beaucoup moins de pâtes, c'est surtout ça le secret. On en mange une fois par semaine mais pas plus quoi. Ouais c'est bien limité. Les enfants peut-être un peu plus parce qu'ils ont faim donc il faut compléter. Mais j'pense que mon mari et moi on en mange pas plus d'une fois par semaine.

She also adapted the menus to the appetite of their sons by adding more carbohydrates, which were precisely the items she tried to limit for herself and her husband. In Adelaide, for Sally Davies (low. mid. class), buying ready-made meal boxes was a healthy habit, as they enable her to control the nutritional quantity of food eaten:

**Sally:** [They're] time saving, they're quite healthy as well, it says there how many calories are on there, so it's good to stick to, you know, how much you're having. They call them clean meals, we've been having. And they also have so many good things on, that it's just easier, yeah, for definitely convenience. And it's nicer than frozen meals [...]. So that's just because we're so busy, that's been quite easy for us. I used to be a lot better, pre-planned, but now it's really, like literally tonight, it was like 5:00, we're like: 'right, what are we gonna do for dinner?'

Vanessa Bennet from Adelaide (up. mid. class) was also concerned about her own diet when preparing her meal plans:

**Vanessa:** At least then I know that my kids are eating nutritional food and so are we. I mean we go to work like every day and we try and exercise as much as we can. I don't enjoy eating McDonalds every day of the week, like, I do not crave that kind of food. I don't crave going to the local Italian place to have a bowl full of pasta. Like it's not, you know I'm, we don't crave that kind of food. Like if we go out and we go to the pub we will have something that we wouldn't normally have at home, you know something different. Like I wouldn't go and have a schnitzel because I can have that at home.

Vanessa had internalised liking healthy food, which was also motivated by the fact that she exercised every day of the week. Perhaps her dislike of fast food was a result of her exercising that much, as eating that 'kind of food' would ruin her efforts. Vanessa's concern for exercise recalls Magali Imbert's (up. class) and Sophie Obecanov's (int. mid. class) discourses about food in terms of weight concerns:

**Sophie:** So I like to eat. I don't only eat what I like, because otherwise I would gain a kilo a day or more. So I pay attention to what I eat. I am the kind that really likes food, and unfortunately I like both sweet and savoury food. So I try to pay attention to what I eat, to be physically active as well. And to eat as balanced as possible. I'm not saying that I'm 100% balanced and that all my meals are perfectly composed, because I also don't have enough time.

**Sophie:** Alors, moi, j'aime bien manger. Je ne mange pas que ce que j'aime, parce que sinon je prendrais un kilo par jour voire plus. Donc je fais attention à ce que je mange. Je suis d'une nature assez gourmande, et malheureusement et de salé et de sucré. Donc voilà, j'essaie du coup de faire quand même attention à ce que je mange, à faire de l'activité physique aussi. Et à manger le plus équilibré possible. Je dis pas que je suis à 100% équilibré et que tous mes repas sont d'une composition parfaite, parce que manque de temps aussi.

Some of the parents who meal planned had more precise and nutrition oriented definition of what healthy meals meant. Perhaps they meal planned because they had these rather detailed notions about food, or perhaps their requirements resulted from their meal planning, but in any case the parents who anticipated their family meals distinguished themselves from those who did not. For the Imbert (up. class), while their food provisioning was guided by notions of seasonality of products and by preferences, public nutritional public recommendations were also strongly integrated into Stéphane Imbert's rationales, despite the approximation in the use of the nutritional discourse. They therefore had set ideas about how to construct mealtime menus. Stéphane talked about different food groups – dairy, fruit and vegetables, red meat, fish – and was also quite proud to be thinking their food provisioning in nutritional terms:

**Stéphane:** So in terms of management perspective, we simply consider that we eat in the morning - in fact it's mainly the girls who eat in the morning - a dairy product, a cereal product such as bread, and a fruit. At lunchtime, we consider that we eat some carbohydrates and red meat. And in the evening, we

eat proteins - rather white meat or fish - and vegetables. From this idea, from the pattern we have in terms of food, we do our shopping according to what we need. And we go straight to the market or to Super U [a French supermarket chain], focusing on what we need - if we need carbohydrates, we go and buy pasta and rice, it's mainly these carbohydrates that we buy. In terms of the children in fact, we will mainly buy bread in the morning, milk or yoghurt [...]. The way we see it, the way I see our meals, we make them with: the lunchtime meal is proteins, carbohydrates, the evening meal is soft proteins, with vegetables. And from there, we see what the display offers us. When we go shopping, we don't say: I'm going to buy tomatoes, I'm going to buy salad, I'm going to buy a steak. No: we go to the butcher to buy proteins, or to the fishmonger to buy fish and we take what we find, what interests us, what inspires us.

**Stéphane** : Donc d'un point de vue gestion chez nous, en fait, on part simplement du principe qu'on mange le matin – en fait c'est surtout les filles qui mangent le matin – un laitage, un produit céréalier type pain, et un fruit. Le midi, on considère qu'on mange un féculent et une viande rouge. Et le soir on mange des protéines - plutôt viande blanche ou poisson - et légumes. A partir de cette idée, de schéma qu'on a au niveau de l'alimentation, on fait nos courses en fonction de ce qu'on a besoin. Et on va directement à ce moment-là, faire les courses, que ce soit au marché ou au Super U, en se focalisant en fait sur ce dont on a besoin - si on a besoin de féculent on va aller acheter des pâtes et du riz, c'est principalement ces féculents qu'on va acheter. Au niveau du, des enfants en fait, on va acheter principalement le pain le matin, du lait ou des yaourts [...]. La façon que l'on voit, que je vois aussi nos repas, on les fait avec : le repas du midi c'est protéines, féculents, le repas du soir c'est protéines douces, avec légumes. Et à partir de là, on voit ce que nous propose l'étalage. Quand on va faire des courses on va pas dire: tiens, je vais acheter des tomates, je vais acheter de la salade, je vais acheter un steak. Non: on va chez le boucher acheter des protéines, ou chez le poissonnier pour acheter des poissons et va prendre ce que l'on trouve, ce qui nous intéresse, ce qui nous inspire.

Observations showed that, indeed, their dinner menus were constituted mostly of vegetables accompanied by fish or chicken. Red meat in the evening was exceptional and there were only small quantities of carbohydrates:

*Table 14. Menus prepared at the Imbert household throughout the 5 visits or video conference observations*

Dinner 1 (week)	Broccoli and pike quenelle gratin bread – dairy, cheese and fruit
Dinner 2 (week)	Raw vegetables (carrots, cucumber), cheese, bread
Dinner 3 (week)	Roast pork (no meat eaten at lunch), rice salad with leftover raw vegetables from the day before
Lunch 4 (weekend)	Roast potatoes and chicken legs
Dinner 5	Eggplant puree, savoury carrot pie, bread, fruit and yogurts
“Apéro dinnatoire” 6 - (week)	Bread, cucumbers, cooked sausage, cheese, eggplant spread, bell pepper spread, mayonnaise, homemade roasted pumpkin seed, artisanal sweets, fruit and dairy

Nathalie Franquet’s (up. mid. class) rationales for constructing their menus showed similar appropriation of the nutritional recommendations:

**Nathalie:** Making sure it's balanced, with systematically a vegetable and some carbohydrate in the evening [...]. Usually, there are no proteins in the evening: no meat, no fish in the evening. Then there's croque-monsieur, so there's ham in it. But we try to avoid as much as possible, in fact, that they have protein twice a day. Our principle is that they should only have it once. And usually at the lunchtime canteen they have it, so there's no problem. One is a bit more reticent than the other, one for whom it's not a problem at all, and the other, yeah, who likes meat and wants it morning, noon and night, it's hard to refrain him. [...]. Usually the older one, who really likes meat, and moreover he likes good meat, and he doesn't pretend, and in quantity, so it's expensive.

**Nathalie :** Faisant en sorte que ce soit quand même équilibré avec systématiquement du légume et un féculent le soir [...]. Généralement c'est pas de protéines le soir : pas de viande, pas de poisson le soir. Alors ça arrive des croque-monsieur alors là y'a du jambon dedans. Mais on essaye d'éviter quand même au maximum en fait, qu'ils aient deux fois des protéines par jours quoi. Le principe c'est qu'ils en aient qu'une fois. Et généralement à la cantine du midi ils en ont donc y'a pas de soucis. Y'en a un qui est un peu plus réticent que l'autre, y'en a un pour qui c'est pas grave du tout et puis l'autre ouais, qui aime la viande et qui a envie de la viande matin midi et soir, c'est dur de l'freiner. [...]. Plus souvent l'ainé, et qui, oui qui aime vraiment la viande, en plus il aime la bonne viande, puis il fait pas semblant quoi et en quantité, donc ça revient cher.

Nathalie's rationale for their meal planning was similar in terms of avoiding red meat in the evening and incorporating vegetables in every dinner. The difference was that the Franquet family (up. mid. class) added carbohydrates in their evening meals, because their 10 and 12 year-old sons – who did many sport activities over the week – were 'hungry, so we need to complement'.

Associated to these high standards existed a desire to 'let go' of them once a week, and provide a meal that was mostly enjoyable by all without taking into consideration the healthy and varied aspect of this particular menu in itself. This was allowed because parents strived to reach healthiness over several days. This 'aversion to extremes' has already been describe in the literature about mothers and food work in Canada: 'women worked to present a moderate relationship to food ideals and were careful to distance themselves from displays of excessive commitment' (Cairns and Johnston 2015, 45). For the mothers of this research, who were mainly in charge of the decision about food, foregoing their ideals once or twice a week was a way to please everybody, to have less work, but it also represented a means of avoiding 'obsessiveness', positioning oneself in the 'middle ground' and adopting a calibrated approach to food and health within the family, therefore steering away from any form of 'pathologized femininities':

'By calibration, we refer to the process through which women actively negotiate hegemonic food femininities and position themselves as reasonable, informed, and moderate'. (Cairns and Johnston 2015, 46)

Bianca Armand, for example, talked of having balanced meals 'without being excessive about it'. At the Bourdon household, also, after the main course at the second visit, Marie-Cécile asked Lucie and

Marius what they would like to have as a dairy product: she gave them the choice between some cheese and a yogurt. They both chose cheese, Lucie specifying she would like some Vache qui rit<sup>86</sup>.

**Benoit:** But do you remember the Laughing Cow on Yuka? 4/5! Red!

*Benoit explains there is some type of unhealthy additive in it, without remembering which one.*

**Benoit:** But we were all fed on the Laughing Cow

**Marie-Cécile:** No, but it's always the same, you can't eat ONLY Laughing Cow

**Lucie:** I won't take Laughing Cow, I will have some comté

*Lunch 2*

**Benoit:** Mais tu te rappelles de la Vache-qui-rit sur Yuka<sup>87</sup>? 4/5! Rouge!

*Benoit explains there is some type of unhealthy additive in it, without remembering which one.*

**Benoit:** Après, on a tous été nourris à la Vache-qui-rit

**Marie-Cécile:** Non, mais c'est toujours pareil, faut pas manger QUE de la Vache-qui-rit

**Lucie:** Je prends pas de Vache-qui-rit, je prends du comté

*Lunch 2*

### **8.3. The weight of individual preferences and dietary restrictions**

A central dimension factored in the food work was striving to please individual preferences. This implied either finding out a menu that all would like, or tailoring some dishes to the family members' likes. Nathalie and Vanessa, for example, were concerned about pleasing the whole family by choosing menus that everybody would like:

**Nathalie:** Thirdly [after the time constraints and the constraints linked to Marco's diet] everyone's preferences: that everyone likes it. [We do] according to the tastes of the children, who are rather difficult [...]. Before, we were able to make Excel sheets with our children who noted down the recipes, to see which ones we could make again, which ones they liked. The aim was not to think too much about, when we had to prepare the menus for the week, to anticipate. [...] And it prevents us from, yeah, getting having to think too much about it in the evening 'and what are we going to eat?', the others complaining because they don't like it, because something is missing, because...you know. [...] Sometimes] we take the most popular things and we put them back the following week.

**Nathalie :** Dans un troisième temps [après les contraintes de temps et les contraintes liés au régime alimentaire de Marco] les goûts de chacun : que ça plaise à chacun. [On fait] en fonction des goûts, quand même, des enfants qui sont assez difficiles [...]. Avant on était arrivé à faire des tableaux Excel avec nos enfants qui notaient les recettes, voir lesquelles on pouvait refaire, les quelles leurs plaisaient. Le but, c'était pas se prendre la tête quand on avait à préparer les menus pour la semaine, d'anticiper. [...] Et ça évite de, ouais de se prendre la tête le soir 'et qu'est ce qu'on va manger ?', les autres qui râlent par ce que ça va pas, parce qu'il manque un truc, par ce que...voilà. [...] Parfois] on récupère les trucs les plus appréciés et on les recale la semaine d'après.

This was not to say that Marco (10) and Jules (12) were always happy with the menus, but it left them less negotiation possibilities. At the first dinner observed, Jules tried to negotiate the menu right before the mealtime:

**Jules:** Can we have white beans? Come on, please say yes

**Nathalie:** No

**Jules:** Come on!

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<sup>86</sup> The Laughing Cow: a French industrial cheese constitute of a mix of several melted cheeses.

<sup>87</sup> A French mobile application that scans certain food and cosmetic products and provides information on their health impact.

**Nathalie:** No!  
**Jules:** We always have zucchini, it's not fair  
**Nathalie:** It's not true  
**Jules:** We've had some on Sunday, Monday and we're going to have...  
**Fairley:** Are you allowed to change the menus during the week?  
**Nathalie:** It can happen  
*The discussion continues about the zucchini. Jules complains that he eats too much zucchini.*  
**Nathalie:** Well, give me another vegetable you like  
**Jules:** Tomato  
**Nathalie:** Well, I... ah well no...  
**Jules:** ... beans in tomato sauce  
**Nathalie:** Yes, but we already had them last week, didn't we? A fortnight ago?  
**Jules:** No  
**Nathalie:** [to me] So we systematically explain to them: we make the meal plan generally, with Lucas, on Friday or Saturday, to go shopping on Saturday or Sunday morning and they grumble ...  
**Jules:** ... no  
**Nathalie:** ...because they always say, you do it without us but in fact they know very well that we're going to do the menus and they complain because they don't have what they want  
**Jules:** No, I didn't know  
**Nathalie:** Stop it  
**Jules:** What? It's true!  
**Nathalie:** We've been doing it pretty much the same way for three years  
*Dinner 1*

**Jules:** Est-ce qu'on peut prendre des haricots blancs? allez, s'te plait, dis oui  
**Nathalie:** Non  
**Jules:** Allez !  
**Nathalie:** Non! [ferme]  
**Jules:** On a toujours des courgettes, c'est pas juste  
**Nathalie:** C'est pas vrai  
**Jules:** On a eu dimanche, lundi et on va avoir... euh  
**Fairley:** Y'a le droit de modifier les menus pendant la semaine?  
**Nathalie:** Ça peut arriver  
*Le discussion continue sur les courgettes. Jules se plaint qu'il mange trop de courgettes.*  
**Nathalie:** Ben, donne-moi un autre légume que t'aimes  
**Jules:** ... la tomate  
**Nathalie:** Ben dem... ah ba non...  
**Jules:** ... les haricots à la sauce tomate  
**Nathalie:** Oui, mais on a déjà eu la semaine dernière, non? y'a deux semaines?  
**Jules:** Non  
**Nathalie:** En fait, on leur explique systématiquement : on fait les menus, généralement, avec Lucas, le vendredi ou samedi pour aller faire les courses samedi dans la journée ou le dimanche matin et ils râlent ...  
**Jules:** ... non  
**Nathalie:** ...parce qu'ils disent toujours, vous faites sans nous mais en fait ils savent très bien qu'on va faire les menus et ils râlent parce qu'ils ont pas ce qu'ils veulent  
**Jules:** Non, moi je savais pas  
**Nathalie:** Arrête  
**Jules:** Quoi? c'est vrai!  
**Nathalie:** Trois ans qu'on s'organise à peu près de la même manière  
*Dîner 1*

Nathalie was restricting the negotiation possibilities of Jules: although he pointed out he liked tomatoes, Nathalie was reluctant to change the menu, as would have disrupted her whole meal plan and implicitly did not recognise it a valuable enough vegetable (as opposed to green vegetables). At

another time, Marco (10) was displeased with the amount of food planned for dinner. Nathalie thus accepted, based on her son's age and activities, to serve more food (proteins and carbohydrates):

**Nathalie:** On est aussi en train de découvrir la taille des estomacs des adolescents. Des fois on a des surprises. On croit qu'on a fait assez à manger, mais en fait, ils ont encore faim.

*Dîner 1*

**Nathalie:** We are also finding out the size of teenage stomachs. Sometimes we get surprises. We think we've made enough food, but in fact they are still hungry.

*Dinner 1*

**Nathalie Franquet** (up. mid. class): Marco, when coming home, was complaining because there was definitely not enough for him to eat this evening. He saw potatoes and ratatouille and he told me: 'But, hum, there is no other food to eat tonight? We are going to eat ONLY that?'. I think I will make some fried eggs, so as to feed a bit everybody.

*Dinner 2*

**Nathalie:** Marco, en rentrant, râlait, parce qu'il n'y avait certainement pas assez à manger ce soir. Il a vu pommes de terre, ratatouille et il m'a dit, ' mais, euh, y'a pas d'autres aliments qu'on va manger ce soir? on mange vraiment QUE ça? ' (elle l'imite). Je pense que je vais faire des œufs aux plats en plus, histoire de nourrir un peu tout le monde.

*Dîner 2*

For Marie, deciding the menus in advance was a way to include children and their husband in the decision process and make sure they would eat what was served:

**Jules :** Souvent, ils nous prennent, le week-end, et ils disent : ' dites-moi au moins trois légumes que vous voulez manger dans la semaine ', et on dit les légumes, ensuite on fait des plats avec des légumes. Du coup bah on propose.

**Jules:** Often, they call us on the weekend and they say: 'Tell me at least three vegetables that you want to eat during the week', and we say the vegetables, then they make dishes with vegetables. So we propose.

**Bianca:** The children are quite fussy in terms of vegetables and so on, so I make meals a little bit, according to what I know goes down well. And I try to revisit things a little bit, maybe they didn't like it that time, I try to make them taste it all again. In winter it's a lot easier because the vegetables go well in soup and in summer it's more complicated, they don't like raw vegetables. My husband likes cooked meals with lots of meat, potatoes and all that, so we have evening meals, let's say real meals, not very light [...]. And so I try to take into account the days when, for example, if I don't eat here because I have something to do, to think: for tonight it will be the leftovers from the day before' or it will be another meal, for example I don't eat fish, so I'll take fish that I won't be here to eat.

**Bianca :** Les enfants sont assez difficiles en terme de légumes et tout donc je fais des repas un p'tit peu en fonction de ce que je sais qui passe bien. Et j'essaie d'un peu revisiter des trucs, peut être là fois d'avant ils ont moyennement appréciés, j'essaie de faire en sorte qu'ils re-goûtent tout ça. En hiver c'est beaucoup plus facile parce que les légumes, tout passe en bien soupe et en été c'est plus compliqué, les crudités ils aiment pas. Mon mari il aime bien quand même des repas cuisinés avec plein de viande, des patates et tout ça, donc on a quand même des repas du soir, on va dire des vrais repas, pas très légers [...]. Et donc j'essaie de tenir compte des jours où par exemple, si moi j'mange pas là parce que j'ai un truc, de réfléchir : pour ce soir ce sera les restes de la veille' ou ce sera un autre repas, par exemple j'mange pas de poisson donc j'vais prendre du poisson que je serai pas là pour manger.

At the Bennet household, in Adelaide, Charlie and Henry could choose between a restricted selection of dishes as well:

**Vanessa:** For example, if I don't have a mincemeat dish I might say to them, 'do you want shepherd's pie or stir-fry?' And I'll let them choose. But I know that we only have mince once a week. Or, like Craig doesn't eat fish, so Craig will have lamb chops and me and the two kids will have fish in the oven. Sometimes, for example, last night, the kids like this, a sausage dish that I do, which is just sausages with tomato puree and then it's got like barbecue sauce in it. They like that whereas Craig and I don't eat a lot of sausages so we had turkey patties. So I accommodate to the things that they like. And sometimes I will ask them if I've gone off, you know: 'I need one more thing to eat, what do you want?' And they'll tell me what they want or I let them choose between two things if I can't decide. Or on a Friday night sometimes it'll be: 'get what, like, not get what you want but it's not necessarily a meat and veg dish'. So I might say: "Henry, do you want to have chicken wraps or nachos?" Because that seems to be a Friday night dinner. And this week he wanted nachos [...].

**Fairley:** So if they have a choice, it's usually between, like, it's in the restricted sense, like: 'do you want this or this or...?'

**Vanessa:** Yeah because, correct. Because if I just said to them, what do you want to eat? They'll probably tell me they want two minute noodles or something like that [chuckles]. So I kind of give them choices and let them choose.

This was indeed a restricted choice, as were they to have more freedom, Vanessa thought they would have chosen dishes that she would find unhealthy, as suggested by her chuckles. Just as Henry and Henry needed to choose a dish following the meal plan rules, Craig also proposed dishes according to the principle of balance over the weeks (although this may also coincide with a dislike of eating the same food repetitively):

**Craig:** She pretty much just asks what we want for dinners during the week. So yeah, she always says to us, 'give us one meal that you want to have during the week' and generally I'll select something that we haven't had the week before or a couple of weeks before. So yeah, I certainly get my choice in what I'd like to eat in the week.

At the Ferret household in Lyon (up. class), while Céline no longer prepared menus for the whole week, they had set up a way to give Noémie (7) limited negotiation possibilities for the menus (*Figure 5 Noémie Ferret can have sushi whenever she wants, providing she follows the game rules*):

**Jérôme:** So Noémie got - I don't even know if it was for Christmas last year or for her birthday - she got vouchers with 'Tonight we're eating sushi' [...]. We gave her vouchers, about ten vouchers, saying: 'Here, one evening, one day, you want to eat sushi, you give us the voucher, and in the evening you eat sushi' [...]. Because she likes sushi and she kept asking for sushi [laughter]! So we made a rule: she has a capital, if she wants she can burn it in a week, we won't be happy, but it doesn't matter, but that's the point of the game.

**Fairley:** So is it sushi for everyone or just for her?

**Jérôme:** Oh no, for everyone. Afterwards, we gave her a second rule, which is that she must not ask for it when we go to the table. She has to say it when she gets home from school, before we really start preparing, and there's almost an hour's delay.

**Jérôme :** Alors Noémie a eu – je sais même plus si c'est pour Noël l'année dernière ou pour son anniversaire – elle a eu des bons pour dire ' Ce soir on mange sushis ' [...]. On lui fait des bons, une dizaine de bons, on lui disant : ' voilà, un soir, un jour, tu veux manger sushis, tu nous donnes le bon, et le soir tu manges sushis ' [...]. Parce qu'elle aime bien les sushis et qu'elle arrêtait pas de demander des sushis [rire] ! Donc comme ça on a fait une règle : elle a un capital, si elle veut elle le crame en une semaine, ça va pas nous faire plaisir, mais c'est pas grave, mais c'est l'but du jeu.

**Fairley :** Donc c'est sushi pour tout le monde ou juste pour elle ?



**Jérôme** : Ah non, pour tout le monde. Après, on lui a donné une deuxième règle, c'est qu'il faut pas qu'elle le dise au moment où on passe à table. Elle doit le dire en rentrant de l'école, avant qu'on commence vraiment à préparer, puis y'a quasiment une heure de délai.



*Figure 5 Noémie Ferret can have sushi whenever she wants, providing she follows the game rules*

Bianca Armand resorted as well to restrictive techniques to please her children with alternative menus:

**Bianca**: Quite regularly, we try to integrate meals that are a bit, how can I put it, like a takeaway, a pizza takeaway. So I'm not against all that, but we try to limit it. If we had a rule, it would be no more than once a month. So if they asked for it, I would say 'well, we've already had it for this month'.

**Bianca** : Assez régulièrement on essaie d'intégrer des repas un peu, comment dire, un truc à emporter, une pizza à emporter. Donc j'suis pas contre tout ça mais on essaie de limiter. Si on avait une règle c'est pas plus d'une fois par mois. Donc s'ils réclamaient je disais 'bah on a déjà eu pour ce mois-ci'.

Meal plans at the Franquet household (up. mid. class) became even more established over the years because Jules, their youngest son, declare a Crohn disease, a year before the fieldwork. This led the whole family to completely delete certain ingredients from mealtimes, such as legumes, cabbages, milk and eggs. At the worst period of his illness, a few months before the fieldwork, he could hardly eat anything: the whole family still adapted their menus to make mealtimes easier, when he had to be there. So that not to tempt Marco, Nathalie would plan menus with the food Marco (10) liked the least when he was there and when he was not present during their mealtimes, they would eat what he usually enjoyed eating. The Franquet family (up. mid. class) also had to prepare Marco school lunches, which made the planning of the menus ahead of time all the more necessary for them. Nathalie had already been meal planning for two or three years before Marco's disease declared, but the additional constraints that appeared added to the various others constraints and preferences that Nathalie took into account when thinking about feeding the family. The Franquet family's adaptation to Marco's dietary restrictions was interesting in terms of the position of commensality within this family: eating meant eating together and the same food.

Magali Imbert (up. class) summarised the rationale behind their anticipation strategies, which also represented the basis of the other families' rationales in term of anticipating family meals: 'well, we try that is does not require any efforts in the evening' ('on essaie de faire en sorte que ce soit pas d'effort justement' (dinner 2, video conf.). Meal planning greatly facilitated indeed evenings and meant parents arrived less stressed at the table. However, the efforts to provide healthy meals for the family did not disappear. In reality, the most demanding aspect of food work was displaced to the weekend, such as the mental load, the preparation of vegetables and some elaborate or time consuming dishes. The advanced food preparation and the daily preparation was partially shared between spouses but the mental load of it was often bared by mothers, which was described as the most stressful aspect of the food work process (Mehta et al. 2019; Burnod et al. 2022; Wright, Maher, and Tanner 2015; B. Beagan et al. 2008a). In terms of share of food work between fathers and mothers, the cooking might be the tree hiding the forest, the latter being the mental load: the actual food preparation is the most valued and discussed aspect of food work and the mental load, the organization and planning the most difficult and hidden aspect, and all the more because is it a recurrent necessity.

### **8.3.1. 'We choose meals that are gonna be what they eat': adapting the menu to children's preferences**

Some middle class parents from Adelaide and from Lyon chose meals that they thought their children were going to eat, which meant either they adapted the whole menu towards their children's preferences, or they made some adjustment for the kids' dinners, without making two entirely different menus:

**Amy:** So it's got to be quick, it's got to be something they like [...]. We choose meals that are gonna be what they eat, and we choose it that we all eat the same meal just to keep it simple.

Amy described several reasons for adapting the menus towards the children's preferences. Both she and her husband were lacking time and energy during the week to find out and cook a menu that was both 'healthy' and that their children would. Not only were they lacking time because of constraints external to family life, but also their children's hunger and their difficulty to manage it added an additional time constraint. Their children being still quite young (1, 5 and 7 years old), they had difficulty to wait until the mealtime hour to eat and parents had difficulty refraining them. There was a kind of vicious circle going on: because Amy wanted her children to eat during, rather than before the mealtime with 'unhealthy' snacks, and because she needed to feed them quickly before they 'lost it', she ended up serving them a quick fix, which she considered to be an unhealthy menu. She was also concerned with other aspects of their health: getting enough sleep and of good quality, which she associated with them eating enough. Overall, Amy was very much concerned about several aspects of

her children's health and responded to these imperatives with the resources she had at hand. In a lower middle class family in Lyon, the parents prepared the menu based on children's liking as well, which in this case implied a lot of carbohydrates:

**Pascal:** We are careful with what the children will eat [...]. It's hard, because the children eat a lot of rice, pasta, potatoes, so we eat that a lot of that because feeding them vegetables, it's complicated.

**Pascal :** On fait plutôt attention à ce que vont manger les enfants [...]. C'est dur, parce que les enfants mangent beaucoup de riz, de pâtes, pommes de terre, donc ça on en mange, parce que, pour leur faire manger des légumes c'est compliqué.

At the Rizzo household (int. mid. class) in Lyon, Guillaume often prepared part of the meal to suit his daughter's preferences as well (10 years old), who did not eat much nor varied enough, for him: 'she has trouble eating, so often, it's true that I cook what she enjoys eating' ("Elle a du mal à manger. Du coup, souvent, c'est vrai que je fais souvent ce qui lui fait plaisir à manger").

Without elaborating two complete menus, some parents (Rizzo, Franquet, Comescu, Obecanov, André) served an extra or different dish for children, or for themselves (according to whether the menu was more child or adult oriented)

**Guillaume Rizzo** (int. mid. class): Zoé (10), she hates soup and I, during winter, I like to have some soup, so I make some soup. However, I will make her some grated carrots and so I will put some pieces of carrots in her preparation, with the pasta and chicken, so that it looks nice.

**Guillaume Rizzo** (int. mid. class) : Zoé (10), elle déteste la soupe et moi, l'hiver, j'aime bien manger de la soupe, du coup je me fais de la soupe. Par contre je vais lui faire des carottes coupées en morceaux et du coup vais lui mettre des p'tites carottes dans sa présentation avec des pâtes et son poulet, pour ce que soit un peu stylé.

Pascal André and his wife planned the main mealtime course to be adapted to their children's taste but they added some vegetables as a side dish for themselves: 'from time to time, yes, we are obliged to do something more for them, on the side' (' de temps en temps, oui, on est obligés de refaire un petit truc pour eux, oui, à part '). This also took place at the Comescu household (up. class):

*Irina Comescu explains that she eats her tomatoes with aragula, but she tells me that for them it's a bit too bitter. Hugo says he eats a bit of it.*

**Irina:** So I make my own salad. Laurent doesn't eat salad.  
*Dinner 1, video conf.*

*Irina Comescu m'explique qu'elle mange ses tomates avec de la roquette, mais elle me dit que pour eux, c'est un peu trop amer. Hugo dit qu'il en mange un peu.*

**Irina:** Et du coup moi je fais ma salade. Laurent ne mange pas de salade.  
*Diner 1, video conf.*

It happened then when children refused to eat some of the food prepared, the parents would serve them something different, usually quickly prepared. At the third dinner at the Rizzo household (int. mid. class), Guillaume had cooked a filet mignon, which Zoé (10) refused to eat. She argued she had already eaten chicken at lunch, thus engaging in a reverse socialisation process by reminding her father of the dietary and environmental recommendations of diminishing the consumption of meat.

Guillaume did not adhere to this argument, offering her instead some grilled ham. Zoé refused, pretexting this required extra work, to which he argued 'no, no, you need to eat'. A friend of Guillaume who was invited for dinner commented the whole scene, mocking Zoé for being fussy. Guillaume replied: 'listen, this is what we usually do here'. Guillaume was concerned about her daughter eating enough food and in this case, the appropriate quantity of food was linked to the type of food, meat being perceived as more nutritious and filling than just rice and vegetables. In Adelaide, the Brown family (up. mid. class) tailored part of the meal to their children's liking as well:

**Alison:** And the thing is now we sort of tailor a little bit to them because one might eat something and the other will... So we don't, we don't actually make different meals, because I, I don't want to go down that path. I think that's just...it's just creating more problems later on. So we just modify, like if we've got to cook a whole steamed vegetables, I just won't cook the ones that one of them will complain about eating, and then I'll cook different things on each, different plates. And if they eat some of each, and they eat a few vegetables, which I know is enough I think for them to eat.....then I'm reasonably happy.

Alison had a double approach to the effects of commensality on health. She was concerned about getting her two children (6 and 8 year old) to eat vegetables and especially *enough* of them. Yet, for this to happen, she had to navigate around their differing dislikes. She was also concerned about her family actually eating the same menu during mealtimes, which she considered was a preventive health practice.

## **9. Anticipation and improvisation in the organisation of food work**

Two contrasted strategies existed in terms of experience and management of time and food work (Jabs et al. 2007). On the one side, some households adopted anticipation and time management strategies to be able to have healthier family dinners and alleviate stress in the evenings. On the other hand, a few households made do with their time stress and prepared family meals on a daily schedule. In between these two opposite organisation for delivering family meals existed a range of practices of partially anticipated food preparation.

### **9.1. Anticipation strategies**

#### **9.1.1. Planning the menus**

A few of the families visited (in Lyon Bourdon, Imbert, Ferret: up. class; Franquet: up. mid. class; Armand (*unknown social class*); in Adelaide: Bennet, Brown: up. mid. class, Chapman: int. mid. class) planned some or most of their family meals in advance for the upcoming week. The Franquet and Armand families in Lyon and the Bennet and Brown families in Adelaide, begun by elaborating dinner menus on the Friday or on the Saturday for Monday to Friday or the next Saturday:

**Bianca:** Well, for starters, it's mostly I who cooks. I plan meals in advance. Every weekend, I think about the meals for [the seven upcoming days] and we do the groceries accordingly [...], on Saturday, and it needs to last until the next Saturday [...]. So it's true it does not leave much space for the unexpected.

**Bianca:** Déjà pour commencer c'est surtout moi qui cuisine. Je planifie les repas à l'avance. Donc tous les week-end je réfléchis aux repas pour [les sept jours à venir] et on fait des courses en fonction [...], le samedi, donc il faut qu'ça tienne jusqu'au samedi suivant [...]. Donc c'est vrai que ça laisse peu de place pour les imprévus.

At the Franquet household (up. mid. class), Nathalie chose the menus and then consulted Lucas to make sure he was happy with the selected meals (*Figure 6 Meal planner at the Franquet household – For the first visit, on Tuesday, dinner is vegetable flan and gyozas*):

**Lucas:** That is to say that, about once a week, we do list of menus for the entire week. After that, we deduce the list of groceries and after we go shopping. We set up this organisation with my wife a few years ago already, so now it's pretty rigorous. We like to be quite rigorous, pretty organised.

**Lucas :** C'est à dire qu'à peu près une fois par semaine, on fait la liste des menus de toute la semaine. Ensuite, on en déduit la liste de courses, et après on va faire les courses. On a mis cette organisation en place avec ma femme y'a quelques années maintenant, donc maintenant c'est assez carré [...]. Nous, on aime bien être assez carrés, assez organisés.

**Nathalie:** Usually, we do our groceries list during the weekend, we go shopping on the weekend and everything is ready until the next Friday evening, more or less. I mean, everything is ready: we know what we are going to have until Friday evening, so as to avoid last minute shopping [...]. So it's very organised at our place.

**Nathalie :** Généralement on fait la liste des menus pendant le week-end, on fait les courses le week-end, et puis tout est prêt jusqu'au vendredi soir à peu près. 'Fin tout est prêt : on sait c'qu'on va faire jusqu'au vendredi soir pour éviter les courses de dernière minute [...]. Donc c'est très organisé chez nous.

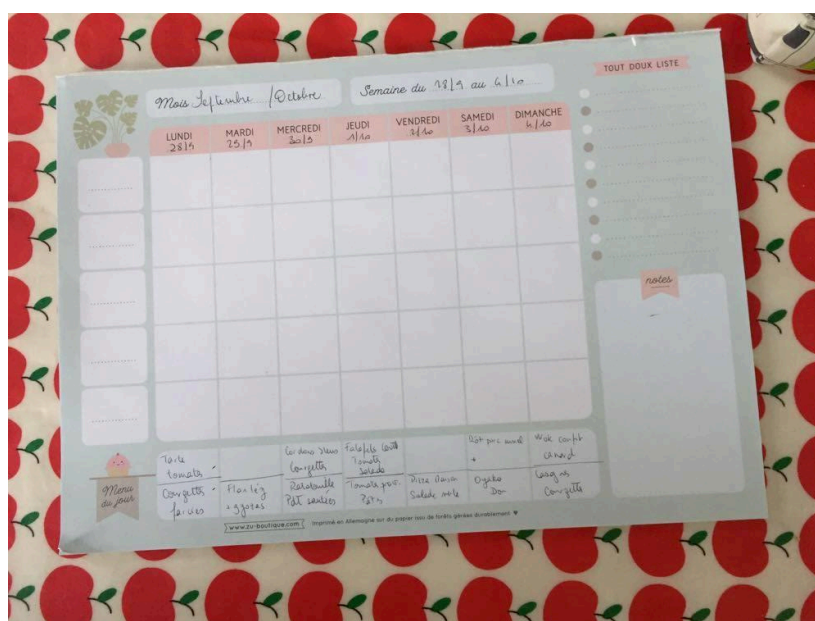


Figure 6 Meal planner at the Franquet household – For the first visit, on Tuesday, dinner is vegetable flan and gyozas

As they had been doing this for several years, they were able to reuse and adapt week menus from the previous years. The Franquet family rarely changed their meal plan during the week. Nathalie adjusted

the plan if she found out that her children had had the same food for lunch as what was planned for dinnertime:

**Nathalie:** Not every week, but it happens from time to time. Yeah, either because we feel like it, either because the children tell me they have had the same thing at lunch. Yeah, it happens, it happens from time to time.

**Nathalie :** Pas toutes les semaines mais ça arrive de temps en temps quand même. Ouais, soit par envie, soit les enfants m'disent qu'ils ont mangé la même chose à la cantine à midi. Oui ça arrive, ça arrive de temps en temps.

Her son's school canteen menus were not known beforehand, which made changing the meal plans difficult. For the third dinner at the Franquet household, the menu was carbonara spaghetti. Jules commented on what he had eaten at lunch, noting the redundancy of pasta in his daytime menu:

**Jules:** At lunch, guess what I ate? Pasta Bolognese [they are having pasta carbonara for diner]

**Nathalie:** The thing is, at their school, we don't have the menus, so, hum..., it's really a surprise  
*Dinner 3*

**Jules:** A midi, devinez ce que j'ai mangé? Des pâtes à la bolognaise [ils mangent de pâte carbonara pour le dîner]  
[...].

**Nathalie:** Le problème, c'est qu'au collège, on a pas les menus, donc .. c'est surprise en fait  
*Dîner 3*

Nathalie was concerned about the variety of her children's diet but she did not have the means to know that in advance. During exceptional weeks, such as on their vacations, or when they were too tired, the Franquet family temporarily gave up the meal plans:

**Nathalie:** It has been three years. At times, there are down phases and it can happens from time to time that we had planned only until the Wednesday, thinking that we would have time to do groceries. But if we can, we do it, yeah. I think there is one week out of ten when we don't do it, let's say in between each school period, or school break. And then there will be this once when we don't do it, because we don't have the energy or something like that. But no, no, we really try to stick to it.

**Nathalie :** Ça fait trois ans. A des moments y'a des coups de mou et ça peut arriver de temps en temps que on ait prévu que jusqu'au mercredi en s'disant qu'on aurait bien le temps d'aller faire les courses. Mais si on peut on l'fait ouais. J'pense que y'a qu'une semaine sur dix où on l'fait pas entre, on va dire entre chaque période scolaire, ou de vacances scolaires, pis y'a peut-être une fois où on l'fait pas par ce que, parce que maintenant on a pas l'énergie ou tout ça. Mais non, non on essaie vraiment de tenir.

At the Bennet household from Adelaide, Vanessa took care alone of deciding which meals to plan for the upcoming seven dinners but also consulted the other family members to make sure they agreed with her choices:

**Vanessa:** I do my meal planning once a week. So it's typically, sort of like come Friday I would start to think about what we're going to eat from Sunday through to the following Saturday. So I do, in the bigger supermarket, I do an online food order. So I normally submit my food order on a Saturday, normally a Saturday evening so that I can pick it up from the food store on Sunday.

**Craig:** Yeah, no, I don't have anything to do with that [the meal planning], I leave that all to her [laughter].

Vanessa also wrote down her meal plans and kept them over time, as a record of their eating and as a source of inspiration (Figure 7. Vanessa Bennet’s meal plan notepad):

**Vanessa:** I’ve got a little, like, A4 for meal plan notepad. So I’ve got the days of the week and then I’ve got the dinners down the side. So I could look back and tell you what we ate on Monday five weeks ago because I’ve got it all written on my thing.



Figure 7. Vanessa Bennet’s meal plan notepad

The meals were consistently planned from Monday to Thursday for the past 8 weeks. Some dishes were repeated over the weeks: Thai beef salad, tuna bake during the week, or burger on Friday evenings or on the weekend. Vanessa, as well as Marie, consulted several recipe books to find out the menus (Figure 8. Vanessa Bennet’s reference books for her meal plans). Vanessa initially began consulting these when she and Craig went on a diet, several years ago:

**Vanessa:** [I bought these books] just ideas for eating, portion control and exercise. Not that we were big people but just to lose some weight. And we found that the food was good. It was every day stuff that you have in your pantry. So it wasn’t kind of like just use one off type of thing. But it just meant that rather than using a jar of pasta sauce that had so many grams of sugar and all these other extra things that you could kind of accomplish the same thing by using, you know, tomato puree with some garlic and herbs and stuff and you got the same thing.

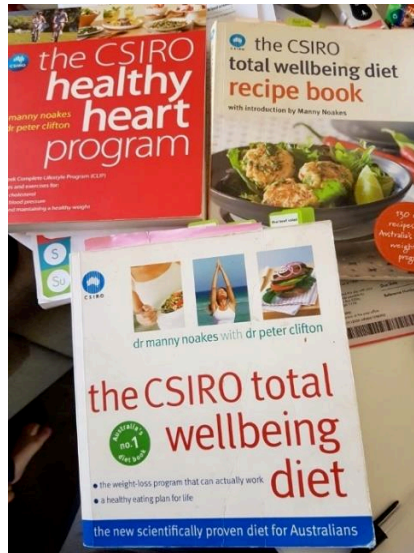


Figure 8. Vanessa Bennet's reference books for her meal plans

Vanessa described her meal plan from Monday to Thursday as being 'set in stone: it is what it is, what we plan is what we eat'. The Brown family (up. mid. class) also anticipated their family meals although the menus for Friday evening or for the weekend were not necessarily planned:

**Alison:** We try and do at least four to five, five days probably of meal plans. So we say roughly what we're going to have for those five [...]. The majority, it's probably, we know what we're going to eat but we cook it on the day or the night [...]. So tonight, like just, we've had wraps tonight, so like falafel wraps, because it's vegetables. Tomorrow night, we'll have some vegetables, with like a vegetarian lentil pie. Wednesday Luke's doing a Mexican meal. Chicken. I think, a Mexican meal, and then Thursday we have, I'm going to do ricotta gnocchi with, like, a homemade tomato sauce.

Variation in daily circumstances, independent of their own will, might have affected the meal plan as well:

**Alison:** Whether or not we swap, we might swap what we cook on each night, depending. Like tonight was quite warm, so we decided I was going to make ricotta gnocchi, so it was going to be a bit more labour-intensive, so we just had some wraps instead. It's much easier, it was quicker and it was also, like, we didn't have to be slaving over a stove when it's hot. So we swap sometimes.

**Alison:** The discussion and meal planning for this meal was had on the Sunday and part of the meal was purchased at our local foodie place at the Farmers Market.

Luke and I discussed the options of what to eat for dinner. We both agreed – as we had a busy day at work – something healthy, required simple preparation.

Luke prepared the potatoes and pumpkin for roasting to accompanied lentil lasagna and arancini ball from a market stall at the farmer'

*Food diary*

In Lyon, the weekly dinners at the Bourdon, the Imbert and the Ferret households (up. class) were also anticipated, although they did not use the expressions of 'meal plan' (or 'menus' in French) and the planning happened at a different stage of the food process. They planned their meals according to the fresh products they found at the local stores and markets such as vegetables, fruit, fish and meat. In the case of these households, the parents did a large part of their provisioning at street markets and



at independent butchers and buying local and seasonal products took up a central part in their rationales for food provisioning. Their weekly menus resulted from the shopping process itself and the decision about what to have for the week began at the street market and at the butcher. Céline Ferret (up. class) used to plans all the menus for the week in advance, but gave up because it was too much work:

**Céline** : So I've let go a bit on that [the anticipated preparation of meals] because it's true that I used to do many menus, with precise groceries lists, and I realised that I was getting fed up a bit, you know? For that matter, it was a real mental load: on Saturday, I took out the cooking book to find also a bit of pleasure, you know. I gave myself too much work. And so, well I stopped making menus. Essentially, when I go to the market, I think a bit about when I'm going to do with what I see. And the rest, I manage with what is in the cupboards and I adjust during the week. But it's true I stopped planning for the whole week.

**Céline** : Alors moi j'me suis un peu relâchée là-dessus [sur la préparation anticipée] par ce que c'est vrai que j'faisais beaucoup les menus avec des listes de courses assez précises, avant, et j'me suis aperçue que ça finissait par me saouler un p'tit peu tu vois ? Pour le coup c'était une vraie charge mentale : le samedi, allez, j'sortais les bouquins d'cuisine pour trouver un peu d'plaisir quand même tu vois, à trouver une nouvelle recette. Et puis en fait j'me mettais trop d'boulot quoi. J'me mettais trop d'boulot. Et bah j'ai arrêté d'faire des menus. Globalement quand j'vais sur l'marché j'réfléchis un p'tit peu à c'que j'vais faire avec c'que j'vois. Et puis le reste j'fais avec les placards et j'ajuste un peu dans la semaine. Mais c'est vrai que j'ai arrêté de vraiment tout planifier sur une semaine.

This type of planning was also possible because the food providers already had a certain amount of culinary experience and cooking skills acquired throughout their life, as I will describe below, which made it easier to imagine menus in situ, at the market, and have set ideas of the type of food they needed.

### 9.1.2. Preparing food in advance

The anticipation strategies mobilised by these families (in Lyon, the Bourdon, Imbert, Franquet, Ferret, Armand families; in Adelaide, the Bennet, Brown, Chapman families) went further than deciding in advance what to prepare. There were two types of 'batch' food work observed and reported: preparing and cooking a few dishes in advance – commonly called batch cooking (Lavelle et al. 2016) – and preparing a large amount of vegetables in advance, with or without cooking them.

Batch cooking implies preparing several dishes during the weekend for the first dinners of the week or even for the whole week. Between these two groups of participants, this happened occasionally at the Franquet household from Lyon and Bennet and Chapman households from Lyon. The dishes were broiled in the oven such as shepherd's pie (Bennet), a variety of vegetable gratin (Bourdon, Imbert and Franquet), soup and vegetable pies (Ferret), fish (Bourdon) or meat dishes cooked on the stove (chicken curry, Chapman):

**Nathalie:** Sometimes, on the weekend I cook sometimes for the Monday or the Tuesday evening [...]. We do gratins and things like that. We prepare in advance, and after we only need to reheat when we get home. It saves us quite a lot of time.

**Nathalie:** Le dimanche on cuisine parfois pour le lundi et le mardi soir [...]. On fait des gratins et des choses comme ça. On les prépare en avance, et après c'est bon ça on a plus qu'à réchauffer quand on rentre. Ça nous fait gagner pas mal de temps.

Marie-Cécile Bourdon (up. class) talked about having prepared during the weekend enough meals for the whole week:

**Marie-Cécile:** Between Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, there was a lot of cooking to do, of meals for the entire week [...]. I mean five [days]: Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, for the children [...]. Really, we rarely cook in the evenings. It's always ready. In fact, we do batch-cooking without knowing. I have some friends who told us about it once: "I think that is what you do". "Yeah, indeed, it's not far from what we do" [laughter].

**Marie-Cécile :** Entre le samedi après-midi et le dimanche matin y'avait quand même de la cuisine, fin des repas près pour tous les soirs de la semaine [...]. Enfin cinq [jours] : dimanche, lundi, mardi, mercredi, jeudi, vendredi pour les enfants [...]. On fait rarement, vraiment, à manger le soir. C'est toujours tout prêt. Nous, on fait du batch cooking sans le savoir en fait. J'ai des copains qui nous ont parlé de ça une fois : ' je pense que c'est ce que vous faites '. ' Ah oui, effectivement, c'est pas loin de ce qu'on fait ' [rire] !

This was also typically, what happens at the Ferret household (up. class). The first visit at their home occurred on a Sunday morning. I accompanied Céline, Jérôme and Noémie (7) to the market and after their usual weekend brunch, Céline began to prepare a few dishes for the beginning of the week, without the help of Jérôme. She asked him that, while she was the kitchen – a separate room – he did an activity with Noémie. Céline prepared pastry for a leek pie. Because she had bought a lot of leek, she prepared as well a soup of leek, carrots, celery, potatoes and store bough broth. Both were prepared without following a written recipe. The next evening, Céline sent me a picture of their dinner, commenting: 'one soup, three possibilities' (*Figure 9. Batch cooking of soup on Sunday, eaten for Monday dinner - Ferret*).



*Figure 9. Batch cooking of soup on Sunday, eaten for Monday dinner - Ferret*

She adjusted the soup to the likes of everybody, by mixing one and adding vermicelli to another. At the Chapman household in Adelaide, a few dishes were occasionally prepared during the weekend when parents felt the upcoming week was going to be particularly rushed:

**Glen:** You know, me and Amy, the plan is tonight [Sunday] that there's a chicken and lentil, like a curry that me and Amy are going to make, so then we'll have that in the fridge for the next couple of nights, so we can just sort of cater for the kids.

**Fairley:** So, sometimes you do that and you prepare a little bit in advance?

**Glen:** If we're organised enough and just not too tired, we like to, we try and do that. It doesn't always happen.

The other form of anticipated cooking was preparing fresh vegetables during the weekend so that they were ready to cook or reheat when parents got home in the evening. This happened at the Bourdon, the Imbert (up. class, Lyon ), the Bennet (up. mid. class, Adelaide) and occasionally at the Brown (up. mid. class, Adelaide) households. The second visit at the Bourdon household took place on a Saturday evening; beginning at 6:30 PM. Benoit was in the kitchen since 6 and also spent some time cooking in the afternoon (*Figure 10. Dinner 2, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit precooked chards for the upcoming week* and *Figure 11. Dinner 2, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit cuts up the chards so that they will be ready for a gratin during the week. The cod cheeks will be cooked on eaten over the weekend and perhaps on Monday as well.*):

**Benoit:** I have cleaned a bit what there was to clean [of vegetables]. I made some green peas in early afternoon, in the steamer, to put some green peas in a Tupperware. Marie-Cécile cooked green beans this morning [for tonight's dinner]. We prepared the things that are a bit difficult], shelling the peas, etc., the chards, once this is done, then it's easy afterwards [...]. So this is classic. We do our best to cook, when we can, the vegetables quickly so that, afterwards, we are not annoyed, we put everything in the fridge and when we have dinner, we have fresh products.

## Dinner 2

**Benoit:** J'ai un peu nettoyé ce qu'il y avait à nettoyer [de légumes]. J'ai fait des p'tits pois aussi en début d'après-midi, à la cocotte, pour mettre des p'tits pois au Tupperware. Marie-Cécile a fait cuire les haricots verts ce matin [pour le dîner de ce soir. ...]. [On a préparé] les trucs un peu pénibles, les p'tits pois à écosser etc., les blettes, une fois que c'est fait, après on est tranquilles [...]. Voilà, en fait, c'est classique, on essaie au maximum de cuire, quand on peut, les légumes frais rapidement, comme ça, après, on n'est pas emmerdés, on les met au frigo et puis quand on va manger, on a des trucs tout frais.

### Dîner 2

**Benoit:** So [this afternoon], I peeled [the chards], I precooked them, in water with vinegar. Then we dry them up, I cut them in small pieces. And there, typically, we will take out a jar of tomatoes, we put some pieces of parmesan and then it goes in the oven [...]. And so, the gratin of chards, it's really the thing, when we are tired, we don't really feel like doing it. And so, now, at the moment, we are rather in good conditions. [The long part], it's the peeling phase, cooking for half an hour, draining them.

**Fairley:** And how long can you keep them in the fridge?

**Benoit:** The week. Anyhow, it never goes past a week [...]. We also do a lot of spinach. Well, now, it's no longer in season, but we prepare them in advance. But there, for that matter, we will eat them one or two days later. Typically, often something the children enjoy, it's a gratin of spinach with a bit of cream and lard. And also some gnocchi, some Crozet or things like that in it: they love it.

### Dinner 2

**Benoit :** Donc [cette après-midi], j'ai épluché [les blettes], je les ai précuites dans de l'eau vinaigrée salée. Ensuite on les fait sécher, j'les coupe en p'tits morceaux. Et là, aussi, typiquement, on sortira un pot de tomate, on met des copeaux de parmesan et puis on passe au four [...]. Et donc, le gratin de blettes, c'est quand même le truc, quand on est fatigué, on a pas très envie de le faire et donc, là, en ce moment, on est plutôt en forme. [Ce qui est long], c'est la phase épluchage, cuisson pendant une demi-heure, les égoutter.

**Fairley :** Et combien de temps pour pouvez le garder au frigo, ça [les blettes conservées dans un Tupperware] ?

**Benoit :** La semaine. De toute façon, ça dépasse jamais la semaine [...]. On fait aussi beaucoup d'épinards. Bon là, c'est plus la saison, mais on les prépare à l'avance. Mais là, pour le coup, les épinards on va les manger un ou deux jours après. Typiquement, souvent, un truc que les enfants aiment bien, c'est un gratin d'épinard avec un peu de crème fraîche et des lardons. Et puis des gnocchis, des Crozet, ou des trucs comme ça dedans : ça, ils adorent.

### Dîner 2



Figure 10. Dinner 2, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit precooked chards for the upcoming week



*Figure 11. Dinner 2, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit cuts up the chards so that they will be ready for a gratin during the week. The cod cheeks will be cooked and eaten over the weekend and perhaps on Monday as well.*

Benoit Bourdon (up. class) usually bought fish at the local street market on Saturday mornings and one of the dishes he prepared for the rest of the week was gravlax salmon. Gravlax was on the menu for the fourth dinner, during which leftovers of the whole week served:

**Marie-Cécile:** It's great for breakfast and it's excellent on toast with butter. And now, he masters the recipe. He makes it on Saturday, and often prepared it on Sunday evening. And one day, we got mixed up with our organisation and he did it on Monday evening, or on a Tuesday, and in fact, it was better.  
*Dinner 4*

**Marie-Cécile:** c'est très bien pour le p'tit déjeuner aussi et c'est excellent sur une tartine de pain grillé avec du beurre. Et puis maintenant il maîtrise bien la recette. Il le fait le samedi et le préparais souvent le dimanche soir. Et puis un jour, où on a buggé sur l'organisation, il l'a fait un lundi soir ou un mardi et en fait, il était meilleur.  
*Dîner 4*

The fifth visit at the Bourdon household (up. class) was on a Saturday morning. At 10:30, Benoit was already in the kitchen. He went to the market early in the morning, with the children. Most of the food for lunch was already prepared – green salad, tomatoes, and cucumbers – and he was about to cook some fish. As he was not at home during the afternoon, he was also preparing some dishes for the rest of the weekend and upcoming week: tomato sauce, ratatouille and two types of fish (hake fillet and sole) (*Figure 12. Lunch 5, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit prepared some vegetables for the upcoming week and Figure 13. Lunch 5, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit was preparing tomato sauce for the upcoming week*):



*Figure 12. Lunch 5, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit prepared some vegetables for the upcoming week*



*Figure 13. Lunch 5, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit was preparing tomato sauce for the upcoming week*

The parents who did the food work in advance on the weekend also prepared rather elaborated dishes or that were time consuming in their making. The Imbert household (up. class) washed and cut up most of the vegetables as soon as they came back from the Saturday market. They then cooked them and kept them in the freezer, defrosting the meal portions the day before:

**Stéphane:** It's mostly vegetables [that are prepared in advance]. All that is carbohydrates..., so we use very little potatoes [...]. Everything that is pasta, rice we do it rather on the same day. However, everything that is vegetables, it's true that from the moment we come back from the market, usually it takes us one or two hours, depending on the quantity: we will trim the green beans, we will cut the pumpkins, we will cook everything in the steamer, put everything into pots, in jars and directly freeze everything. So that, in the evening, when it's time to eat – considering we would have taken out the jar from the freezer the previous day so that it has time to defrost – so in the evening, we only need to reheat the jar directly in the micro-wave, or mix it up, a stir fry it in the wok.

**Fairley:** And you do you do that together, on the weekend, when you prepare, cut up?

**Stéphane:** Very often, yeah, yeah [...]. Most of the time, from the moment when one of us comes back from the market and that we have quite a lot of things, we get to it, either in the kitchen, or in the lounge room and we prepare all the vegetables, we cook all the vegetables.

**Stéphane :** C'est surtout les légumes [qui sont préparés à l'avance]. Tout ce qui est féculent, donc, on utilise très peu les pommes de terre [...]. Donc tout ce qui est pâtes, riz, on les fait plutôt le jour même. Par contre, tout ce qui est légumes, c'est vrai qu'à partir du moment où on sort du marché, en règle général, ça nous prend une ou deux heures en fonction de la quantité, on va équeuter les haricots, on va couper les potirons, on va tout faire cuire à la vapeur, tout mettre en pot, en bocal et directement tout congeler, de façon à ce que le soir, quand on a besoin de manger - sachant qu'on aura sorti le bocal du congéle' en fait la veille, pour avoir du temps pour le décongeler, de façon à ce que le soir, on ait juste à réchauffer le bocal directement au micro-ondes, ou mettre un coup de mixeur, ou le faire revenir dans un wok, voilà.

**Fairley :** Et est-ce que vous faites ça ensemble le weekend, quand vous préparez, vous prédécoupez?

**Stéphane :** Très souvent ouais, ouais, ouais [...]. La plupart du temps, à partir du moment où l'un ou les deux on revienne du marché et qu'on a pas mal de choses, on s'attelle, soit à la cuisine, soit au salon, et on prépare tous les légumes, on fait cuire tous les légumes.

In Adelaide, at the Brown and Bennet families (up. mid. class), the vegetables were prepared and stored raw in the fridge (*Figure 14. 'Three nights of veg prepared', food diary Bennet, Sunday*). This was done on top of preparing the menus for the whole week:

**Alison:** For example, we're going to have a busy week, so we've decided to, like I've cut up heaps of vegetables for tomorrow night so that we can just cook them when we get home and sort of have that part already done.

**Craig:** So pretty much Sunday afternoons we put time aside. Once we get the fruit and veg, we'll go through and I'll help cutting up the salads, cutting up veggies, getting all that organised, making sure we've got the right sort of food that we need for during the week.



Figure 14. 'Three nights of veg prepared', food diary Bennet, Sunday

Sometimes, if some meat were cooked during the weekend leftover would be kept for the following dinners:

**Vanessa:** But then because I meal plan on a Sunday, say, for example, if we wanted to, I'll be like, what do you want this week, Craig!? So: 'I want roast pork tonight': we might ask his mum and his brother if they want to come over for dinner as well. So I'll buy more meat and sometimes I might do like a pork and a chicken so that we can have leftovers in, because we have salad for every day... we can have the leftover meat in our salad for lunch for the week. And then we'll invite family over for dinner as well.

However, for the Bourdon (up. class), it was easier to prepare vegetables in advance than meat:

**Benoit:** We know they have [meat] at school. We know is less easy..., I mean it's easy to make a dish of vegetables that we can keep 4-5 days without problem. When there is meat in it, it's maybe less easy. So we don't forbid doing some. When we do a sauté de veau, we add a piece of meat, or if there is leftover chicken. But we don't systematise meat in the evening.

**Benoit :** On sait qu'ils en mangent [de la viande] à l'école, on sait que c'est moins facile, enfin c'est plus facile de faire un plat de légumes qu'on peut garder 4-5 jours sans problème. Quand y'a de la viande dedans c'est peut-être un petit peu moins évident. Donc on interdit pas d'en faire. Quand on fait un sauté de veau, on rajoute un morceau de viande, ou si y'a un reste de poulet froid. Mais on systématiser pas la viande le soir.

Another type of meal plan was described by the Davies (low. mid. class). The parents did not eat with their children nor did not anticipate the meals prepared for them but Sally ordered weekly boxes constituted of ready-made meals:

**Sally:** I mainly shop for the kids. I don't shop a lot for me and Adam. We've been having a lot of like ready-made meals. We've got Youfoodz. I don't know if you have that over there. So it's fresh foods delivered to your door – so it's not from the freezer – and you just microwave it in minutes. I usually just do one order a week. They have all these deals all the time, like you can get nine meals for like \$59, which is pretty cheap, considering that I don't then have to cook anything [...]. This one [she is showing me the box] is cranberry roast chicken and pumpkin mash. So that's all in there, ready to go. You just lift the side, two minutes. So it's all yeah, cooked fresh, put in there. You can get it in some supermarkets, like some, they must have a deal with some, so like petrol stations. I guess people get it for the convenience as well on the way home, but yeah, I just do an order, and I'll usually get the nine meals



for whatever that is, and it works out to about , depending on the deal, \$6.50 to \$7.00 a meal. We do get a bit sick of it after a while, because it is a bit repetitive, and so then we might do like a Hello Fresh box.

Sally evaluated the cost of the ready-made meals in terms of money – she considered the meal boxes to be cheap – and time, which was an indication of the time stress they were experiencing in their daily family life.

## 9.2. *Ad hoc approaches*

The other families, who were all intermediary or lower middle class households (in Lyon: Comescu, Obecanov, Lebrun, Nimaga, André and Rizzo families; in Adelaide: Chapman and Davies families) organised their meals daily, operating in a less planned approach. They prepared the meals every evening, in the lapse of time between coming home from work and an appropriate dinnertime hour. This type of meal preparation was done either by shopping for food on the way home from work or by using what was stored in the pantry, fridge and freezer. This type of approach to providing family meals was partially adopted as a choice, partly resulted from external constraints. Typically, when there was only one child to be fed (Obecanov, Bot<sup>88</sup> and Rizzo) and when parents had sufficient time in the evening (Obecanov, Nimaga, Rizzo and Lebrun) the parents were happy about the way they got dinners ready. The couple of families from Adelaide who adopted this rather improvised approach (Chapman and Davies families) and were under considerable time stress experienced their method rather negatively, wishing there was another way but not being able to adopt one either.

In Lyon, for Guillaume Rizzo (int. mid. class) and Pierre Lebrun (int. mid. class), this form of daily food work was claimed as skilful practices of being able to cook well and quickly:

**Fairley:** You always prepare the meal the same day?

**Guillaume:** Always.

**Fairley:** Do don't prepare anything in advance?

**Guillaume:** Never. And even leftovers... In fact, preparing my lunch for the next day, that, I can't do, I mean, it's not... However, I do, you know at the theatre when I work, there is a kitchen, there is a frying pan and, well, I will prepare some chards, I will do something proper, I mean, you see? And Zoé (10), I feel she will be educated in that manner: knowing how to cook, quickly and good. I also love to cook, spend a morning, but I invite people over, rather on a weekend or during the holidays. Like, try some things.

**Fairley :** Tu prépares toujours le repas pour le jour-même?

**Guillaume :** Toujours.

**Fairley :** Tu prépares pas des choses en avance?

**Guillaume :** Jamais. Et même les restes, en fait, moi, même préparer sa gamelle pour le lendemain, ça je sais pas faire, enfin, c'est pas... Parce contre, même moi, tu vois, au théâtre où je suis, y'a une cuisine, y'a une poêle, et ben je vais me faire des blettes, je vais faire un truc correct, enfin, tu vois? Et Zoé (10), je sens qu'elle est, qu'elle va être éduquée de cette façon-là, savoir se faire à manger, rapide et bien en fait, voilà. Après j'adore aussi cuisiner, passer une

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<sup>88</sup> Issa had 3 children but he had partial custody of them and sometimes only had them one at a time.

matinée, mais j'invite des gens, un weekend plutôt, ou pendant les vacances. Tenter des choses quoi.

Throughout the visits, Guillaume indeed appeared to be particularly proud of providing what he considered healthy and tasty meals without much anticipation (*Figure 15. Dinner 2 Rizzo: Zoé is kneading the ravioli pastry* and *Figure 16. Dinner 2 Rizzo: Guillaume filling up the home made ravioli*):



*Figure 15. Dinner 2 Rizzo: Zoé is kneading the ravioli pastry*



Figure 16. Dinner 2 Rizzo: Guillaume filling up the home made ravioli

Table 15 Dinner menus of the 4 visits at the Rizzo family

Dinner 1 - Thursday	Breaded chicken cutlet, fried potatoes, tomato salad, bread – yogurt, strawberries
Dinner 2 - Thursday	Homemade ravioli, homemade tomato sauce, fried zucchinis – fruit salad
Dinner 3 - Thursday	melon, ratatouille (raw tomatoes for Zoé instead as she does not want ratatouille), pork tenderloin (roasted ham for Zoé instead), rice – a selection of vanilla and passion fruit ice cream
Dinner 4 - Monday	Fried potatoes and zucchinis, fried egg (Zoé is served egg but does not eat it, salad (raw tomato instead for Zoé) – yogurt, apple, chocolate

Yet Guillaume also had a sufficient amount of time in the evening to get dinner ready: about an hour to an hour and a half. He also had an easy access to multiple food stores – the local and organic ones he liked – just a few minutes' walk from his apartment. Pierre Lebrun from Lyon (int. mid. class) also

boasted about such skills. His work schedule was quite irregular but he was usually able to finish in time to get his daughters from school. At the seventh visit at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class) in Lyon, Pierre was preparing dinner (*Figure 17 Dinner 7, Lebrun: Pierre happily displaying his tian of courgettes* and *Figure 18. Dinner 7, Lebrun: Family meal resulting of an ad hoc preparation*):

**Fairley:** What are you preparing Pierre?

**Pierre:** A chicken with chanterelles in cream sauce, steamed turnips from the garden and a zucchini tian

**Fairley:** When did you decide you were going to do that?

**Pierre:** Two minutes ago [laughter]

*Laëtitia, who is also in the kitchen, also laughs*

*Dinner 7*

**Fairley:** Qu'est-ce que tu prépares Pierre ?

**Pierre :** Un poulet aux girolles à la crème, des navets vapeur du jardin et un tian de courgettes

**Fairley :** T'as décidé que t'allais faire ça quand ?

**Pierre :** Y'a deux minutes [rire]

*Laëtitia, qui est également dans la cuisine, rigole aussi*

*Dîner 7*



*Figure 17 Dinner 7, Lebrun: Pierre happily displaying his tian of courgettes*



Figure 18. Dinner 7, Lebrun: Family meal resulting of an ad hoc preparation

Pierre talked during his interview about how he liked to cook in an improvised manner, which was, for him, a testimony to his cooking skills. This type of improvisation was allowed by Pierre's cooking competences, but also by the anticipation in their food provisioning (ordering large quantities every two weeks, which Laëtitia was responsible for), complemented by vegetables from the garden. Pierre also mentioned he rarely felt stressed for time in the evening, contrary to Laëtitia who was witnessed concerned about serving dinner at an appropriate time and getting children to bed early enough. The Obecanov – who had an only child, like Guillaume Rizzo – prepared food daily as well:

**Sophie** : Planning, I maybe used to do it a bit when we were just the two of us, but more in the aspect that cooking for two is sometimes difficult [...]. But really, planning all the meals of the week, I am incapable of that.

*Dinner 2*

**Sophie**: La planification, je le faisais peut-être un p'tit peu quand on était que tous les deux, mais plus dans l'sens où cuisiner pour deux, parfois c'est difficile [...]. Mais vraiment, de planifier, moi, tous mes repas de la semaine, j'en suis incapable.

*Dîner 2*

Sophie did not like to plan their dinners in advance, she wanted to be able to follow her daily, spontaneous desires:

**Sophie**: Yesterday, [Viktor] went shopping. He told me 'what do you want? I said, well listen, I would like to eat a ceviche one of these days.

**Sophie**: Hier, [Viktor] est allé faire deux-trois courses. Il me dit ' qu'est-ce que t'as envie ? ' J'lui dit ben écoute je mangerai bien un ceviche un de ces jours.

This form of organisation implied their dinner were 'simpler':

**Sophie:** And then I know that in the end, when I come home in the evening, even if there's not much, there's always a bit of rice, there's always pasta, I have some canned vegetables, there are two or three things in the freezer [...]. The advantage now is that she's grown up, so she takes her bath on her own, and that leaves us time to cook in the meantime. In general, it's simple in the evening, we rarely get into a big, elaborate cooking in the evening because we don't have time: in winter it's soup. My daughter is starting to complain now, she's getting fed up with soup. Soup, grated carrot, a tabbouleh, a green salad made, a quiche with a green salad. Anyway, that's it. It's always home-made, 90% of the time. But in general, it's quite succinct, quite basic [...]. So, when I'm in quieter periods, when I can only have an appointment at ten in the morning, when I'm not very far from home, so I'll stay at home in the early morning, when I have time, and I have enough to make a tabbouleh, to make little things like that, then yes, it's going to be a pleasure because I'm going to make things that I like. But when it has to be done in the evening, when we get home, when we haven't planned it, I'll go for the simplest thing.

**Sophie:** Et puis je sais qu'au final, le soir, je rentre, même si y'a pas grand-chose, y'a toujours un peu d'riz, y'a toujours des pâtes, j'ai des légumes en conserve un peu, y'a deux trois trucs dans le congèl [...]. L'avantage, maintenant, c'est qu'elle est grande, donc elle prend le bain toute seule, et puis ça nous laisse le temps de pouvoir cuisiner à ce moment-là. En général, le soir c'est simple, on rentre rarement dans une grande cuisine très élaborée le soir par manque de temps: l'hiver c'est la soupe. Ma fille commence à râler là, elle commence à en avoir marre de la soupe. Soupe, carotte râpée, un taboulé, une salade verte composée, une quiche avec une salade verte. Enfin, voilà. C'est toujours fait maison, à 90% du temps. Mais en général, assez succinct, assez basique [...]. Alors, quand je suis dans des périodes plus calme, que je peux avoir un rendez-vous qu'a dix heures du matin, que je suis pas très loin de la maison, donc du coup que je vais rester à la maison en début de matinée, que j'ai le temps, puis j'ai de quoi me faire un taboulé, voilà, de faire des p'tites choses comme ça, là oui, ça va être un plaisir parce que je vais faire des choses que j'aime. Mais quand il faut que ce soit fait le soir, en rentrant, qu'on a pas prévu, je vais aller au plus simple.

Sophie characterised her cooking as simple but the dishes she described still required a significant amount of free time (in particular preparing the fresh vegetables for a tabbouleh, for example) and as she noted, Elisa's independence facilitated this. Moreover, as Sophie acknowledged, several supermarkets were situated close to their house and they could easily buy food on their way home from work and she benefited from rather flexible work hours, although this flexibility varied over the years. There also existed some anticipation strategies at the Obecanov household and particularly that of storing sufficient carbohydrates and canned vegetables in their pantry, though Viktor shopped for fresh products (vegetables, dairy and meat) on a rather daily basis, when returning from work.

*Table 16 Menus at the Obecanov household for the 5 visits*

Dinner 1 - Monday	Raw vegetables (radish and tomato), salad, grilled chorizo – yogurt, apple sauce
Dinner 2 - Tuesday	Salad, raw tomatoes, meat balls - clafoutis
Dinner 3, picnic - Tuesday	Quiche, cherry tomatoes, dry sausage, chorizo, cheese, bread
Dinner 4 - Wednesday	Melon, corn cake, croque-monsieur, salad – ice cream for Elisa, apricots for Sophie, peaches for Viktor
Dinner 5 - Wednesday	Dry sausage, store bought nems and samosas, salad – ice cream

Compared to the menus at the Bourdon (up. class) or Franquet (up. mid. class) households, for example, those at the Obecanov household who did not prepare meals or menus in advance, were significantly simpler: there was less variety and quantity of vegetables (the vegetables served during the visits were mostly tomatoes and salad) (Figure 19. Dinner 4 at the Obecanov household: Melon as a starter then croque-monsieur and salad as the main course):



Figure 19. Dinner 4 at the Obecanov household: Melon as a starter then croque-monsieur and salad as the main course

The Bo did not plan their dinners in advance either:

**Ana** [Saturday, 18:31]: So I'm thinking about the meal tonight. And we're going to eat the leftovers from lunch. I've just informed Issa too (that we're going to eat the leftovers). He nodded his head 😊

*Food diary*

**Ana** [samedi, 18h31]: Sinon je suis en train de penser pour le repas de ce soir. Et on va manger les restes de ce midi. Je viens d'informer Issa aussi (Du fait qu'on va manger les restes). Il a hoché de la tête 😊

*Food diary*

**Ana**: Last night [Sunday night] we ate leftovers again. We didn't think about it at all, I knew we had a lot of things already prepared in the fridge. So everyone ate what they felt like. Today I went to work. For lunch I'm having a Tupp', with the rice and vegetables from yesterday, which are really delicious. For tonight I don't know yet. I discussed it a bit with Issa before leaving. He's staying at home with Lila. So I have to see with Alina because Irina was a vegetarian. If it's still the case I'll tell Issa, and maybe he'll do something vegetarian, I suggested him to do it with the cooker, it's faster and less headache. But I don't know yet, we'll have to keep in touch later today.

*Food diary*

**Ana**: Hier soir [dimanche soir] on a re mangé des restes. On avait pas du tout réfléchi, je savais qu'on avait bcp de choses déjà préparés dans le frigo. Donc chacun a mangé ce qui lui donnait envie. Aujourd'hui moi je suis partie au boulot. Pour midi je prends un Tupp', avec le riz et les légumes d'hier, qui sont super délicieux. Pour ce soir je ne sais pas encore. J'en ai discuté un peu avec Issa avant de partir. Lui il reste à la maison avec Lila. Donc je dois réconfirmer avec Alina car Irina était végétarienne. Si c tjrs le cas je dirai à Issa, et peut-être il fera un truc végétarien, je lui ai proposé de faire avec le cuiseur, c plus rapide et moins de prise de tête. Mais voilà je ne sais pas encore, on va devoir se tenir au courant dans la journée.

*Food diary*

**Issa Nimaga:** For fruit and vegetables I took a little of what I felt like without thinking too much. Knowing that Ana wanted 'seasonal fruit'.

*Food diary Issa*

**Issa Nimaga:** Pour fruits et légumes j'ai pris un peu ce qui m'a donné envie sans trop réfléchir. Sachant que Ana avait envie de 'fruits de saison'

*Food diary Issa*

**Ana Nimaga:** The only comment I had [about doing this diary] was that sometimes we don't plan, and sometimes it's hard to anticipate. I think you may have noticed that. That's why several times I wrote 'after' instead of 'before'.

*Food diary Ana*

**Ana Nimaga :** La seule remarque que j'ai eue c'est que des fois chez nous on planifie pas , et des fois c. difficile à anticiper. Je crois que tu as pu le remarquer. Ce qui fait que plusieurs fois j'ai écrit 'après' au lieu de 'avant'.

*Food diary Ana*

Ana and Issa did not talk about their food preparation in terms of anticipation strategies. On the contrary, Ana described their practices as a form of non-anticipation ('we have not yet thought about it', 'for tonight, I don't know yet'; "on avait pas du tout réfléchi", "pour ce soir, je ne sais pas encore") or beginning to think about dinnertime at 6:30 PM), yet there still existed some form of advanced planning in their practices: they tended to cook larger dishes that could be eaten over several days. There was not necessarily rationales of long-term variety in the organisation process and these portions would then be characterised as 'leftovers'.

In Adelaide, Sally Davies (low. mid. class) also talked about the evening food preparation for the children's meals needing to be quick and easy, so that she could prioritise for other family imperatives (Jabs et al. 2007): spending some time with her children, getting them all bathed and in bed at an appropriate hour:

**Sally:** So yeah, anything that takes longer than half an hour, I'm really not into serving, making. So yeah, usually I guess anything longer than boiling rice, that's my limit.

Amy Do described their dinner menus as simple and the detailed she provides suggested the cooking process was shorter than at the Obecanov household:

**Amy:** So we keep it simple with, like, Bolognese, things like hotdogs, like a simple carbonara. Like I said, a lot of carbs to fill up the kids, but the prep has to be, like 5 minutes of shopping at the most, you know, 5-10 minutes of it actually cooking, the prep. So even sometimes, when we want to steam veggies, it's like: "oh that's too long!" So yeah, we have bought at times, like those steamed packs you just put in the microwave. It is literally within 5, 10 minutes of the cutting process, 10 minutes of the cooking and it's gotta be on the table. If we get home a bit earlier then we can have a bit more prep time but most work nights, it is literally that 20 minutes: not a lot of prep, get it cooked and get it on the table [...]. So it's got to be quick, it's got to be something they like and I'm not cooking a meal for us [and one for them].



The following table, listing the menus served at the Chapman household from Adelaide (int. mid. class) over 11 days showed how the more elaborate dinners were prepared in advance, on weekends. They did not manage to meal plan for the entire week, though, and on most school nights, the menus were simpler, sometimes exclusively based on carbohydrates and dairy:

*Table 17 Menus reported on a WhatsApp food diary by Amy and Glen during 11 days*

Thursday	Pasta with leftover Bolognese, steamed vegetables
Friday	Chicken wraps (for the parents) Chicken nuggets and gems (for the children)
Saturday	Chicken curry and microwaved brown rice (for the parents) Hot chips, bread and butter for children - chocolate cheesecake
Sunday	Roast chicken, vegetables, gravy ( <i>Figure 20. Sunday roast chicken at the Chapman household</i> )
Monday	Macaroni and cheese (for children) ( <i>Figure 21 Monday dinner for the Chapman household children: Macaroni and cheese</i> ) Defrosted chicken curry made during the weekend (for parents)
Tuesday [Children at grandmother, Amy's father over for dinner]	Amy and her father had takeout Glen had his leftover lunch
Wednesday	Pre-made frozen meal for parents Noodles for the children
Thursday	Chicken and salad wraps
Friday	Sausages, plain pasta, steamed broccoli
Saturday	Take away
Sunday	Dinner at Amy's mother

**Amy:** Dinner tonight was cooked by both Glen and I. Glen prepared to food and started the cooking process. I finished it and served up. We all ate roast chicken with veg and gravy. This wasn't stressful as once the veg is cut and out in the oven there isn't much more to do other than checking on it. This is about a 1.5-2 hours process so we choose to have roast on the weekend as we have more time. The kids enjoy this meal (chicken more than the veg 😊) but we keep offering veg to encourage good habits. All ate at the dinner table in our usual spots with no television. Kids ate fruit after their meal.

*Food diary*



*Figure 20. Sunday roast chicken at the Chapman household*



*Figure 21 Monday dinner for the Chapman household children: Macaroni and cheese*

**Amy** [Monday]: Mac and cheese for the kids. Requested by Hannah and a quick and easy meal on work/school night when we don't have a lot of time to make dinner.

*Food diary*

Taking care of all the food preparation on a daily basis happened under certain conditions. First, this ad hoc approach to preparing meals was conditioned to rather high levels of anticipation of the food provisioning. The Lebrun family (int. mid. class) ordered food online every two weeks for approximately 450 euros, which Pierre occasionally complemented with a few fresh products bought in local stores. Moreover, the Obecanov, Lebrun, Nimaga and Rizzo families (int. mid. class) all benefited from rather flexible work schedules, which varied over the year but they did not voice as

much concerns about everyday time stress as did the other parents. They were therefore able to provide meals that they considered to be quite balanced and healthy (in the sense that there was at least a bit of vegetables and some carbohydrates, sometimes some meat). Also, Sophie Obecanov (int. mid. class), Pierre Lebrun (int. mid. class) and Guillaume Rizzo (int. mid. class) all felt confident in their cooking skills. The Chapman (int. mid. class) and Davies (low. mid. class) families from Adelaide were under considerable time stress in the evenings, and they felt the only option was to feed their children easily prepared meals (such as pasta) or take away (like burgers for the first dinner at the Davies). A certain dislike of cooking for Angélique and Pascal André resulted in the same types of meals (based on carbohydrates in majority and with few vegetables). Moreover, the children of the Chapman, Davies and André families were considered to be quite 'picky' eaters, which meant it was all the more difficult for their parents to find healthy menus that they would accept to eat.

Therefore, perhaps the possibility of anticipating family meals was related to the composition of the menus in themselves. When the Imbert households (up. class) had carbohydrates for dinner – which was not usually the case, as their dinners were usually constituted of vegetables and lean meat or fish – they prepared them in the evening, before their dinner. Benoit Bourdon (up. class) argued it was easier to prepare vegetables in advance than meat, which conservation could be more risky over a long period than that of vegetables (depending on the preparation). Overall, many of the anticipation strategies revolved around finding the right vegetables to cook, but that also varied over the week, which provided interesting nutritional value – such as 'green vegetables' – which everybody could eat and would like. Once these multiple imperatives were reached, the vegetables could be prepared in advance. Preparing vegetables was a time consuming activity but in return, this preparation could be done in advance as these food items kept well in the fridge. On the contrary, the preparation of carbohydrates was more rarely anticipated. Some parents from Lyon (Obecanov, Lebrun and Rizzo: int. mid. class), rejected anticipation, positioning them as opposed to the type of cooking skills they valued for themselves (being creative and efficient enough to provide 'good and simple' meals quickly). Nevertheless, these parents who had significant cookings skills still mobilised forms of anticipation in their food work, which was highly interiorized and hardly conscientised.

## **10. Repetition and creation in the experience of food work**

Different relationships to the activity of providing family meals were observed, which ranged from a relaxing and pleasurable experience to a stressful chore and related to contrasted visions of the notion and experience of care within the family. Mothers and fathers' experiences of providing family meals were constructed around a series of dichotomies between the repetition of food work activities and

creative cooking, between routines or exceptional practices and responsibilities. There were also tensions between what was considered essential food and what was viewed as more futile, which was associated with the duality of maintaining health on the one hand and developing pleasure on the other. These oppositions were built as well on different uses of time, which was either dedicated to others or dedicated to oneself. Finally, the parents' discourses revealed unequal valorisation of their own efforts: the food work that was other or care oriented (maintenance) was devalued and the one that was self and leisure oriented (creation) was praised.

### **10.1. Food work care as a burden**

Ten of the thirteen mothers of this research talked about the experience of everyday food preparation as a chore (Marie-Cécile, Irina, Céline, Nathalie, Sophie, Laëtitia, Angélique in Lyon and Alison, Amy and Sally in Adelaide), including those who anticipated the food preparation during the weekend (Marie-Cécile, Céline, Nathalie and Alison). They did, however, mention liking it when the conditions were favourable, that is to say having enough time, availability and energy, which was usually limited to some weekends. For Irina, Céline and Alison preparing family meals was difficult because they experienced the time bind negatively, which was accentuated by the fact their husbands rarely cooked:

**Irina:** Sometimes cooking three meals is really a, pff, uh, not a punishment, but sometimes it's really a task that feels burdensome, most of the time. So, on the weekends, I enjoy cooking, but during the week, I must admit that it's, I take it as a burden. It's only because of time. I lack the time, because we have a very strict rhythm. I want to be at the table at 6:30, at the latest at 6:45, 6:50.

**Irina:** Des fois, préparer trois repas c'est vraiment une, pff, euh, pas punition, mais des fois c'est vraiment une tâche qui me paraît lourde, la plupart du temps. Après, le weekend, ça me fait plaisir de cuisiner, mais la semaine, j'avoue que c'est, je le prends comme un poids. C'est uniquement par rapport au temps. Le temps me manque, parce qu'on a un rythme très strict voilà. Je veux qu'on se mette à table à 6h30, au plus tard à 6h45, 6h50.

**Alison :** Like if I'm not in a rush I really enjoy it, but that doesn't happen very often either with kids [laughter], without them. There's like, you're always busy, but yeah, I used to really enjoy like the preparation and if you're not on any time schedule it's quite relaxing to do the whole process [...]. I don't mind it if I don't have time constraints [laughter]

Sophie Obecanov associated the weekly dinner preparation as a necessary chore as well because of lack of time, rather than as a pleasurable experience and as a result, she kept the menu simple:

**Sophie:** So, cooking in the evening, when we come home, I try to do things because Elisa (6) is there. When it's just the two of us, when it's the school break, when she's not here, pfff, I must admit that sometimes we open the fridge and take what we find. In fact, the lack of time means that it's not a pleasure to cook, because it has to be done quickly, because, yes, in the evening, for me, it's more a matter of life than a pleasure. The moment when the three of us get together will be a nice moment, but the fact that we have to cook in the evening, um, pfff, that's it [...]. Yeah, sometimes it's going to be..., well, I'm not going to say it's going to be a chore, but it's not my favourite time.

**Sophie :** Alors, faire le cuisine le soir, quand on rentre, j'essaie de faire des choses parce que y'a Elisa. Quand on est que tous les deux, quand c'est en période de vacances, qu'elle est pas là, pfff, je vous avoue que, des fois, chacun ouvre le frigo et puis il prend ce qu'il y trouve. En

fait le manque de temps fait que c'est pas un plaisir de cuisiner, parce qu'il faut que ça soit fait vite, parce que, effectivement, oui, le soir, pour moi ça va plus être quelque chose de vital au final qu'un plaisir. Le moment où on va se retrouver tous les trois, ensemble, sera un moment sympa, mais le fait d'avoir à faire à manger le soir, euh, pfff, voilà quoi [...]. Ouai, des fois ça va être..., enfin, je vais pas dire que ça va être une corvée, mais c'est pas le moment que je préfère.

**Céline:** What's a bit exhausting is knowing, well, I'm coming home, I go get Noémie, or I've just come back from the office, it's half past six, and then I go straight on to preparing dinner, because, well, you mustn't have dinner too late because otherwise she goes to bed late, and she already goes to bed a bit late for my liking, you know? So it's a source of tension.

**Céline :** Ce qui est un peu épuisant c'est quand même de s'dire bah j'arrive j'avais chercher Noémie, ou j'reviens du bureau, il est dix-huit heures trente, et direct j'enchaîne sur la préparation du dîner, parce que, bah, il faut pas Dîner trop tard parce que sinon elle se couche tard et déjà qu'elle se couche un peu tard à mon goût tu vois ? Donc ça fait une source de tension.

This highly contrasted with Céline's husband's discourse who considered that she took care of the food work because she liked cooking, contrary to him. He also seemed to minimise her efforts in the kitchen: Céline described the time between work and dinner as extenuating but Jérôme summarised it as such: 'when she arrives, we sit down at the table straightaway'. He also justified his non-involvement in the food work on the basis of individual preferences, also implying these could not be worked on. For Jérôme as well, his engagement in domestic activities was conditioned with his liking of them. The way Céline talked about food work, during her interview and the couple of visits showed some weariness of the whole process, combined with a certain satisfaction of managing to provide healthy and varied meals to the family, but this satisfaction derived from the care provided for others and did not seem to correspond to an individual pleasure. Both Jérôme and Céline mentioned that Céline occasionally liked to cook with Noémie (7, usually deserts), but these type of preparation remained more exceptional (during the weekends) and did not fit within the daily food preparation. Their evening food work was caught in an irreducible time bind between the hour she got home from work, between Noémie's bedtime and also between the time they spent eating together. The food work could also be experienced negatively because of the difficulty to find a menu that everybody would like, but also to prepare meals that contained some vegetables and were varied throughout the week. For Angélique André, these difficulties were amplified during the lockdown:

**Angélique:** It was hell during the confinement. The worst thing, frankly the worst thing for me: (she whispers, her daughter is in the same room) making food, we had to make food all the time, all the time. And that was it, that was the worst. Depending on what we could find, because sometimes, at the very beginning, we would place orders like that and then there would be only three products in the bag. And then to vary the pleasures a bit, from everyone. That everyone should eat at least one thing. And at the same time, yeah, we don't eat pasta and rice. Well, I could eat pasta every day but... you know [...]. I like baking, well the basic things. Baking a little cake, especially when there's chocolate. But cooking drives me crazy. And especially when you have to find something, you have to have an idea, try to do something a bit original, maybe try to hide a vegetable or something [laughter]. And then finally it doesn't work [laughter]! No, it's really not my thing [...]. So we have a whole bunch of appliances, the cookeo, the cook expert, the thing and everything, thinking that it's going to help us make great things...In the end... no. Well we use them but, but we always end up eating the same thing anyway.

**Angélique** : C'était l'enfer pendant le confinement. Le pire, franchement moi le pire : (*elle chuchote, sa fille est dans la même pièce*) faire la bouffe, va falloir faire à bouffer, tout l'temps tout l'temps. Et c'était ça, le pire c'était ça. En fonction de c'qu'on trouvait déjà, par ce que des fois, tout au début on faisait des commandes comme ça et puis y'avait trois produits seulement dans le sac. Et puis un peu varier les plaisirs, de tout l'monde quoi. Que chacun mange, au moins un truc. Et qu'en même temps ouais, on bouffe pas des pâtes et du riz. Encore des pâtes tous les jours j'pourrai mais... voilà quoi [...]. J'aime bien la pâtisserie, enfin les trucs basiques. Faire un p'tit gâteau, surtout quand y'a du chocolat. Mais faire à bouffer non ça m'rend folle. Et surtout quand il faut trouver encore, avant il a fallu avoir une idée, essayer de faire un truc un peu original en essayant éventuellement de planquer un légume ou quelque chose [rire]. Et puis finalement ça marche pas [rire]! Non, c'est vraiment pas mon truc [...]. Donc on a tout un tas d'appareils, le cookeo, le cook expert, le machin et tout, en s'disant ça va nous aider on va faire des supers trucs...Au final...Non. bah on les utilise mais, mais on finit toujours par manger la même chose de toute façon.

As Murille described, a recurring reason why mothers found the food work burdensome was its inevitably repetitive nature. Irina Comescu (up. class) and Bianca Armand also experienced this during the first lockdown in France, which impacted their mealtime menus (*Figure 22. Simple meals during the lockdown at the Comescu household and Figure 23. Simple meals during the lockdown at the Comescu household and Figure 24. 'Example of one of our meals to nibble on', Bianca Armand, Food diary*):

**Irina**: Tonight: sandwiches and fruit for dessert. It's hard to get motivated to cook... Laurent prepared the table and Hugo cleared the table. For once I didn't do much.  
*Food diary during the lockdown*

**Irina** : Ce soir sandwichs et fruits en dessert. Dur dur de se motiver pour cuisiner... Laurent a préparé la table et Hugo a débarrassé. Pour une fois j'ai pas fait grand chose.  
*Food diary during the lockdown*



Figure 22. Simple meals during the lockdown at the Comescu household



Figure 23. Simple meals during the lockdown at the Comescu household

**Bianca Armand:** Since we discovered that not only the village bar but also the restaurant offers take-away food, we've got into the habit of having pizza on the weekend and one dish during the week, which is much more than we would have done at home. It's all very holiday-like .... But it's really linked to the fact that we're here in the countryside, between us, we don't see anyone. So these take-away meals are a bit of a change and I know that my husband is happy to order to relieve me (rather than him relieving me...😊)

**Bianca Armand :** Depuis que nous avons découvert que non seulement le bar du village mais le restaurant aussi proposent des plats à emporter, nous avons pris l'habitude de prendre pizzas le weekend et un plat en semaine, ce qui est beaucoup plus que ce qu'on aurait fait à la maison. Décidément, tout ça, ça fait vraiment 'vacances' ....

Mais c'est vraiment lié au fait qu'on soit ici à la campagne, entre nous, on ne voit personne. Donc ces repas à emporter, ça change un peu et je sais que mon mari commande volontiers pour me soulager (plutôt que ce soit lui qui me soulage...😊)

**Bianca Armand:** But I find that at the moment (lockdown + not in our usual home) I am much more relaxed, I 'let go' more.

**Bianca Armand :** Mais je trouve qu'en ce moment (confinement + pas dans notre chez nous habituel) je suis beaucoup plus détendue, je 'lâche' plus.



Figure 24. 'Example of one of our meals to nibble on', Bianca Armand, Food diary

And in terms of feeding the family, repetition was systematically viewed negatively and opposed to creative cooking. The repetitive character of cooking was also viewed as essential (from a health perspective), but it was again devalued, contrary to creative cooking, associated to more futile food but also more pleasurable. Angélique's relationship to cooking was based on an opposition between the imperative of everyday repetitive food work and more exceptional and creative cooking, such as desserts. Nathalie also talked about the evening cooking as a 'chore', because of the lack of time, and the various constraints that guided her food work: her son's dietary restrictions, the difficulty of pleasing the different individual preferences:

**Nathalie:** We enjoy it more on the weekend, and cooking as well as eating I think. It goes together [...]. I would say that during the week it's more of a chore and on the weekend it's more of a pleasure [...]. It's a bit more improvisation on weekend than during the week, that's clear. It's a bit more improvisation on the weekend than during the week, that's clear. It's not a pleasure to do it [prepare the meal plans], after cooking and eating yes, but it's not a pleasure to prepare the meal plans. It's not a pleasure to cook and eat, yes, but it's not a pleasure to make the meal plans. We know that things are going to go wrong, we're going to get criticism from our children. I think that's what makes it complicated. If it was just me it would be easy to do and it would be a pleasure. But you have to think about the constraints of each person, one day we'll be back at such and such a time so we'll have to do something fast... At the moment, one of them has a stomach ache so we avoid this food, that food... In fact, the number of constraints means that it's not a pleasure.

**Nathalie :** On prend plus de plaisir le week-end, et à faire la cuisine et à manger j'pense. Ça va ensemble [...]. Je dirai la semaine c'est plutôt une tâche et le week-end c'est plutôt un plaisir [...]. C'est un peu plus d'improvisation le week-end que la semaine déjà, ça c'est clair. Le faire [de préparer les menus] c'est pas un plaisir, après de faire la cuisine et d'manger oui mais de faire les menus c'est pas un plaisir. Arriver à faire plaisir à... 'fin on sait que derrière ça va mal se..., 'fin on va recevoir les critiques de nos enfants. J'pense que c'est ça qui rend le, le truc compliqué en fait. Si c'était que moi ce serait facile à faire et ce serait un plaisir. Euh là faut penser aux contraintes de chacun, tel jour on rentre à telle heure donc faudra faire un truc



rapide... Heu en ce moment y'en a un qui a mal au ventre donc on évite tel aliment, tel aliment...  
En fait le, le nombre de contraintes fait que c'est pas un plaisir quoi.

In Adelaide, for Sally Davies (low. mid. class) as well, time stress, her children's dislike of her cooking combined with the fact that she took care of most of the food preparation turned an activity that she used to enjoy into something 'torturous':

**Sally:** I used to like cooking, but I don't anymore [...]. I used to really like it and I used to be quite creative, but the kids just don't like anything. Everything's gross: "I don't want it". And it's just a chore, a daily chore, the cooking for these little humans who don't want to eat anything that you cook anyway, so I'm just a little bit over it. And because I'm so busy, the thought of coming home and then having to cook, it's just, yeah, torturous. [laughter]

**Fairley:** And so who does it? Who gets to do this chore?

**Sally:** Generally I do most of the cooking. And when I'm not home, Adam will either get something out the freezer or get takeaway. He doesn't usually cook anything from scratch, I'm the from-scratcher.

**Sally:** (speaking to her husband Adam, who is in the same room) Ah, hey, you just went, 'Wheee!' It's true! I'm going to stick them up there, Adam. So, yeah, he's um... not very creative [laughter], not very experienced. We've got an air fryer. He knows how to use that quite well [laughter].

Marie-Cécile Bourdon (up. class) compared her experience of food work – which she lived as a parental necessity – to that of her husband, who's cooking was also based on the necessity to provide healthy meals, but who also managed to experience it positively:

**Marie-Cécile:** I like to eat but I cook because it's important and also for the children. And because I like to eat and all that, but spending my time working on fifteen recipes, thinking about things and all that, I really can't do that [laughter]! How does Benoit say it? I don't know what his expression is... He says that men cook in a demonstrative and competitive way, whereas women are efficient and feed the family. We're not into performance, we're into efficiency, whereas he's really like that [...] The other day we had absolutely enormous leeks, we had leeks weighing four hundred grams each, so we were looking for what to do with them. I didn't really ask myself the question and he said 'ah I've found a recipe, I'm going to make a risotto with leeks and white ham'. So he started making a leek and ham risotto. I would have ended up making a leek fondue with a slice of ham or a leek tart [laughter]. The difference, I'm not going to get into the elaboration... it was really good, the children loved it, we kept the recipe, we're going to make it again... That's it. But I'm not into this trying something new... That's it, I'm doing something that works [laughter]. Ah yes, ah yes yes. We agree on the importance of this, both in terms of the education of children and conviviality.

**Marie-Cécile :** Moi j'aime manger mais cuisiner je l'ai fait par ce que c'est important et puis par ce que pour les enfants. Et puis parce que j'aime bien manger tout ça mais moi passer du temps à bidouiller quinze recettes, à réfléchir aux trucs tout ça moi ça m'saoûle en fait [rire] ! Comment il dit Benoit ? J'sais plus quelle est son expression... Il dit qu'les hommes font d'la cuisine un peu démonstrative et de compétition alors que les femmes elles sont efficaces et elles nourrissent la famille. On est pas dans la performance, on est dans l'efficacité, alors que, mais lui il est vraiment comme ça hein [...] Là, l'autre jour on avait des poireaux absolument énormes, on avait des poireaux de quatre-cent grammes chacun, donc on cherchait quoi faire avec les poireaux. Moi j'me suis pas tellement posée la question et lui il a dit ' ah j'ai trouvé une recette j'vais faire un risotto aux poireaux et au jambon blanc '. Donc il s'est lancé dans un risotto aux poireaux et au jambon. Chose que, moi, j'aurais fini par faire une fondue d'poireaux avec une tranche de jambon ou une tarte aux poireaux voilà [rire] ! Le, la, la différence, moi je vais pas me lancer dans l'élaboration... c'était super bon hein, les enfants ont adoré, on a gardé la recette, on va la r'faire... Voilà. Mais moi j'suis pas dans ce côté j'essaie un truc nouveau... Voilà, moi j'fais un truc qui marche quoi [rire]! Ah oui, ah oui oui. On est d'accord sur l'importance que ça a, à la fois en terme d'éducation des enfants et de convivialité.

For Marie-Cécile, there were three central dimensions of the dichotomies observed between the fathers and the mothers of this study. The mothers were witnessed taking care of the food work and talking about it in a rather routine, efficient manner and oriented towards and they often distanced themselves from a creative aspect of cooking, which was often the stance adopted by the fathers. Marie-Cécile characterized her everyday cooking as simple, but this characteristic also varied according to the social class positions (as well as the cooking skills), as in other households, a simple menu would be only pasta, for example. The creative, leisurely and fun aspect of cooking and feeding that the fathers regularly adopted was valued by both parents in terms of family life. The mothers rarely characterised their own food work (to other family members nor to me) as creative nor did they put forward the essential dimension of their maintenance food practices.

Amy Chapman (int. mid. class) also disliked cooking due to their hectic family life in itself and she opposed the creative and repetitive dimensions of cooking, Glen Chapman enjoyed baking – identified as ‘creative’ cooking – and Amy taking care of the essential food, which she disparaged as ‘staples’:

**Amy:** Glen likes to be quite creative on the weekend. He likes making dampers and rolls and stuff for the kids. We like making things from scratch when we can. So, and the kids, again if it's something the kids are gonna eat then we'll make it, so he definitely prefers to be in the kitchen over me. Oh, I just, I can't, I can't do it. I used to like it, but I think having kids, it was just like: "nup, one thing had to go". Yeah, no, we definitely share [the food work]. I probably prep the kids' meals more than what he does. He's probably not overly, confident, like there's some things, like carbonara, he'll keep asking, like: "what goes next to rice?" So there are certain staples that if I just get in there I can do it quicker, it's just easier that way, but no, it's pretty shared [...]. I guess because life is pretty busy. We don't have a lot of time. I hate cooking. Just the thought of it, just ergh, ergh. I just hate it. He's not so bad. He enjoys it, but he needs the time and the space, which we don't have [...]. That's a task he doesn't mind doing, and I think he knows that's a task I hate doing. Him and food prep and stuff, he has his moments, but it's probably more of a choice than going to fold the washing or cleaning the bathroom. If that's his one thing he can do, he won't say it, but I know that he'll choose that over having to do other stuff. So I guess then he does that, I go do the other things and then it's just kind of an unsaid kind of thing. It just happens. Maybe 'cause I'm a very particular about things as well, I like the bathroom cleaned a certain way and the folded of the washing and stuff. So I think, for him, he can't really get much wrong in the kitchen, it's just like just get a meal out, you know, at the end of the day, just get on the table.

For Vanessa Bennet (up. mid. class) from Adelaide, finding out what to eat and feed the children for the upcoming week was burdensome:

**Vanessa:** But it is time consuming. I do feel that I spend, you know, many hours, sometimes two/three hours on a Sunday, you know, cutting up stuff for our salad, for our lunches, cutting up all of the stuff, you know.

These dichotomies bring us to the theorisation of care. Joan Tronto defined care as a generic activity ‘that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our “world” so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web’ (Tronto and Fisher 1990, 40). There is in the notion of care an opposition between maintaining or perpetuating, and creating, which we find in the

results from this study. The mother's involvement in the everyday food work was about maintaining the family's health and creation was not part of the rationales mobilised (which did not mean the mothers were not creative, simply that they did not think of their practices as being creative).

Only three of the fathers who cooked regularly (although without being the main food provider) did not take out much enjoyment of it, on a daily basis. Lucas Franquet's dislike of cooking was not voiced in strong terms, it rather constituted a form of indifference suggesting it was done quite easily (Burnod et al. 2022):

**Lucas:** I mean if I don't do it, I won't miss it. I like to eat, I like to eat a lot, but cooking is not my passion.

**Lucas :** C'est à dire que si j'le fais pas ça va pas m'manquer. J'aime bien manger, j'aime beaucoup manger, après cuisiner ouais c'est pas une passion.

Glen Chapman strongly disliked the everyday cooking and as such, it was Amy who mostly cooked for the children during the week:

**Glen:** I'm not a great cook at all. I really, really enjoy cooking, but I hate doing it as, as a chore, like I hate doing it as I've got to quickly get something ready for dinner or something.

This was the same for Adam Davies (low. mid. class) from Adelaide: he strongly disliked the every food work, and as a consequence did not take care of it as much as Sally did (who also hated it):

**Adam:** Cooking at the moment feels like a chore. Because I'm just so tired, exhausted.

Among the 15 fathers of this study, Laurent Comescu and Jérôme Ferret (both up. class) did not help much in the kitchen and they justified their disengagement by the fact that their wife enjoyed cooking, which was presented in these cases as non-questionable facts, and most of all because they did not enjoy its repetitive daily nature:

**Laurent:** Irina likes to cook, so in general, the preparation of meals is more her responsibility. However, I help out, I help with the cooking of meat and fish, that's more my job. One: because I like it, and two: there you go. And then, on the quick dishes to help out or whatever, or the evening dishes. When I say dishes, I mean reheated dishes more than actual dishes. I tend to make pasta or something like that and I help out. Afterwards, in general, in what we've set up, I help with all the preparation beforehand, the dishwasher, emptying the dishwasher, setting the table and especially clearing the table, that's more my job when I'm there. Like, even in the evenings, when I'm working, when I arrive quite late, they're already at the table, so it's more me who clears up and finishes the preparation than the other way round.

**Laurent :** Irina aime cuisiner, donc en général, la préparation des repas c'est plutôt elle qui le fait. Néanmoins, je dépanne, j'aide, tout ce qui est cuisson viande, poisson, c'est plutôt moi. Un: parce que j'aime ça, et deux: voilà. Et puis, sur les plats vite faits pour dépanner ou autre, ou les plats des soirs. 'Fin, quand je dis des plats, du réchauffé plus que de la réalisation. Je fais plutôt des pâtes ou des trucs comme ça et j'aide. Après, en général, dans ce qu'on a mis en place, j'aide tout ce qui la préparation avant, le lave-vaisselle, vider le lave-vaisselle, la mise de table et surtout débarrasser, c'est plutôt mes tâches quand je suis là. Comme, même les soirs, quand je travaille, quand j'arrive assez tard, ils sont déjà à table, donc c'est plutôt moi qui débarrasse et qui finis la préparation que l'inverse.

Contrary to Laurent's thinking, Irina also found the daily preparation of meals burdensome. She enjoyed it when she had more time and energy, which was rare because she worked long hours and her work was periodically very tiring. Laurent, on the contrary, cooked the dishes he liked to prepare, which was typical of a men's engagement in domestic food work: when men cook, they often prepare meat (Parsons 2016), which is associated with masculinity (Nath 2011; Bourdieu 1979). Jérôme Ferret (up. class) also justified his disengagement from the kitchen by his wife's supposedly enjoyment of cooking. Nevertheless Céline, like Irina, found the daily food work quite exhausting and did not enjoy cooking during the week.

### **10.2. *Cooking as pleasurable and relaxing activity***

Several studies have already shown that fathers who cooked, whether this was on a rather exceptional, leisurely basis or had greater daily responsibility in the domestic food work and specifically the cooking (M. Szabo 2013; Burnod et al. 2022) tended to experience greater pleasure in the kitchen and were less likely to view cooking for the family as a burden. The fathers from our research who cooked occasionally or regularly also mostly talked about cooking as an overall positive experience, deriving pleasure either from being confident and efficient in it (Stéphane Imbert; Laurent Obecanov: up. class; Lucas Franquet), from it being a relaxing activity (Benoit Bourdon: up. class; Pierre Lebrun: int. mid. class) or a very occasional experimental one (Laurent Comescu, up. class), or else from having a lot of time to cook (Guillaume Rizzo, int. mid. class). Some did associate the meal planning and preparation with discourses of care and affection though (Benoit, Pierre, Guillaume), which is a more traditionally feminine and maternal discourse. All the mothers except one, on the contrary, talked about feeding the family as a chore. I was interested in exploring further this discrepancy between cooking as a pleasure and cooking as a burden in these two groups of participants.

Most of the fathers who cooked, whether regularly or exceptionally, talked about their experience of it in positive terms. Of the fourteen fathers of this research, two rarely take care of the food preparation (Laurent Comescu and Jérôme Ferret, both up. class) and when they do so, they describe it as exceptional weekend cooking, usually of meat.

For the other fathers, cooking was either associated to a creative leisure, a relaxing moment or an occasion to demonstrate professional-like skills. In any case, there was a strong dimension in fathers' discourse that was about dedicating time for oneself. Benoit Bourdon (up. class) had difficulty to disconnect from his professional work and arrive home with a free mindset that would leave him available for family life. He mobilised the evening cooking as a time to relax and be able to transition into family life. He did so, in particular, by spending time alone in the kitchen – allowed by the kitchen being a separate room – cooking while listening to radio programs:

**Benoit:** Actually, the break happens – to each its own thing, right – for me, the break usually happens when I do the dishes or when I cook. So I put a podcast of France Culture on. I took that habit. And when I am there, well I really disconet, I clean my brain.

**Benoit :** En fait la césure elle se fait – enfin chacun ses trucs hein – moi la césure se fait en général quand je fais la vaisselle ou quand je cuisine. En fait je mets un podcast de France Culture. J'ai pris cette habitude-là. Et quand je suis là, du coup je débranche vraiment et je nettoie la cervelle.

He was able to turn a domestic space into a sphere for himself. For him, the food preparation was an individual activity, without much family interaction and possibilities for a convivial atmosphere:

**Benoit:** But as a result, it's not very convivial as a practice [laughter], it's even an individualistic thing. So, if the children, for instance, want to help me cook, well, it's not necessarily.... [inaudible ...]. I mean, there are times when I spend my life in the kitchen, but then again, it's also a time when I listen to a lot of France Culture podcasts, and that's the only time I can listen to them, in fact. Except when the kids are here, I'm not going to put on headphones and listen to something while the kids are around.

**Benoit :** Mais du coup, c'est pas hyper convivial comme, comme pratique [rire], c'est même un truc individualiste. Et voilà, alors du coup, si les enfants, typiquement, veulent m'aider à faire à manger, ben voilà, c'est pas forcément.... [inaudible ...]. Enfin y'a des moment où je passe ma vie en cuisine, mais encore une fois, c'est aussi un moment où j'écoute beaucoup de podcast de France Culture et c'est les seuls moment où je peux les écouter en fait. Hormis quand les enfants sont là, je vais pas aller mettre un casque et puis écouter un truc pendant que les enfants sont autour en fait.

The expression 'spending all one time in the kitchen' was typical of mothers' discourse about food work, but here Benoit turned this domestic activity into a leisure activity:

*When I arrive at the Bourdon household (up. class) on a Saturday, Benoit is in the kitchen, alone, listening to a radio program. I remain with him in the kitchen, and because we are talking, he turns of the radio, which I object to*

**Benoit:** No, but had you not been here, I would have finished the podcast, you know [...]. But yes, it's clear that we spend time in the kitchen. But actually, first of all, it makes me let go, so I don't think about the things that happened today, I don't think about work, or anything like that. Secondly, cooking in the evening allows me to listen to things that are not very friendly, like podcasts of the Scientific Method or sociology from France Culture, it's true that it's not very friendly...

**Marie-Cécile:** No, no, no, admit it..., admit all of it [silence]: the whole Bible study course of the Collège de France

**Benoit:** Ah yes, I have not yet...

**Fairley:** ... Oh okay! So, the kitchen is empty at that time?

**Marie-Cécile:** It's mostly that, when we come back, we get yelled at because we make noise [laughter]!

**Benoit:** Yes! Yes, because then, it really takes..., sometimes...

**Fairley:** ... do you ever close the door?

**Benoit:** No

**Marie-Cécile:** No, but it's far enough away from the rest of the flat, it's not a problem  
*He only closes the door when cooking causes smoke, like cooking a side of beef.*

**Benoit:** It's a kind of decompression airlock [...], it's a way to isolate yourself.... well, there you go... Typically, listening to podcasts, I can't do it otherwise. I can't put it in the living room and then ask everyone to shut up...

**Marie-Cécile:** In fact, there are times when you feel like you're persona non grata in the kitchen...

**Benoit:** ... in the kitchen, because I want to hear the end! But yes, yes, afterwards, there's this side where it's a kind of personal breathing and so on.

*Dinner 2*

Lorsque j'arrive chez les Bourdon (up. class) un samedi matin, Benoit est dans la cuisine, seul, en train d'écouter une émission de radio. Je reste avec lui dans la cuisine et, comme nous parlons, il éteint la radio. Je lui dit que ce n'est pas nécessaire :

**Benoit:** Non, mais vous auriez pas été là, j'aurai fini le podcast, hein [...]. Mais oui, c'est clair qu'on passe du temps dans la cuisine. Mais pour le coup, d'abord moi, ça m'fait lâcher, comme ça, j'réfléchis pas aux trucs qui se sont passés aujourd'hui, j'pense pas au boulot, aux truc comme ça. Faire la cuisine le soir, deux, ça me permet d'écouter des trucs qui sont pas très conviviaux, genre des podcasts de la Méthode scientifique ou de sociologie de France Culture, c'est sûr que c'est pas très convivial...

**Marie-Cécile:** non, non, non, assume..., assume jusqu'au bout (silence): l'intégralité des cours d'études bibliques du collège de France

**Benoit:** Ah oui, ça, j'les ai pas encore...

**Fairley:** ... Ah oui! Du coup, la cuisine est vide à ce moment-là?

**Marie-Cécile:** c'est surtout que, quand on rentre, on se fait enguirlander parce qu'on fait du bruit [rire] !

**Benoit:** oui! oui, parce que du coup, ça prend vraiment..., y'a des fois...

**Fairley:** ... vous fermez la porte des fois?

**Benoit:** non

**Marie-Cécile:** non, mais c'est suffisamment loin du reste de l'appart, c'est pas gênant. Il ferme seulement la porte lorsque cuisiner provoque de la fumée, comme cuire une côte de bœuf.

**Benoit:** c'est un espèce de sas [...], c'est une manière de s'isoler.... enfin, voilà... Typiquement, écouter des podcasts, j'peux pas l'faire autrement. J'peux pas l'mettre dans l'salon et puis demander à tout le monde de s'taire...

**Marie-Cécile:** En fait, y'a des moments, où on sent bien qu'on est persona non grata dans la cuisine...

**Benoit:** ... dans la cuisine, parce que j'veux écouter la fin! Mais oui oui, après, y'a ce côté-là où c'est une espèce de respiration personnelle etc.

Dîner 2

On the fifth visit at the Bourdon household (up. class), Benoit and Marie-Cécile are in the kitchen. Benoit was cooking and Marie-Cécile was getting the utensils out to set the table. The radio was on in the kitchen, Benoit was listening to a program. Marie-Cécile asked Benoit to turn it off, as we were talking, which he did:

**Benoit:** Yes, it's a bit of an ear-splitter

**Fairley:** You can leave it, I can also not talk, you know

**Benoit:** No, no, no, it's not... I can also act like a civilized guy

**Marie-Cécile:** Really? You can do that?

**Benoit:** Not for very long, not for very long, I can pretend for a few minutes

*She laughs*

Lunch 5

**Benoit:** oui, ça casse un peu les oreilles

**Fairley:** vous pouvez laisser, je peux aussi ne pas parler hein

**Benoit:** non non non, c'est pas... je peux aussi faire le type civilisé

**Marie-Cécile:** c'est vrai? tu sais faire ? (humour)

**Benoit:** pas très longtemps hein (humour), pas très longtemps, je peux faire illusion quelques minutes

*Elle rigole*

Lunch 5

Benoit mentioned once that he felt cooking could, at times, be a burden in that it prevented him from spending time outside on the weekends. For Marie-Cécile, this difficulty was balanced out by the fact that he also took pleasure in it:

**Marie-Cécile:** But I think it relaxes him [to cook]. He complains a lot. But that's his 'I complain all the time' side. He complains a lot, but in fact it's moments when he's not bothered, when he does something useful [...]. And, at the same time, he listens to the radio, so it's a bit like his own time. So when he's moaning like crazy because he's the only one who cooks... I think that's a bit in bad faith.

**Marie-Cécile :** Mais j'pense que ça l'détend [de faire à manger]. Il s'plaint beaucoup. Mais bon, ça c'est son coté ' je râle tout l'temps '. Il se plaint beaucoup, mais en fait c'est des moments où il est tranquille, où il fait quelque chose d'utile [...]. Et en même temps il écoute la radio, voilà, donc c'est un peu ses moments à lui. Donc quand il râle comme pas possible par ce que il est, c'est l'seul qui fait à manger... j'trouve ça un peu de mauvaise foi.

While Benoit took care of the cooking and its mental load, Marie-Cécile oversaw most of the other aspects of parenting: children's homework (or verifying that the homework was done, because a babysitter makes them do it), medical appointments and administrative aspects of family life. At the Nimaga household, in Lyon, Issa mostly cooked and also took on the mental load of food work. Issa's engagement in the domestic food practices was highly connected to his cultural origins (from Mali) as he wished to socialise his daughters to Malian recipes. Ana felt grateful she did not have to do as much in terms of cooking:

**Ana Nimaga:** Hello. I haven't forgotten you. But yesterday I didn't think about food at all. I had a class and I came home late. When I have a class like that, Issa always takes care of it, I got used to not taking care of it 😊 When I got home, he had made frozen pizzas and fried plantains. And this morning, before I could even think or talk about it, he took salmon out of the freezer. So I'm still letting him handle it, without interfering 😊 So, as I'm writing all this, I realise I'm pretty lucky anyway  
*Food diary*

**Ana Nimaga:** Coucou. Je ne t'ai pas oublié. Mais hier je n'ai pas du tout pensé à la bouffe. J'avais un cours et je suis rentré tard. Quand j'ai cours comme ça c'est tjrs Issa qui s'en occupe, j'ai pris l'habitude de ne pas m'en occuper 😊 Quand je suis rentré il avait fait des pizzas surgelé et des bananes plantain frites. Et ce matin, avant même que je pense ou qu'on en parle, il a sorti du saumon du congèle. Donc je le laisse encore gérer, sans me mêler 😊 Voilà, en t'écrivant tout ça je me rends compte que j'ai bcp de chance qd même  
*Food diary*

However, Issa's enjoyment of cooking was also related to his dislike of cleaning up, which Ana took care of:

*At the end of lunch, Issa is making coffee and Ana is tidying the kitchen.*

**Issa:** Oh Fairley, these are the moments I avoid [tidying and cleaning the kitchen].

**Fairley:** Oh yes, that's what I was watching. Why?

**Issa:** I prefer to cook. I don't know, I think it's the same thing, you know...

**Fairley:** So you do it Ana?

**Ana:** Yes, yes, I do, yes. Afterwards, if there's a need, if I ask him to do it, he does it, but he doesn't do it of his own free will

**Fairley:** So you do the dishes, and you also clean the kitchen?

**Ana:** Yes

**Issa:** I'd rather do my own cooking than that. But if I don't have a choice, I do it anyway

*Silence*

**Ana:** I don't mind either, I mean [...]. No, but yes, it's fine, it's fine. I don't know, but in fact, we naturally share a lot of things. He does the shopping, so that is nice [...]. And I do more, yes, the cleaning, except..., because I also like to tidy up and keep things clean, so um... on the weekend, yeah

*Lunch 1*

A la fin du déjeuner, Issa fait couler un café et Ana est en train de ranger la cuisine.  
**Issa:** Ah Fairley, ça, c'est des moments que j'évite, moi [ranger et nettoyer la cuisine]  
**Fairley:** Ah oui, c'est ce que j'observais. Pourquoi ?  
**Issa:** Je préfère faire à manger. je sais pas, je trouve que c'est pareil, tu vois...  
**Fairley:** Donc c'est toi qui fait Ana?  
**Ana:** Oui, oui, c'est moi qui fait oui. après, si vraiment y'a besoin, si je lui demande de faire, il fait, mais il fait pas de son propre gré  
**Fairley:** Donc toi, tu fais la vaisselle, et tu ranges aussi la cuisine?  
**Ana:** Oui.  
**Issa:** Je préfère faire ma cuisine que ça. mais bon, si j'ai pas le choix, je le fais quand même  
 Silence.  
**Ana:** Ca me dérange pas non plus, enfin j'veux dire [...]. Non, mais oui, ça va, ça va. J'sais pas, mais en fait, on se partage naturellement plein de choses. Lui il fait les courses, donc il fait plaisir [...]. Et moi, j'fais plus, oui, le ménage, sauf..., parce que moi aussi, en fait, j'aime bien ranger et qu'ce soit propre, donc euh... le weekend, ouai  
 Déjeuner 1

In Lyon, Pierre Lebrun (int. mid. class) also enjoyed cooking and talked about it in terms of pleasure. Laëtitia, his partner was also the one cleaning the kitchen:

**Laëtitia:** So, that, on the other hand, you see, is completely typical: Pierre cooks, he messes everything up and leaves it all in the kitchen [reproachful, but laughs at the same time]! [...] But he loves to cook! He loves to use lots of equipment [emphasis on 'lots'] that is really ... hard to wash [laughter].  
*Dinner 7*

**Laëtitia:** Alors, ça, par contre, tu vois, c'est complètement typique hein : Pierre il fait la cuisine, il en fout partout et il laisse tout en plan dans la cuisine (reproche, mais rigole en même temps) ! [...] Mais il adore cuisiner ! Il adore utiliser plein de matériel (insiste sur 'plein ') vachement ... dur à laver [rire].  
*Dîner 7*

While Laëtitia was complaining about Pierre's practices, she was cleaning up the kitchen, and in particular was washing a kitchen mandolin, which Pierre was proudly using earlier on to prepare the vegetable for the tian. Laëtitia commented she found using a knife was just as efficient. For Pierre Lebrun, cooking also both had its pleasurable aspect and was a way to disconnect from work, but contrary to Benoit, the benefit came from cooking as a social activity, with Laëtitia – when the children were away – or some of their children (but not all of them at once):

For Pierre also, cooking was a relaxing activity and he managed to gain control over the kitchen, allowing only a few members of the family to be in the kitchen at once (one or two children only who help). This recalls what de Singly has observed about the position of fathers in the contemporary household: 'at home, men seek to have separate times, a moment for each thing' ("à la maison, l'homme cherche à avoir des temps séparés, un temps pour chaque chose") (1996, 273). Pierre was indeed witnessed asking the children who were in or around the kitchen but were not helping to leave:

**Pierre:** So for me, this moment when I cook, when I take my mind off the work, is my little moment that I share with one or two children who help me. And a special moment with one or two of them. When I cook with my partner, it's a time when we talk and it's very pleasant because we meet up, we talk about our day and we also often cook together, you know. Mind you, I say I cook all the time but she also often helps me to cook.



**Pierre** : Déjà pour moi ce moment quand je cuisine où je me vide la tête du travail, c'est mon petit moment que je partage justement avec un ou deux enfants qui m'aident. Et un petit moment privilégié avec un ou deux d'entre eux. Quand je cuisine avec ma compagne c'est un moment où on discute et qui est super agréable parce qu'on se retrouve, on se raconte notre journée on cuisine aussi souvent ensemble hein. je dis que je fais tout le temps la cuisine mais elle m'aide aussi souvent à faire la cuisine, attention, hein.

His son in law, Nathan (11), also talked about this social aspect of cooking with him, although he describe the social aspect as being gather altogether:

**Nathan**: [about often helping in the kitchen]: I like to be with everyone..., a 'convivial' time [emphasis on convivial] [laughter]

[...]

**Fairley**: So what is a convivial moment for you?

**Nathan**: It means that we are all together, we all participate, that we all do a little.... That we have fun together, doing things.

**Nathan** : [à propos du fait qu'il aide souvent dans la cuisine] : J'aime bien être avec tout le monde..., un moment 'convivial' [insiste sur convivial] [rire]

[...]

**Fairley** : C'est quoi, pour toi du coup, un moment convivial ?

**Nathan** : Ça veut dire qu'on est tous ensemble, on participe tous, qu'on fait tous un peu.... Qu'on s'amuse ensemble, à faire.

When asked about way of relaxing while cooking, Pierre explained how he searched for the social aspect of cooking:

**Pierre**: It's the moment when it allows me to do some manual work, to decompress, and on the contrary, to get back in touch with the family, with what's going on, with everyday life. That's why I want it to be open, not closed. For me, a closed kitchen is not possible, kitchens like before... I wouldn't cook in a closed kitchen. Cooking is above all offering something to everyone and sharing a moment with everyone. And I couldn't cook in a closed kitchen. Well, I could, but not on a daily basis. I wouldn't enjoy it, even though it's a moment of pleasure for me. [Cooking] is my moment of transition, it's the moment when it clears my head, that's it.

**Pierre** : C'est le moment où justement, ça me permet de faire du manuel, de décompresser, et au contraire de reprendre le lien avec la famille, avec ce qu'il se passe, avec la vie de tous les jours. C'est pour ça que je la veux ouverte, et pas fermée. Pour moi une cuisine fermée c'est pas possible, les cuisines comme avant..., je ne cuisinerais pas dans une cuisine fermée. Cuisiner, c'est avant offrir quelque chose à tout le monde et partager un moment avec tout le monde. Et je pourrais pas cuisiner dans une cuisine fermée. Enfin si je pourrais, mais pas au quotidien. Je ne prendrai pas de plaisir, alors que c'est un moment de plaisir pour moi. [Cuisiner] c'est mon moment de transition, c'est le moment où ça me vide la tête, voilà.

Guillaume Rizzo (Lyon, int. mid. class) experienced cooking in the evening as a pleasurable activity as well, which was associated with the amount of time he has:

**Guillaume**: In fact, in the evening I have time. I come home, I have an hour, an hour and a half, if I want to do crazy things, cooking, I could actually do it. Well, no, crazy things [...]. I actually like cooking too. I like to prepare food and to have a lot of other things happening: for her to take a shower, for us to tidy up the house, for it to be a convivial moment. You know, peeling a vegetable: I'll peel a vegetable and then I can go into her room; help her if she has a homework assignment, or play.

**Guillaume** : En fait le soir j'ai du temps quoi. Je rentre, j'ai une heure, une heure et demie, si je veux faire des trucs de fou, cuisiner, je pourrais en fait. Enfin non, des trucs de fou [...]. En fait j'aime bien aussi préparer à manger. J'aime bien préparer à manger et qu'il se passe plein

d'autres choses en fait: qu'elle prenne sa douche, que on range aussi la maison, que ce soit un moment convivial. Tu vois, éplucher un légume: je vais éplucher un légume et puis je peux aller dans sa chambre; l'aider si elle a un devoir à faire, ou jouer.

For Craig Bennet (up. mid. class) from Adelaide, cooking in the evening was 'very easy', which contrasted with Vanessa's strenuous efforts put into meal planning and preparing the most tedious food in advance. In reality, Craig's feel of ease in the kitchen was allowed by Vanessa facilitating him the task. Vanessa described both their involvement in the daily preparation of dinners as equitable, doing the food work in alternation, but Vanessa still bore the full responsibility of the food provisioning, finding out the menus and taking care of the batched preparation of cooking on the weekend. The evening food work therefore resembled more a form of execution.

A couple of fathers cooked on a regular basis but did not particularly enjoy it, but they still found a way to enhance their experience and justify it positively. For my first visit at the Franquet household (up. mid. class), Lucas prepared a vegetable flan for dinner:

**Lucas:** I came home fifteen minutes ago. So I looked at the recipe.

**Fairley:** So you've got your meal plan decided, already?

**Lucas:** Yeah, so we put them on the internet, we put them on a drive, so on the weekend we look at them, we do them. And then I do the shopping. We do it, but it's often been me since the beginning of the school year. And then, Marie, she puts them on there, so we know. Usually we also write down the week's activities. This week we didn't do it.

*He describes the menus of the week.*

**Lucas:** So, tonight it's vegetable flan and gyoza

*Marco, who is upstairs but hears our conversation, expresses excitement that they're having gyoza*

**Lucas:** So I've got to make the vegetable flan, so this is a recipe from the robot.

*He has already tried the recipe not long ago and mentions the children loved it.*

*He adds more carrots to the recipe than indicated, because he does not have enough of the other vegetables, because they have not had carrots in a while and because he prefers to put in more vegetables than the recipe indicates.*

*He follows the recipe book.*

*He mentions he does not add much salt.*

[...]

**Lucas:** What I like about the recipes is that I alternate the different times, and so I try to anticipate both the next step and the tidying up.

*Dinner 1*

**Lucas:** J'suis rentrée y'a un quart d'heure. Du coup j'ai regardé la recette.

**Fairley :** Donc vous avez vos menus décidés, déjà ?

**Lucas :** Ouai, alors on les met sur internet, on les met sur un drive, comme ça le weekend on regarde, on fait. Et puis j'fais les courses. 'fin on fait, mais c'est souvent moi depuis la rentrée. Et puis après, Marie, elle les reporte là-dessus, comme ça on sait. D'habitude on les reporte aussi avec nos activités de la semaine. Là, cette semaine on la pas fait.

*He describes the menus of the week.*

*Since the beginning of the school year, Lucas also*

**Lucas:** Voilà, donc là, ce soir, c'est flan de légumes et gyoza

*Marco, who is upstairs but hears our conversation, expresses excitement that they're having gyoza*

**Lucas:** Donc faut que j'attaque le flan de légumes, donc ça, c'est une recette du robot.

*He has already tried the recipe not long ago and mentions the children loved it.*

*He adds more carrots to the recipe than indicated, because he does not have enough of the other vegetables, because they have not had carrots in a while and because he prefers to put in more vegetables than the recipe indicates.*

*He follows the recipe book.*

*He mentions he does not add much salt.*

[...]

**Lucas:** moi, ce que j'aime bien dans les recettes, c'est que j'alterne les différents temps, et du coup j'essaie d'anticiper à la fois l'étape suivante et le rangement.

*Dîner 1*

While the vegetables were cooking, Lucas put aside the carrot peeling for their rabbit, got out the other ingredients (eggs, cream, and cheese) and noted down on their shopping list to remember to buy more. These practices did not appear as traditionally masculine practices. Yet, Lucas described and legitimised his involvement in the kitchen by revaluing these domestic practices through a professional perspective lens, mobilizing the register of efficiency (Jabs et al. 2007). Viktor Obecanov mobilised the same justification strategies:

**Viktor:** Yeah, but that's my professional deformation, because I'm able, in my head, sometimes I tire myself out: I know what I have to throw in such and such a way for this. For example, I'll explain. If I'm making soup, while I'm peeling my carrots, I've already put water in the kettle, when I start the thermomix, my vegetables are already cut and the boiling water will come on the vegetables. So I'm not going to start the vegetables first and then put the water in because I'm going to take twice as long. So I'm a bit, tock tock, and in my laboratory, we have protocols and I'm used to launching two or three experiments at the same time. I try to organise them in time. If I had the time, I wouldn't do that because I get tired of doing it. My brain is all the time....

**Fairley:** Is this something you do, for other activities at home? Housework for example?

**Viktor:** Housework, if I'm in a hurry, yes, it's the same, I'm into two or three things. Sophie is not like that at all. I prefer to do it myself actually. Because we tend to argue, we don't have the same way of doing things, we don't have the same logic. So it reassures me to do it like that, and then I tell myself that I go faster.

**Viktor :** Ouai, mais c'est ma déformation professionnelle, parce que je suis capable, dans ma tête, des fois je me fatigue moi-même : je sais qu'est-ce que je dois lancer de telle manière pour ce que ça.. Par exemple, je vais vous expliquer. Si je fais de la soupe, pendant que j'épluche mes carottes, j'ai déjà mis de l'eau à chauffer dans la bouilloire, quand je vais lancer le thermomix, ben mes légumes sont déjà coupés et l'eau qui est bouillante elle va venir sur les légumes. Donc je vais pas lancer d'abord les légumes et ensuite mettre l'eau puisque je vais mettre deux fois plus de temps. Donc je suis un peu, tac tac tac, et dans mon laboratoire, on a des protocoles et moi j'ai l'habitude de lancer deux-trois expériences en même temps. J'essaie de les organiser dans le temps. Si j'avais le temps, je ferais pas ça parce que ça me fatigue à force de faire ça. Mon cerveau est tout le temps....

**Fairley :** Ça, c'est quelque chose que vous faites, pour les autres activités à la maison? Les tâches ménagères par exemple?

**Viktor :** Les tâches ménagères, si je suis pressé, oui, c'est pareil, je suis dans deux-trois trucs. Sophie est pas du tout comme ça. Je préfère le faire moi-même en fait. Parce qu'on a tendance à s'engueuler, on a pas du tout la même manière, on a pas du tout la même logique. Donc ça me rassure de faire comme ça, et puis je me dis que je vais plus vite.

The mothers who cooked also appeared to be particularly efficient in the whole process of providing family meals: they anticipated, strategized, managed competing imperatives, multi tasked, but neither of them ever associated their skills with professional competences.

Among the thirteen mothers of the study, only Magali was the only mother who did not bluntly describe food work as a burdensome experience. Yet, her discourse reveals how she feels constrained to feed the family and that it is part of her role of a mother. She intrinsically associates the work of feeding the family to her role as a good mother:

**Magali:** If there's one conference a year and it falls on a weekend, that's fine, but even my travels, I try to make sure that I don't have appointments on Monday morning in Sweden, you know. I try to include my travel when possible during the week.

**Fairley:** Okay. And how do you feel about having a full time job...? With a schedule where you come home at the end of the day, beginning of the evening, etc., and there you are, feeding the family?

**Magali :** Well, actually... as this is an important subject for me, I do both. Because I can't let Stéphane take care of everything. So he likes to cook and he does a lot of that, I could..., I think he would do more if it's necessary and besides when I'm not there he cooks very well. He doesn't need me to cook for the girls. But it would make me feel guilty in my role as a mother not to do that. You see, I don't clean the house at all, anyway, it bugs me. And we can afford it, we've got a cleaning lady. It's really our luxury. And ironing is the same, I don't do it at all: if there's ironing to be done, Stéphane may do it. And even sewing, now that grandmothers have taught Louise to sew, now if there's sewing to be done it's Louise who does it. That's one thing I don't do. And so my role as a mother for me is very much linked to the food management part. So it's something that even from a distance, even if I'm working, that I don't let go of because it's also my way of feeling useful and in my place, in my role as a mother.

**Fairley:** Does it mean that during your working day you also think about this? Or when you're away?

**Magali:** Yeah, very regularly.

**Magali :** Si y'a un congrès par an et qui tombe le week-end ok mais, même mes déplacements, j'essaie de faire en sorte de pas avoir des rendez-vous le lundi matin en Suède tu vois. D'inclure mes déplacements quand c'est possible sur la semaine.

**Fairley :** Ok. Et ça comment tu l'vis du coup d'avoir un travail à temps plein...? Heu... Avec des horaires où tu vas rentrer en fin de journée, début de soirée, heu... et voilà, nourrir la famille?

**Magali :** Bah du coup en fait... comme pour moi c'est important ce sujet-là, j'fait les deux. Parce que j'arrive pas à tout lâcher à Stéphane le management de l'intendance. Après il aime bien cuisiner et il fait beaucoup là-dessus, je pourrais lui..., je pense qu'il ferait plus si c'est nécessaire et d'ailleurs quand j'suis pas là il cuisine très bien. Il a pas besoin de moi pour cuisiner aux filles. Mais ça me, ça me ferait culpabiliser dans mon rôle de maman de ne pas faire ça. Tu vois le ménage de la maison je le fais absolument pas, t'façon ça me gonfle. Et puis on a les moyens, on a pris une femme de ménage. C'est vraiment notre luxe à nous. Et le repassage c'est pareil, je l'fait absolument pas : si y'a du repassage à faire c'est éventuellement Stéphane qui s'y colle. Et même la couture maintenant que les grands-mères ont appris à Louise à coudre, maintenant si y'a de la couture c'est Louise qui le fait. Ca c'est une chose que je n'fait pas. Et donc du coup mon rôle de maman pour moi c'est très lié à la partie intendance de la nourriture. Donc du coup c'est quelque chose que même à distance, même si je travaille, sur lequel je lâche pas par ce que c'est aussi ma façon de me sentir utile et à ma place dans mon rôle de maman.

**Fairley :** Est-ce que, pendant ta journée de travail, tu penses aussi à ça ? Ou quand t'es en déplacement ?

**Magali :** Ouais, très régulièrement.

This strong association of food provider and motherhood implied she had difficulty to share the food work and let go of her 'duties' and she is driven by a need to avoid feeling guilty if she indeed did not take care of the food work:

**Magali:** It's the same, I find it hard not to participate in the groceries. That is to say that sometimes Stéphane goes shopping but I prefer that we go together or that I go myself. Because I have my list, but I always, when I'm going to see something: 'ah bah hold that would be nice too', there's always, you know like the Avignon festival, you have the off that goes round in my head all the time... 'Ah well, that

would be nice too, and I imagine things and I say well, I'll take that because it will allow me to prepare this kind of thing.

**Magali:** C'est pareil j'ai du mal à ne pas participer aux courses. C'est à dire que ça arrive des fois qu'Stéphane aille faire les courses mais j'préfère qu'on y aille ensemble ou qu'y aille moi. Parce que j'ai ma liste, mais j'ai toujours quand j'vais croiser un truc 'ah bah tiens ça se serait sympa aussi', y'a toujours, tu sais comme le festival d'Avignon, t'as le off quoi, qui tourne tout le temps dans la tête... 'Ah bah tient y'aurait ça aussi et hop je m'imagine des trucs et j'dis bah tiens je vais prendre ça par ce que ça me permettra aussi de préparer ce genre choses.

Yet, Magali also acknowledged that she was tied to the role of the food provider, like her mother, and her great grandmother:

**Magali :** But then you know it's also part of the, the family history... On my mother's side, she comes from an Italian family who had migrated to the north of France at the time of the war and who had married their children. In fact, at the beginning I learnt to cook rather Italian and my mother's grandmother, I've always heard that, I didn't know her very well because she died when I was three years old. But she was a strong woman in the family who had a lot of influence, and I always heard that this grandmother used to get up in the morning to prepare the lunch dishes, she used to clear the lunch table and she used to say: 'Well, let's not talk too much, let's talk well, what are we going to eat this evening? [laughter]... And she took care of it, that was her thing. So I think that subconsciously it must certainly be imprinted, and yes, yes it happens regularly to me to think 'ah well it would be nice if we did that' [...]. So that's always been present in my relationship with my parents, with my grandparents, the 'why don't you eat what I made? You don't like me?' you know, with my grandmother.

**Magali :** Mais après tu sais c'est aussi inscrit dans la, l'histoire familiale...Du coté de ma mère, elle est issue de famille italienne qui avait migré dans le nord de la France au moment de la guerre et qui avaient marié leurs enfants. D'ailleurs moi au départ j'ai appris à cuisiner plutôt italien et la grand-mère de ma mère, j'ai toujours entendu dire ça, moi je l'ai connu assez peu par ce qu'elle est morte quand j'avais trois ans. Mais c'était une femme forte de la famille et qui, qui a eu beaucoup d'empreinte, et, et moi j'ai toujours entendu parler que cette grand-mère elle se levait le matin pour préparer les plats du midi, elle débarrassait la table du midi et elle disait : 'bon parlons peu, parlons bien qu'est-ce qu'on mange ce soir?'. [rire] Et elle gérait, c'était son truc. Donc j'pense qu'inconsciemment ça doit certainement être empreint, et oui, oui ça m'arrive régulièrement de me dire 'ah bah tient ce serait sympa qu'on fasse ça' [...]. Alors ça a toujours été présent dans ma relation aussi avec mes parents, avec mes grands parents, le coté 'pourquoi tu manges pas c'que j'tai fait ? Tu m'aimes pas?' tu vois, avec ma grand-mère.

Providing healthy and tasty food was also inscribed in Magali's conjugal relationship, as a demonstration of love, but also as a caring relationship:

**Magali :** Also, this relationship, well here it is, that I was taught as a child of 'you love me so you eat what I prepared' and 'I love you so I prepare you something good to eat', it was also for me a kind of proof of love, to [...] prepare [for Stéphane] good things to eat, healthy and good [...]. Stéphane the first time I sent him to buy courgettes he brought me back cucumbers... And I know that he knew how to cook pizzas, carbo pasta or bolo pasta very well and there you go. And so, it's true that I certainly felt inverted by a mission to diversify his diet, to... One: because I really like sausages, carbo pasta and pizzas, but at some point I can't weigh 300 kilos if we want to stay together for a little while. So, one: for the well-being of our couple, in terms of a balanced diet. Two: for health too, for balance; and three: when you're thirty years old and you get into a relationship, even if it's 'no, but... wait and see', you still have a little idea in the back of your mind with regard to the family and the kids. And to say to myself, well, I have to diversify his diet quickly so that the day we have children it won't be a subject of dispute and it won't be a problem to have a healthy and balanced diet for the children.

**Magali :** Aussi, cette relation, bah voilà, qu'on m'a inculquée enfant de 'tu m'aimes donc tu manges ce que j'tai préparé' et 'je t'aime donc je te prépare quelque chose de bon à manger', c'était aussi pour moi une sorte de preuve d'amour, de [...] préparer [à Stéphane] des bonnes

choses à manger, saines et bonnes [...]. Stéphane la première fois que j'ai envoyé acheter des courgettes il m'a ramené des concombres... Et je sais que il savait très très bien se cuisiner des pizzas, des pâtes carbo ou des pâtes bolo et heu voilà. Et donc, c'est vrai que certainement je me suis sentie investie d'une mission de lui diversifier son alimentation, pour... Un : par ce que j'aime beaucoup hein moi les saucissons les pâtes carbo et les pizzas mais à un moment donné je peux pas peser 300 kilos hein si on veut rester ensemble un p'tit peu longtemps . Donc, un : pour le bien être de notre couple, dans l'équilibre alimentaire. Deux : pour sa santé aussi, pour son équilibre; et trois : quand t'as trente ans que tu te mets en couple même si c'est 'non mais... attend et tout', t'as quand même une p'tit idée derrière la tête vis à vis de la famille et des gamins. Et de me dire bah il faut que je lui diversifie son alimentation à lui rapidement pour que le jour où on ait des enfants ce soit pas un sujet de dispute et ce soit pas un problème d'avoir une alimentation saine et équilibrée pour les enfants.

Yet for Magali, the place that food took in their conjugal relationship was also a matter of providing healthy food for their future children.

Most of the parents of this study demonstrated significant cooking skills. Mother and fathers' posture about cooking differed though. The fathers who cooked on a regular presented themselves as being confident in their culinary competences, echoing recent findings in Australia (Burnod et al. 2022). They all mentioned their childhood memories of their parents or grandparents cooking:

**Pierre:** First, on my father's side, there was my grandmother who cooks very, very well and the important moments of my childhood are really the big family meals. On a big table, a big living room with everyone talking, let's say 15, 20.

And then my mother has always cooked very, very well, an excellent cook: traditional French, coq au vin, gratins, and I have eaten fresh food since I was a child. So I didn't know what frozen food tasted, except for the canteen. After that, I was always at the canteen, so I had a real difference between: what you could eat when you cooked well and what it was like not to eat well every lunch [laughter]. I could see the difference.

**Fairley:** And your mother, did she work or was she at home?

**Pierre:** She worked. So my father died early when I was 13, and so I often cooked with my mother, and I helped my mother with the cooking too. I stayed with her, I'm the youngest, I have an older brother and an older sister who are 10 and 12 years older than me, they were gone so I was alone with my mother and so I helped her and the task I felt comfortable helping her with was really cooking

**Fairley:** So you learned to cook early in fact, when you left your family you knew how to cook?

**Pierre:** Exactly, my mother taught me to cook. And she always made good food, so she taught me how to cook couscous, how to make beef bourguignon, how to make lamb navarin, how to cook chicken, well, all the traditional dishes. Making potato gratin, making courgette gratin, actually so many different dishes in fact.

**Pierre :** Déjà, du côté de mon père, il y avait ma grand-mère qui cuisine est très très bien et les moments de mon enfance qui sont forts c'est vraiment les grands repas de famille. Sur une grande table, Un grand salon avec tout le monde qui parle, disons 15, 20.

Et après ma mère a toujours cuisiné très très bien, une excellente cuisinière : traditionnel français, du coq au vin des gratins, et j'ai mangé frais depuis mon enfance. Voilà, je ne savais pas ce que c'était le congelé, à part avec la cantine. Après j'ai toujours été à la cantine voilà donc j'avais une vraie différence entre : qu'est-ce qu'on pouvait manger quand on faisait bien à manger et qu'est-ce que c'était de pas bien manger tous les midis. [Rire] Je voyais bien la différence.

**Fairley:** Et ta mère elle travaillait où elle était à la maison ?

**Pierre:** Elle travaillait. Après mon père est décédé tôt quand j'avais 13 ans, et du coup j'ai souvent cuisiné avec ma mère, et j'aidais ma mère aussi à faire la cuisine. Je suis resté avec elle, je suis le petit dernier j'ai un grand frère une grande sœur qui ont 10 et 12 ans de plus que moi

ils étaient plus là donc j'étais tout seul avec ma mère et du coup je l'aidais et la tâche dans laquelle je me sentais à l'aise à l'aider c'était vraiment la cuisine

**Fairley** : Du coup tu as appris à cuisiner tôt en fait, quand tu es parti de chez ta famille tu savais cuisiner ?

**Pierre**: Voilà et ma mère m'a appris à cuisiner. Et souvent ben elle a toujours fait à manger des bonnes choses donc elle m'a appris, voilà, à faire cuire à faire du couscous, à faire du bœuf bourguignon à faire des un navarin d'agneau, à faire cuire un poulet ben, enfin voilà tous les plats un peu traditionnels. Faire un gratin de pommes de terre, faire un gratin de courgettes, je sais pas, en fait tellement de plats différents.

Pierre competences and confidence in his cooking skills were built come from two periods of socialisation. He was socialised into preparing meals during his childhood, because he felt he had to step up, in the absence of his father, to help his mother. He's ability to provide family meals on an everyday basis might also come from his role as a father in his previous marriage and the conjugal socialisation with his ex-wife. He talked about their relationship as a one where he had to step to the 'maternal role' of taking care of the children because his ex-wife was not following the providing the proper maternal care, according to him.



*Figure 25. Lunch 5, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit is preparing sole for the weekend and upcoming week*

Benoit's cooking was sophisticated (*Figure 25. Lunch 5, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit is preparing sole for the weekend and upcoming week*); he spent a lot of time preparing dishes and talked extensively about what he prepared. Benoit described, for instance, his traditional Gravlax recipe:

**Benoit**: You have to take a piece of salmon, I take it from the tail because there are no bones, otherwise you have to remove the bones. You have to remove the skin: I do that, but otherwise the fishmonger does it without any problem. And then you have to make a little mixture with a little oil, 5% of the weight

of the fish in salt, 10% in sugar. A big bunch of chopped dill. And then (inaudible). And we let it marinate. I cut it on Wednesday night, I did it on Saturday.

**Benoit** : Faut prendre un morceau de saumon, moi, j'prends plutôt dans la queue parce qu'il y'a pas d'arrête, sinon faut enlever les arrêtes. Faut enlever la peau : j'le fais, mais sinon le poissonnier le fais sans problème. Et ensuite il faut faire un p'tit mélange avec un peu d'huile, 5% du poids du poisson en sel, 10% en sucre. Un gros bouquet d'aneth haché. Et puis (inaudible). Et on laisse mariner. Là, j'lai coupé mercredi soir, j'l'ai fais samedi.

He associated his relationship to food and cooking to his family origins:

**Benoit**: I think it's a family thing. So I think that for Marie-Cécile it's a bit the same, for her parents, well for her mother it's an important thing. But yes, my mother used to cook a lot, I remember my two grandmothers cooking a lot too. Going to the market with my grandmothers was an important thing. Eating fresh vegetables, peas were my grandmother's peas, salsify was typically my mother's salsify, it was something... I really have memories like that of - more vegetables than lots of meat by the way - or fish. Because I come from the Charente Maritimes, and so fish was an important thing at our place. And yes, I have memories of my grandmother, my grandmother knocking out eels in her kitchen, well things... sometimes a bit gory, but there you go, that make...

**Fairley**: ...who were quite present [in your life], your grandmothers?

**Benoit**: Well, I only saw them on holiday, when we went to their house, as we were in Lille, or in the Paris region, but every time we went to their house, there was always something going on around meals, it was really a very important thing. So, sometimes a bit boring when you're a kid. Obviously, it's the time when everyone is there, the aunts, etc. and it can make for unbearable meals, but on the other hand, there was this very sharing side of grandmothers, which meant that it was times when they made really fresh products, they prepared... My grandmother preparing a turbo, it was an exceptional thing. My grandmother used to make... I had a grandmother who was a great cook, well both of them were great cooks, but I had one who was dazzling at it, who used to make puff pastry while doing fifteen other things at the same time, but it was amazing to see her take out her pastry, roll it out, put some butter back in, put it in the fridge and then afterwards I'll go and look after the eels, or prepare snails... We would go snail hunting with my grandfather, fast them, prepare them with my grandmother. So there were many, many things around food.

**Fairley**: So there are techniques, not only recipes, but ways of doing things that you have acquired in the family?

**Benoit**: Yes, probably. So, typically. I would never venture to make puff pastry, but yeah, yeah, there are lots of dishes that I make because I know I've seen my grandmothers make them.

**Fairley**: In your parents' house, was it more your mother or your father who cooked?

**Benoit**: At my parents' house, it was my mother a lot. My father did a little bit... So my parents usually went to the market together. I have this memory that my parents went to the market together. But it was my mother a lot, my father a little bit on the weekend. But I don't know if you know this book by Boris Cyrulnik, *Mémoire de singe et paroles d'hommes*, which is quite funny and shows the remains of animal behaviour that we can have, etc., and there is a moment where he talks about the difference between men and women in terms of food and where he basically says: women prepare food to feed people, men do, prepare food for performance, to make dishes. Typically, that was really it. My mum was really into home cooking, pressure cooker stuff, etc. doing it quickly, etc. but we're all going to enjoy ourselves together. And then my father, it was always things..., necessarily that we liked a lot, because, well, I don't remember steak au poivre - I hate steak au poivre - but there you go...

**Fairley**: But then, it's interesting, because I have the impression that you, you've taken on both, in the sense that you're doing both things, quite elaborate dishes, but it's also the domestic, everyday side of everyday...

**Benoit**: Yes, absolutely. Yes. But I'm convinced that, if we are so addicted to fresh vegetables, Marie-Cécile and I, it's precisely because, at least, I know it, because my mother gave us this taste. Making dishes, yeah, good vegetable dishes, it was a thing, that's it. And so, that's it. For me, it's important, and at the end of the day, I'd rather do it again... I'm bored, eh, the chard gratin, I'm bored because preparing the chard is quite difficult. But it's such a joy to see Marius enjoy it and to like it, that, well yes, every weekend, when it's the right time, I make a gratin of chard.



**Benoit** : Je pense que c'est familial. Alors je crois que chez Marie-Cécile c'est un peu pareil, chez ses parents, enfin chez sa mère c'est plutôt un truc important. Mais oui, ma mère cuisinait beaucoup, j'ai surtout le souvenir de mes deux grands-mères qui cuisinaient beaucoup aussi. Faire le marché avec mes grands-mères, c'était un truc important. Manger des légumes frais, les petits pois, c'était les petits pois de ma grand-mère, les salsifis, typiquement, c'était les salsifis de ma mère, c'est un truc... J'ai vraiment des souvenirs comme ça de – plus de légumes d'ailleurs que de plein de viande, hein – ou de poisson, typiquement. Parce que, voilà, je suis originaire de Charente Maritimes, et donc le poisson c'était un truc important chez moi. Et oui, j'ai des souvenirs de grand-mère, ma grand-mère assommant les anguilles dans sa cuisine, enfin des trucs... parfois un peu gore mais voilà, qui font...

Fairley : ...Qui étaient bien présentes du coup, vos grands-mères?

**Benoit** : Alors je les voyais qu'en vacances, quand on allait chez elles, puisqu'on était à Lille, ou en région parisienne, mais à chaque fois qu'on allait chez elles, y'avait toujours des trucs autour des repas, c'était vraiment un truc hyper important. Alors, parfois un peu chiant d'ailleurs quand on est gamin. Evidemment, c'est le moment où tout le monde est là, les tantes, etc. et puis ça peut faire des repas insupportables quoi, dans la durée, mais en revanche, y'avait ce côté très partage des grand-mères qui faisait que c'était des moments où elles faisaient vachement de produits frais, elles préparaient des... Ma grand-mère préparant un turbo, c'était un truc exceptionnel. Ma grand-mère faisait... j'avais une grand-mère qui était hyper, enfin les deux étaient très cuisinières, mais j'en avais une qui était éblouissante pour ça, qui faisait des pâtes feuilletées en faisant quinze autres trucs à la fois, mais c'était bluffant de la voir sortir sa pâte, la rouler, remettre du beurre, remettre au frigo et puis après je vais m'occuper des anguilles, ou préparer des escargots... On allait chasser les escargots avec mon grand-père, les faire jeûner, les préparer avec ma grand-mère. Enfin voilà, y'a eu beaucoup, beaucoup de choses autour de la nourriture.

**Fairley** : Donc y'a des techniques, non seulement des recettes, mais des façons de faire que vous avez acquis dans la famille?

**Benoit** : Oui, probablement. Alors, typiquement. Je me risquerais jamais à faire une pâte feuilletée, mais oui, oui, y'a plein de plats que je fais parce que je sais que j'ai vu mes grand-mères les faire.

**Fairley** : Chez vos parents, c'était plus votre mère ou votre père qui cuisinait?

**Benoit** : Chez mes parents c'était beaucoup ma mère. Mon père faisait un p'tit peu... Alors mes parents faisaient le marché ensemble, en général. Moi j'ai ce souvenir-là, que mes parents faisaient le marché ensemble. Mais c'était beaucoup ma mère, mon père un peu le weekend. Mais, je sais pas si vous connaissez ce bouquin de Boris Cyrulnik, *Mémoire de singe et paroles d'hommes*, qui est assez rigolo et qui montre les restes de comportement animaux qu'on peut avoir, etc., et y'a un moment, il parle de la différence entre les hommes et les femmes au niveau de la nourriture et où il dit en gros : les femmes préparent à manger pour nourrir les gens, les hommes font, préparent à manger pour la performance, pour faire des plats. Typiquement, c'était vraiment ça. Ma mère était vraiment dans des plats ménagers, des trucs à la cocotte-minute, etc. faire rapidement, etc. mais on va se faire plaisir tous ensemble. Et puis mon père, c'était toujours des trucs..., forcément qu'on appréciait beaucoup, pour le coup, parce que du coup, voilà, j'ai pas de souvenir de steak au poivre - je déteste les steaks au poivre - mais voilà...

**Fairley** : Mais du coup, c'est intéressant, parce que j'ai l'impression que vous, vous avez pris des deux, dans le sens où vous faites à la fois des choses, des plats assez élaborés, mais c'est aussi le côté domestique, quotidien de tous les jours...

**Benoit** : Oui, tout à fait. Ouai. Mais moi j'ai acquis cette conviction que, si on est aussi accros aux légumes frais, Marie-Cécile comme moi, c'est justement parce que, en tout cas, moi je le sais, parce que ma mère nous a donné ce goût-là. A faire des plats, ouai, des bons plats de légumes, c'était un truc, voilà. Et du coup, voilà. Pour moi, c'est important, et à la limite, je préfère refaire... ça me saoule hein, le gratin de blettes, ça me saoule puisque préparer les blettes, c'est quand même assez pénible. Mais c'est un tel bonheur de voir Marius en profiter et d'aimer ça, que, ben oui, tous les weekends, quand c'est la période, je me tape un gratin de blettes.

**Benoit had an emotional experience with cooking: providing his children healthy and tasty food was a demonstration of affection, and he regularly checked with his children, making sure they were happy**

with the food served. His mother and his grandmothers' everyday cooking of vegetables inspired him to cook, but he transforms it into a performance similar to his father's relationship to food – cooking as a spectacle that is meant to be appreciated. The difference here was that the spectacle was expected to be appreciated during the mealtime, rather than in the kitchen, as he preferred to be alone in the kitchen while cooking. However, during mealtimes, Benoit regularly asked his children if they liked the food he prepared, he also commonly talked about the recipes he used (and even Marie-Cécile described some of his recipes), thus reminding the rest of the family (and myself) of his cooking performances. This combination of influences can be explained by today's health imperatives that promote more the consumption of vegetables than that of meat, especially in upper classes.

Tronto argued that the search for pleasure and creativity, which appeared in the discourses and practices of the fathers of this study were not inherent to the notion of care (Tronto 2008). As such, carers often considered that taking care of themselves conflicted with their activity of caring for others (Tronto 2008). An examination of the fathers' significant involvement in the process of producing family meals leads to ambiguous findings. The fathers who cooked a lot, even planned and took care of the food provisioning experienced it as a rather leisurely activity, all while being involved in a care dynamic of providing healthy meals. This was particularly the case with Benoit Bourdon (up. class), who cooked the most at their home. Although he found it difficult at times to be spending so much time at it, he also felt it was a rewarding activity when his children liked the vegetables that he cooked: "the fact: "Lucie, what do you want to eat?": "Green beans", it's really a victory!" (dinner 2). Guillaume Rizzo's (int. mid. class) relationship to feeding his daughter Zoé (10) was similar. His was concerned with catering healthy and tasty food for Zoé and felt this was a way to demonstrate as well paternal affection. However, in this case, this turned into frustration for him, as his daughter was difficult with food, preferring to eat very simple and plain products rather than the elaborated dishes her father prepared. He still felt it was his duty to keep trying and cooking, as he expected she would grow into liking it. Guillaume was also attentive to eating, himself, a healthy and sustainable diet, based on locally grown vegetables, organic products, provisioning meat at the local butcher and integrating many vegetables in his diet. His was concerned, especially, with losing weight, in relationship to his climbing activity.

I have argued above how fathers experienced cooking positively, as they managed to transform it into a leisurely activity (appropriating their own space to do so). Some fathers also justified and valued their involvement in the kitchen through as an extension of their professional skills. An examination of the overall weekly food work strategies suggest that some fathers also managed to experience it positively as their cooking was facilitated by the efforts of mothers.

For Marie, Magali and Vanessa, choosing mealtime menus and preparing vegetables in advance was a way to make the cooking process easier for both parents, and they mentioned how their husband could easily take care of the dinner preparation when they were not home:

**Craig:** [Preparing meals in the evening is] very easy. Because we've got all the veggies cut up, ready to go, it's just: grab them from the fridge, throw it into the saucepan. Or if we're doing salad, the salad's already made, all cut up, ready to go. And then just cooking whatever meat we're having pretty much [...]. I just do my fair share in those sorts of chores and stuff.

**Vanessa :** I wouldn't normally go to a gym class right on dinner time unless it's already prepared because I know to try and keep two children entertained and try and organise dinner can be quite stressful. So I wouldn't usually do that but because it was already done and all he had to do was put it in a bowl and put it in the microwave. I went to the gym and could eat mine, I ate mine when I got home.

**Nathalie :** There's no questions to ask when you get home in the evening, I don't have to think about what we're going to eat and then going shopping if there's not enough to eat. So I arrive later and somehow I'm a bit more relaxed, thinking to myself, well, at least everything's ready and... And yeah, there's nothing to do, I mean apart from cooking [...]. It's relatively shared [the evening preparation]. It's usually the one who's a bit free who does it. So, well, it's often the one who gets home first who cooks.

**Nathalie :** Y'a pas de questions à s'poser quand on rentre le soir, y' pas réfléchi à c'qu'on mange et puis à faire les courses si y'a pas assez de ce qui faut à manger. Donc moi j'arrive plus tard et quelque part un peu plus détendue en m'disant bah au moins tout est, tout est prêt. Et ouais y'a rien à faire, enfin à part cuisiner [...]. C'est relativement partagé [la préparation du soir]. C'est généralement celui qui est un peu dispo qui fait. Donc c'est souvent celui qui rentre le premier qui va, qui va cuisiner.

The mental load of finding out what to prepare weighed a lot in the whole food work process, as if the most difficult was not the cooking but the daily 'what's for dinner' question: finding and renewing menus. For the first visit at the Franquet household (up. mid. class), Lucas starts preparing dinner at 6h30, before Nathalie gets home, at 7. The planned menu was vegetable flan accompanied by store bought gyoza. The flan was to be prepared in the cooking machine and Lucas was following the recipe book associated to the machine (*Figure 26. Dinner 1, Franquet household – Meal plan on the right, recipe on the left: Lucas cuts up vegetables for a flan that he already prepared a few times before*). Overall, Lucas appeared quite confident in his cooking. He liked to cook 'efficiently', so as to spend the least time possible in the kitchen:



Figure 26. Dinner 1, Franquet household – Meal plan on the right, recipe on the left: Lucas cuts up vegetables for a flan that he already prepared a few times before

Céline Ferret (up. class) also prepared some vegetables in advance and froze them, which made the dinner preparation easier when she was away. Céline and Jérôme exchanged between each other during the day, while they were at work, about the dinner menu:

**Céline** [Thursday, 7:18 AM]: This evening, I am going to the restaurant with the group of co-birth: you can either make ravioli, either pasta with frozen mushrooms and the cream that is open in the fridge

**Jérôme** [9 :12 AM] : Thought of this morning before leaving the house : [...] ask Céline which mushrooms she was talking about in her options for the menus of this evening (I was barely out of bed so not at all awake)

*Food diary*

**Céline** [jeudi, 7:18 AM]: Ce soir je vais au resto avec le groupe de co-naissances : tu peux faire soit des raviolis soit des pâtes avec des champignons surgelés et la crème liquide entamée au frigo.

**Jérôme** [9 :12 AM] : Réflexions de ce matin avant de partir de la maison : [...] demander à Céline de quels champignons elle parlait dans ses options de menus pour ce soir (j'étais à peine sorti du lit donc pas réveillé du tout).

*Food diary*

At the Lebrun household from Lyon (int. mid. class), both Pierre and Laëtitia agreed that Pierre did most of the cooking. During the 7 visits at their household, the food preparation was rather shared between both of them, although they did notice that Pierre was doing rather less than usual:

**Pierre** : Je sais pas si c'est la vision que j'ai de ma génération et de la micro-sphère dans laquelle on est hein, en tout cas, les gens de notre milieu, moi, tous les potes, c'est des pères ultra investis [dans la cuisine].

*Dîner 1*

**Laëtitia**: So when we are both at home, it is true that it is mostly Pierre who takes the initiative of cooking. So I was not at all used to that, I am discovering what it is with a man who cooks. And to be honest, I greatly appreciate it, and I think that because of that, I let go a bit and I do not take as much the lead to cook when he is there. When he is there, he is the one who takes the initiative to cook; when I am available, I come and help him and we cook together, there is no problem there. But it is still mostly

him who initiates the thing. And I think I rely a lot on that. I have cooked so much for everybody, for so long that now...

**Fairley:** ... that must be nice!

**Laëtitia:** Yeah, that is exactly it! It is such a relief, so I take advantage of it! And he cooks really well, so I really enjoy it

**Fairley:** Ça is a change compared to your ... [her previous relationships, where she was the sole responsible for the food work]

**Laëtitia:** It's a huge change, and I have adapted very well to it [laughter]!

*Dinner 1*

**Laëtitia :** Alors, quand on est tous les deux à la maison, c'est vrai que c'est beaucoup plus Pierre qui prend l'initiative de faire à manger. Donc ça, moi, j'avais pas l'habitude, pas du tout du tout, je découvre ce que c'est qu'un homme qui fait à manger. Et j'avoue que j'apprécie énormément, et je pense que du coup je me laisse un peu aller, et que j'prends moins l'initiative de faire à manger quand il est là. Quand il est là, on va dire que c'est lui qui prend l'initiative de faire à manger ; quand j'suis disponible, j'viens l'aider et on fait à manger ensemble, ça, y'a pas de souci. Mais c'est quand-même beaucoup plus lui qui lance le truc. Et puis, j'crois que je m'appuie vraiment là dessus. J'ai tellement toujours fait à manger, pour tout l'monde que là...

**Fairley:** ça doit faire du bien!

**Laëtitia:** ouais! c'est exactement ça! Ça fait un bien fou, donc j'en profite! Et puis, il cuisine très bien donc j'en profite vraiment

**Fairley:** ok. ça, c'est un changement, par rapport à... [her previous relationships, where she was the sole responsible for the food work]

**Laëtitia:** c'est un énorme changement, et je me suis très bien adaptée [rire] !

*Dîner 1*

Yet, in a sense, Laëtitia was also facilitating Pierre's engagement in the everyday food work. She was nearly entirely responsible for the food provisioning, and her ability to estimate properly what to order for two weeks facilitated Pierre being able to spontaneously decide on what to cook in the evenings:

*During the first dinner at the Lebrun household, I am talking with Pierre about trying out new recipes during the lockdown:*

**Pierre:** ... [about the recipe] A what? [laughter] A recipe, that is of no use [laughter]!

**Fairley:** You never do...

**Pierre:** ... No, she does the groceries and I cook. How do you want me to prepare a recipe? I don't even know what is in the freezer [laughter]! You see? [laughter]

**Laëtitia:** You control my online order!

**Pierre:** I look at whether you order beer! [laughter] I control your order, indeed: okay there are beers [laughter!]

**Laëtitia:** And so after he blames me: you did not order this!

**Pierre:** I don't blame you ..

**Laëtitia:** ... right, okay...

**Pierre:** ... if there is not this or that, I will go do groceries

**Laëtitia:** ... blame was not the right word. You complain [laughter]

**Pierre:** I complain, okay, I complain

**Laëtitia:** "You did not order this" [laughter]! But you could have clicked in the little button [laughter]

*Dinner 1*

*During the first dinner at the Lebrun household, I am talking with Pierre about trying out new recipes during the lockdown:*

**Pierre:** ... [au sujet de la recette] une quoi? [rire] Une recette, ça sert à rien [rire] !

**Fairley:** Toi, tu fais jamais...

**Pierre:** Non, c'est elle qui fait les courses et moi qui fait à manger. Comment tu veux que je prépare une recette? Je sais même pas ce qu'il y a dans le congélateur [rire]! Tu comprends? [rire]

**Laëtitia:** Tu contrôles mon drive!

**Pierre:** Je regarde si t'as pris des bières [rire]! Je contrôle ton drive, en effet! c'est bon, y'a des bières [rire] !  
**Laëtitia:** Et donc après, il me reproche: t'as pas pris ça!  
**Pierre:** Je te le reproche pas...  
**Laëtitia:** ... ok, d'accord...  
**Pierre:** ... si y'a pas ça, je vais faire les courses [rire]  
**Laëtitia:** ... le reproche n'était pas le bon mot. tu te plains [rire]  
**Pierre:** Je me plains, d'accord, je me plains  
**Laëtitia:** ' T'as pas pris ça ' [rire] ! Mais tu pouvais appuyer sur le petit bouton [rire] !  
Dîner 1

So in a sense, here again, Pierre' enjoyment of cooking for the family could be lived as a leisurely activity as Laëtitia had the fridge and freezer packed for him to cook. This did not diminish Pierre's cooking skills and involvement in the kitchen, but it certainly helped him experience the it positively.

## 11. Conclusion

Being satisfied with the way family meals were produced meant responding to multiple imperatives: creating balanced dinner menus in themselves, which meant sufficient vegetables (particularly the 'green' ones), not too much carbohydrates and avoiding red meat. Yet family meals menus were also considered in a much larger context than single dinnertimes. Meals had to be balanced with children's school lunch, with the dinners throughout the week, but also from one week to another. This longer-term approach of healthy menus meant weekly 'lapses' in the parents' principles were authorised (usually on Friday evenings or on weekends). Being satisfied with the production of family meals also meant satisfying individual preferences, dealing with individual dietary restrictions, and dealing with other important considerations (saving money and avoiding food waste).

On the one hand, some of the families (Lyon: Bourdon, Imbert, Comescu, Ferret: up. class; Franquet, Armand: up. mid. class; Adelaide: Bennet, Brown: up. mid. class; Davies: low. mid. class) mobilised anticipation strategies to produce the weekly food work, so that the daily preparation became simplified and, ultimately, so that they could experience weekday family meals more positively. These anticipation strategies made the daily food preparation easier – which meant any of the parents could take care of it – and more egalitarian – which is an important dimension of contemporary family life. Nevertheless, it also meant a heavy workload on the weekend and over the week of planning the menus, and this work load was still often taken care of by mothers (except for Benoit Bourdon: up. class). Deciding menus in advance as a rule for the whole family also had the effect of restricting the negotiation possibilities of children, who were given their say in the menus but only according to a set choice of dishes or vegetables. Some parents also felt it was easier to refuse the children's demands by referring to the rules of meal planning (the decision happens at the time of the meal planning, there has to be enough vegetables, less healthy options remain exceptional).

On the other hand, the other families – some of which experienced similar time stress than the families above – took care of the food work daily, in rather improvised manners. This management of food work on a daily basis led to two different results: parents either simplified menus, which often meant excluding vegetables and having carbohydrates as the ingredient. This was the case for the family from lower middle class background (André family in Lyon and Davies family in Adelaide). Moreover, the difficulty of some parents to get their young children to eat enough vegetables restricted their family meals menus to ingredients, which anticipated preparation was more delicate (carbohydrates and meat). In other cases, parents managed to create menus that they were satisfied with in terms of health concern, but these families usually had older children, easy access to food stores and developed cooking skills, which all made the daily improvisation easier.

On top of these different ways of producing family meals food work, there were also contrasted experience of the food preparation in itself, varying from a relaxing and overall pleasurable experience to a chore or even a dreaded activity. Some of the fathers who took care of most of the food work (Benoit, Pierre, Guillaume) experienced it as a real pleasurable experience, turning it into a moment to transition into family life, either by spending time alone in the kitchen – listening to radio programs – or by spending a privileged shared moment with some or all of the family members (Pierre, Guillaume). These fathers cooked on a daily basis and took great pride in being able to provide healthy and tasty food that all the family enjoyed. As such, they positioned themselves as quite happy health providers for the family.

The various forms of involvement in the planning and preparation of family meals presented above were still constructed in a highly gendered manner, reproducing rather than diminishing gender inequalities, although in rather complex or subverted forms.

The burdensome aspect of food work for mothers seemed to have had shifted over the weekend for most of the mothers of this research: they were in charge of the mental load of food work but some of them concentrated over the weekend, by planning menus on advance. This facilitated the participation of fathers in the preparation of meals, which then resembled more a form of execution. But in return, the burdensome aspect of food work – which was finding out what to eat, and so not much the food preparation in itself – was sometimes hidden, by both parents, behind a discourse of equal division of the domestic food work, as the ‘doing’ aspect of family meals appeared to be more valued than their ‘planning’.

The fathers of this research who were in charge of nearly all the food work process, including the mental load of it cooked on a daily basis (Pierre), were also in charge of the shopping and finding out the menus (Benoit and Issa). These fathers all experienced a rather epicurean relationship to food and

cooking (Parsons 2015, Scholliers 2001). They were also concerned about feeding their children healthy meals.

But there was an additional aspect to fathers' differentiated involvement in the everyday food work: the time they spent in the kitchen was developed and experienced as a time and space for oneself. Cooking was therefore for them a pleasurable activity (as other studies have pointed out) but it was also a relaxing activity, a means to disconnect from work, a time that helped them to be ready for a transition into family life, or a time of transition in itself into family life. This particular time and space of cooking, as a 'decompression chamber', as Benoit Bourdon (up. class) put it, existed, however, thanks to being relived from other domestic chores (cleaning up for Issa and Pierre) (Hochschild 1989) and parenting responsibilities (not paying attention to what children are doing, for Benoit, when he is cooking), which were domestic activities that were not valued (at home and out of home), in the same way. Some mothers' engagement in food work allowed them to free time for themselves, but they did not seem to derive the pleasure from the food work in itself. Their organisational strategies of anticipating the mental load of family meals provided them with extra time to do other activities during the week, such as sports for Vanessa Bennet (up. mid. class) from Adelaide, but usually, this time freed up during the week was allocated to their professional work, other parenting activities and family meals.

This chapter aimed at interrogating how the way domestic food work was experienced affected family relationships and to what point examining this enabled us to better understand family mealtimes. The contrasting modalities according to which the mothers and fathers of this research engaged in domestic food work revealed differences in terms of family relationship and in relation to the notion of sharing among the family in the preparation of mealtimes.

Getting family meals ready could be either a sharing moment between the different family members or, on the contrary, a moment of isolation, constrained and experienced rather negatively or chosen and valued. In that sense, food work could affect the experience of mealtime (arriving at the table rather relaxed or not). Additionally, food work was affected by the perspective of eating together: the stressful aspect of food work, when it was experienced as such, was directly connected to the commensals' likes and dislikes, and particularly the potential rejection of children. The burdensome aspect of food preparation is therefore directly connected to the mealtime in itself.

The results have thus revealed that the mealtime – as a moment of eating together – is very much present in the mind of the parents who are preparing food, especially as they anticipate the children's reactions, who are constituted as a 'jury' of their cooking. For some parents, and mostly the fathers, the mealtime was an occasion to obtain recognition of the efforts produced and the cooking skills. For



others, and mostly for the mothers, the mealtime was a stressful occasion as they feared that the (healthy) food they had prepared would be rejected. Some parents would arrive at the table being quite relaxed as their cooking skills, and the circumstances in which they cooked (being alone in the kitchen, for instance, or not having to deal with the mental load) did not require burdensome efforts. Other parents and – again, mostly mothers, would arrive at the table being already mentally exhausted from having to find out what to cook, cook it and sometimes dealing with being unsatisfied with the menu.



## Chapter 5. The boundaries of family mealtimes

On the fourth visit at the Bourdon household (up. class), on a Friday evening, Marie-Cécile was taking care of preparing dinner while Benoit, her husband, was still at work. At one point, the children, Marius (8) and Lucie (6) briefly came into the kitchen, interrupting their ball game, prompting their mother to remind them they were to set the table:

**Marie-Cécile:** Can you set the table, please?

**Marius** [8 years-old]: What ?

*She slowly repeats*

**The kids:** Oh no !!

**Marie-Cécile :** [to me] I love the enthusiasm [irony]

*She goes and sees them in the next room*

**Marie-Cécile:** [angry] ! Come on, I am fed up now!

*The children keep complaining*

**Lucie** [6 years-old]: [angry as well] ... but I wanted you to give it to me! [Marie-Cécile took the ball away from her]

**Marie-Cécile:** [yelling] Hey ! Don't you take that tone with me !

*Silence*

**Marie-Cécile:** [calmer] I've taken the things out, you are going to set the table

**Marius:** [moaning] We always do it !

**Marie-Cécile:** No, you do not always set the table. You set the table from time to time.

**Lucie:** [contestation] Well if it's alone, I'm not doing it

**Marie-Cécile:** Well you do it the both of you. I've put EVERYTHING out on the table

**Lucie:** [firm] But if it's just the two of us, I'm not doing it

**Marie-Cécile:** Well I will come and help you, but you get started and ...

**Marius:** ... yes, but why... ?

**Marie-Cécile:** ... [irony] because you have the most horrible parents in the world, [angry] and because I am asking you to!

**Lucie:** Mum, Mum, but when you say you are going to help us, you hardly ever help us !

**Marie-Cécile:** [Calm] Come on, let's go

**Marius:** ...I want...

**Marie-Cécile:** ... [annoyed] but it's because I am obliged to negotiate for hours and in the meantime, I have other things to do. No, no, you're not hiding in your bed, you're going to...

**Marius:** ... yes, but you interrupted me, I didn't want...

**Marie-Cécile:** ... now what is this blackmail?

**Marius:** [whining] No, I swear, you interrupted me

**Marie-Cécile:** Oh, come one !

**Marius:** It makes me sad

**Marie-Cécile:** [calm] I understand it makes you sad. Come on, we're going to set the table, please. Come on. Lucie, come.

**Lucie:** Yes

*Marie-Cécile helps the children set the table*

**Marie-Cécile:** There, I am helping : are you going to survive this ?

*Lucie hums*

*Dinner 4*

**Marie-Cécile:** Vous mettez la table s'il vous plait?

**Marius:** Quoi?

*Elle répète plus lentement.*

**Les enfants:** Oh, non!!

**Marie-Cécile :** [à moi] J'aime cet enthousiasme [ironie]

*Elle sort de la cuisine pour les rejoindre*

**Marie-Cécile:** Allez ! [en colère] J'en peux plus là !

*Les enfants râlent*

**Lucie:** ... mais justement, je voulais que tu me la donnes ! [en colère, elle aussi. Marie-Cécile a dû lui retirer sa balle]

**Marie-Cécile:** Et dis donc ! Tu me parles pas sur ce ton !! [en criant]

*Silence*

**Marie-Cécile:** J'ai sorti des trucs, vous allez mettre le couvert [plus calme]

**Marius:** On le fait toujours [en râlant]

**Marie-Cécile:** Non, vous mettez pas toujours le couvert, vous mettez le couvert de temps en temps

**Lucie:** Et si c'est tout seul, moi je le fais pas!

**Marie-Cécile:** Mais vous le faites tous les deux ! J'ai TOUT sorti sur la table

**Lucie:** Mais si c'est que nous deux, moi j'le fais pas [affirmée]

**Marie-Cécile:** Mais je vais venir vous aider, mais vous commencez et...

**Marius:** Oui, mais pourquoi... ?

**Marie-Cécile:** ... parce que vous avez les parents les plus horribles du monde et que je vous le demande [ironique, énervée]

**Lucie:** ... Maman..., Maman, en fait quand tu dis que tu vas nous aider, tu nous aides presque jamais !

**Marie-Cécile:** Allez, on y va !

**Marius:** ...moi, j'ai envie...

**Marie-Cécile:** ...mais, c'est parce que je suis obligée de discuter pendant des plombes et qu'en attendant je fais autre chose. Non, non, tu te planques pas dans ton lit, tu vas...

**Marius:** ... oui, mais tu m'as coupé la parole, je voulais pas...

**Marie-Cécile:** ... non, mais c'est quoi ce chantage-là ?

**Marius:** non, mais j'te jure, tu m'as coupé la parole [ton pleurnichant]

**Marie-Cécile:** Oh ! Allez !

**Marius:** Ça me rend triste

**Marie-Cécile:** Je comprends que ça te rende triste. Allez [plus calme], on va mettre le couvert, s'il vous plaît. Allez. Lucie, tu viens.

**Lucie:** Oui

*Marie-Cécile aide les enfants à mettre la table.*

**Marie-Cécile:** Alors ça va là, je vous aide : vous survivez?

*Lucie chantonne*

Dîner 4

At the end of dinner, the children were much more excited about the meal being over than they were about preparing for it:

**Benoit:** Have you finished, sweetie?

**Lucie:** Yes

*She gets up to leave the table*

**Marie-Cécile:** No, no, no, no

**Lucie:** Oh [disappointed]

**Marie-Cécile:** If you want to leave the table, fold your napkin and you can leave

**Benoit:** ... [at the same time] fold your napkin and you can leave

*She lays out the napkin as a square on the table, flattening it out with her hand*

**Lucie:** There : I've folded my napkin

**Marie-Cécile:** Is that folded?

**Marie-Cécile:** mm-hmm

**Lucie:** Why? I folded it into a square [teasing]

**Marie-Cécile :** It's a large square, isn't it? [a little bit of humour, a little bit of blame]

**Lucie:** Well not, it's very small, look !

**Benoit:** mm-hmm

**Marie-Cécile:** Come on sweetie

**Benoit:** Come on, young girl  
*Benoit gets up to clear away*  
**Lucie:** There : I've folded it, blablabli [she folded it into four]  
**Marie-Cécile:** Very well. Thank you missie  
**Benoit:** Right, thank you, young girl.  
*Silence*  
**Benoit:** So you can maybe go wash your hands and your face...  
**Marie-Cécile:** ... [at the same time] wash your hands and your face. [to Benoit]: so when I asked them to set the table  
**Benoit:** Yes?  
**Marie-Cécile:** They went: 'Oh no, we always set the table' [laughter]  
*Dinner 4*

**Benoit:** Est-ce que tu as fini ma puce ?  
**Lucie:** Oui  
*Elle se lève pour sortir de table*  
**Marie-Cécile:** Non, non, non, non.  
**Lucie:** Oh [déçue]  
**Marie-Cécile:** Si tu veux sortir de table, tu plies ta serviette et tu peux sortir de table  
**Benoit:** ... (en même temps) tu plies ta serviette et tu peux sortir de table  
*Elle étale la serviette carrée sur la table et l'aplatit avec sa main*  
**Lucie:** Voilà, j'ai plié ma serviette !  
**Marie-Cécile:** C'est plié ça ?  
**Marie-Cécile:** Hhmmm  
**Lucie:** Ben pourquoi ? Je l'ai plié en carré [teasing her parents]  
**Marie-Cécile:** C'est un gros carré hein [mi humour, mi reproche]  
**Lucie:** Ben non, c'en est un tout petit, s'ils regardez !  
**Benoit:** Hmm hmm  
**Marie-Cécile:** Allez chouquette  
**Benoit:** Allez, jeune fille  
*Benoit se lève pour débarrasser*  
**Lucie:** Voilà, j'ai plié, blablabli (elle a plié sa serviette en quatre)  
**Marie-Cécile:** Très bien, merci mademoiselle  
**Benoit:** Bien, merci jeune fille. Silence. Du coup, tu peux peut-être aller faire les mains et les dents.  
**Marie-Cécile:** ... (en même temps) faire les mains, les dents. [à Benoit] : alors, quand même, j'ai demandé qu'ils mettent le couvert aujourd'hui...  
**Benoit:** Ouais ?  
**Marie-Cécile:** J'ai eu le droit à: 'oh noon, c'est toujours nous qui mettons le couvert !' [rire]  
*Dîner 4*

I have demonstrated in the previous chapter some of the challenges inherent to the circumstances in which family meals were produced, in particular some unequal gendered experiences and how these experiences affected and were affected by the mealtimes in themselves. In this chapter, I bring the reader closer to the dining table, moving on to the boundaries of family mealtimes, observing the circumstances in which commensality came together and dissolved and the additional challenges family members faced. Above, Marie-Cécile first had difficulty to get Lucie and Marius to quit their game and engage together in the preparation of an event for the whole family. In the end, after some conflictual interactions and intergenerational negotiation, she reluctantly lowered her expectations of what her children should do: all three of them set the table. The stake here was to get the children to participate in an activity *for* the family, initiating in that way the commensal togetherness. At the end

of the mealtime, commensality crumbled more easily than it came together, with the children being eager to leave and not being asked to clear the table. Domestic commensality, as a collective family ritual, was more difficult to build than it was to undo. Family mealtimes and particularly their boundaries became opportunities to observe the balance and tensions between individuals and the family as a collective.

Bourdieu's theorisation of the notion of ritual of institution enlightens our understanding of everyday family mealtimes (1982). He analysed the notion of rite of passage, initially developed by Van Genep (1991) and later completed by Turner (1995), according to its social function, one of which is to separate those who undergo the rite of passage from those who will never undergo it. He substituted the notion of ritual of passage by that of ritual of institution, analysing the passage from one state to another and putting forward the authorities that enforce it. For Bourdieu, the line or the limit that is passed during the ritual is of particular interest: it is not so much the passage that is of importance rather the line that is crossed that separates two groups and institutes a particular social order. For Durkheim, there is a repetitive dimension inherent to the notion of ritual:

'The essential is that individuals are reunited, that common feelings are felt and are expressed through common acts. Everything brings us back to the same idea: that rituals are, above all, the means through which the group reinstates itself periodically' (1909)

Durkheim's interest was in the efficiency of the rite, which resides according to him in the collective state of minds created through the rituals which need to be repeated regularly.

Everyday family meals, as rituals, had an instituting dimension: they built and confirmed, on a routine basis, the family as an institution, as opposed to a collection of individuals. They reinstate, over the days and the weeks, individuals into member of a family and this cyclical dimension happened because the ritual and the gathering of the family also fell apart every evening. The everyday performance of family mealtimes confirmed the existence of the family as a private group constituted in opposition to other groups or members of society. In fact, Grignon reminded us that commensality is first and foremost a segregative social act (C. Grignon 2001):

'Consuming food and drinks together may no doubt activate and tighten internal solidarity; but it happens because commensality first allows the limits of the group to be redrawn, its internal hierarchies to be restored and if necessary to be redefined. (2001, 24)'

What Grignon names segregative commensality is a way to strengthen the frontiers between groups: 'to meet for eating and drinking is a way to set up and restore the group by closing it, a way to assert or to strengthen a "We" by pointing out and rejecting, as symbols of otherness, the "not We"' (2001, 28).

Yet, this institutive or segregative act is not necessarily a straightforward process. If it is clear that mealtimes reaffirm the family as a group, as Grignon already noted, there is less knowledge about the difficulties inherent to this. De Singly argued the distance characterising family relationships needed to be both ‘weak to create a feeling of community and strong to protect one’s individuality. The difficulty then mostly resides in the agreement between the members of the relationship on what is appropriate at this or that moment’ (2000, 6). I apprehended everyday family rituals with this type of family relationship in mind, questioning how they could be performed – necessarily quite loosely in the context of family life – to encompass both space for individual freedom but also for creating and sustaining togetherness. With his concept of rite of institution, Bourdieu encouraged us to look into the delimitations of which the ritual marked the passage from one state to another. This chapter provides an insight into these delimitations, or boundaries, and examined the circumstances in which family members gathered and parted for mealtimes. I look into mealtime boundaries from spatial and temporal perspectives, focusing on where and when commensality formed and dissolved and the challenges that these passages posed in the context of contemporary family life. Looking at the boundaries of mealtimes also implies examining when usual delimitations were transgressed and what were the meanings of these transgressions for commensality and family life.

## **1. Spatial delimitations**

### **1.1. *From the dining table to the lounge room***

The etymological origin of commensality means sharing the table<sup>89</sup>, ‘mensa’ designating the table. In common public representations, family meals are usually portrayed with family members sitting at a table. The dining or kitchen table was indeed the usual mealtime location for the large majority of the households of this study, where parents felt it was best to have dinner and where they were most likely to call the eating occasion a family mealtime.

For 14 out of the 16 families of this study, eating at a dining table was mentioned as the principal mealtime locations (see *Figures 30 to 38 below*). In Lyon, out of the 39 meals I observed, only three did not happen at a dining table; one occurred on the couch, another at the coffee table and one in a park. Nevertheless, there was still mention of regular mealtime displacements among these households of Lyon and 8 reported eating elsewhere on a regular basis. Of the 18 dinnertimes reported on or filmed by the families from Adelaide (3 filmed and 15 described shortly in food diaries), 11 took place with

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<sup>89</sup><https://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/commensal> (accessed on 12 March 2021).

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/commensal> (accessed on 5 November 2021)

some or all of the households gathered around the table. For 2 dinners, the children were eating on the couch and for 5 they ate at the counter.

It was more difficult to get the parents from Lyon to acknowledge they ate elsewhere than at the dining table, although I eventually found out it did happen in most families and on a quite regular basis. It was less straightforward to get invited at these mealtimes. Some of the parents from Adelaide spoke much more freely about alternative eating locations. Family mealtimes were relocated (from the dining table) for various reasons among the different households and these displacements affected differently the place of commensality within the families.

### 1.1.1. The dining table as a pillar of commensality

All the parents from Lyon mentioned the dining table as the focal space of family life and a condition of proper commensality. The parents from Adelaide did not voice as strong an attachment to it. Pierre Lebrun from Lyon (int. mid. class) explained how his new open plan kitchen, which was under construction, would be laid out:

**Pierre:** After, we will have a large table in the middle of the living room, where we will all fit around. For seven, eight people. And that is really important for us, as it will take up a central space in the house, that table [...]. So we invest a lot to be in a space for sharing.

**Pierre :** Après, on aura une très grande table au milieu du séjour, où on tient tous assis autour. Pour sept, huit personnes. Et là c'est vraiment important pour nous puisque ça va prendre un espace central de la maison, cette table [...]. Donc on investit beaucoup pour être dans des lieux de partage.

Observations at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class) from Lyon also revealed that the table was central to mealtimes. Even though they were undertaking construction in their house, all the observed meals happened on the patio of the garden at one or two plastic tables. Magali Imbert (up. class) from Lyon described their family mealtimes and how the table also became central in the making of the couple and then of the construction of their family with the children:

**Magali:** So we are at the table. It's true that, with that as well, when Stéphane [husband] come to live at my place, I was just coming back from Vietnam: I had a mat on the floor with cushions and a coffee table. The first thing he told me was: 'okay, I am coming to live at your place but we are buying a table and some chairs to eat properly at the table [laughter]'.

**Magali :** Donc du coup on est à table. C'est vrai que, ça aussi, quand Stéphane [husband] il est venu vivre chez moi, moi j'rentrais du Vietnam : j'avais une natte par terre avec des coussins et une table basse. La première chose qu'il m'a dit c'est : ' ok je viens vivre chez toi mais on achète une table et des chaises pour manger correctement à table ' [rire].

Observations at the Imbert household (up. class) showed indeed the table occupied a central position in the house and they had even recently invested in a new one and some chairs. During the fifth dinner at their place Magali, Stéphane and Louise (8) rejoiced about having invested in their 'beautiful table' and commented on it being large and the padded chairs comfortable. During the sixth dinner at the



Imbert household, this subject came up again and Stéphane and Magali explained how they connected the notion of family to the dining table:

**Stéphane** : I thought from the moment we're a couple, we start to do..., to create a family life: there is a table for the meal and all the ceremonial, so to speak

**Fairley**: Well yes, settling into a relationship, it is doing things...?

**Magali**: Properly.

*Dinner 6*

**Stéphane**: J' me suis dit, à partir du moment où on se met en couple, on commence à faire..., à créer une vie de famille : y'a la table pour le repas et tout le cérémoniel, entre guillemets.

**Fairley**: Et oui, s'installer en couple, c'est faire les choses.... ?

**Magali**: ... bien.

*Dîner 6*

In another apartment in Lyon Guillaume Rizzo (int. mid. class) invested in a new dining table and some chairs at the time of my visits, explaining he found the old ones not comfortable and appropriate enough: the chairs he got rid of were outdoor metal ones. In yet another home in Lyon, Ana Nimaga (int. mid. class) explained that she preferred to eat at the table with her family, although her step-daughter and her companion did not care as much about it. She associated her attachment to eating at the table to her childhood experiences in Romania, where the family members did not necessarily sit down to eat:

**Ana**: Everybody ate when he or she wanted. I mean, in the kitchen. And we did not have these habits [of eating together at the table]. There was [just] a little table in the kitchen.

**Fairley**: You did not eat together?

**Ana**: No. Or perhaps if my brother and I ate. My father did not sit down. He ate standing [...]. But also, we did not have the same schedule so I think that, from their point of view, they did that so as not to bother us, so that we were, let's say, free. I mean so that everyone felt free. But as a consequence, I missed it, I think, that aspect of eating together, I don't know.

**Ana** : C'est pour ça aussi que j'aime bien manger assis à table, ça doit venir du fait que dans mon enfance on était pas assis à table.

**Fairley** : Ok. Vous mangiez où ?

**Ana** : Chacun mangeait quand il voulait, 'fin dans la cuisine, et on a pas eu ces habitudes [de manger ensemble à table]. Y'avait [juste] une petite table dans la cuisine.

**Fairley** : Mais vous mangiez pas ensemble ?

**Ana** : Non, et encore, si jamais on mangeait, peut-être moi et mon frère. Mon père il s'asseyait pas. Il mangeait debout [...]. Après on n'avait pas le même programme, donc je crois que de leur point de vue, ils faisaient ça pour pas trop nous embêter, pour qu'on soit libres on va dire, enfin pour que tout le monde se sente libre. Mais moi du coup ça m'a manqué, je crois, ce côté manger ensemble, je sais pas.

Nevertheless, how could Ana miss something she never experienced as a kid? When saying 'I missed it, this eating together aspect', she was actually implicitly pointing to her high endorsement of eating together at a table as a family and might have been creating, retrospectively, an emotional memory validating her current practices. She was also referring to the way she was trying to construct her family more as a collective rather than as a collection of individuals, in opposition to the way she ate as a

child. Her parents did have a dining room with a large table, but this space was not meant for everyday domestic commensality:

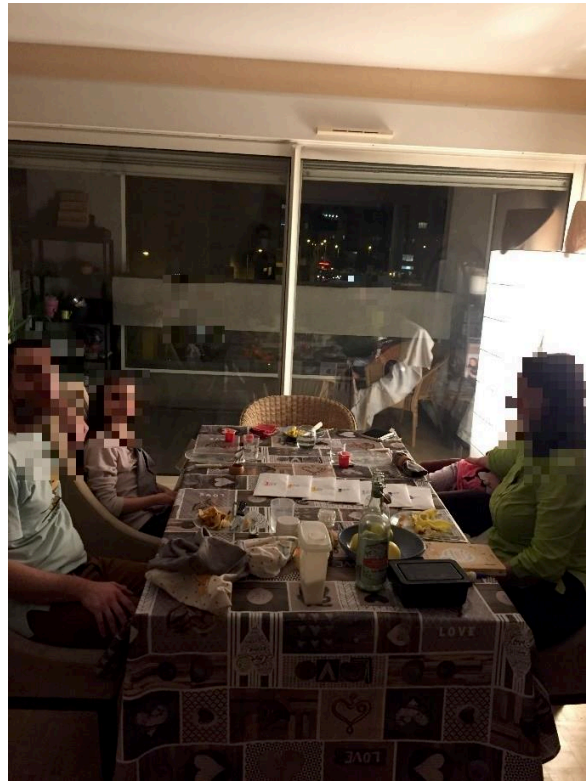
**Ana:** At our place, there was not really [a place to eat together]. Or there would be a room meant for it, but we never go there, it's for when there is a wedding, or when people come. But you know that's rare [...]. Nothing happens in that room. In the everyday life, we never go into that room. All the houses..., when I was a kid, in the countryside, at my grandparents, that was everywhere, [...] there are still two or three rooms where, in general, you are not allowed to go in, so as not to get them dirty. Those are the rooms for I don't know which guest, because there is never any guest. And so the good rooms, we did not go into them. Life happened in the kitchen.

**Ana :** Chez nous y'avait pas trop [d'endroit pour manger ensemble], ou alors y'a une pièce prévue mais on y va jamais, c'est quand y'a un mariage, ou des gens qui arrivent. Mais c'est rare quoi [...]. Il se passe rien dans cette pièce, dans la vie de tous les jours, on y va jamais dans cette pièce. Toutes les maisons..., moi quand j'étais petite, à la campagne, chez les grands parents, ça, c'est partout : [...] y'a encore deux, trois pièces où en général t'as pas droit d'y aller pour pas salir. C'est les pièces pour je sais pas quel invité, parce qu'il y a jamais d'invité. Et donc les bonnes pièces, on allait pas là-bas. La vie se passait dans la cuisine.

If the parents from Lyon and a couple of them from Adelaide talked about the dining table as being central to commensality and had indeed the majority of their family meals around it, in practice though, only 4 families from Lyon (Bourdon: up. class, Nimaga: int. mid. class, André: low. mid class; Armand: *unknown social class*) never talked about nor were witnessed eating at another location than the dining or kitchen table.



Figure 27. Dinner table at the Lebrun household, lunch 5



*Figure 28 Dinner table at the Imbert household, dinner 1*



*Figure 29. Dinner table at the Comescu household, dinner 4*



Figure 30. Dinner table at the Obecanov household, dinner 2



Figure 31. Dinner table at the Lebrun household, dinner 6



*Figure 32 Dinner table at the Chapman household, Food diary*



*Figure 33. Dinner table at the Davies, dinner 3, family produced video*



Figure 34 Dinner table at the Bennet, Food diary



Figure 35 Dinner table at the Bennet household, Food diary

## 1.1.2. The significance of eating elsewhere

### 1.1.2.1. Reinforcing commensal norms by eating in the lounge room

For four of the households (Imbert, Ferret: up class, Lebrun: int. mid. class, Cellier: *unknown social class*), eating elsewhere than at the dining table happened regularly, but in an anticipated and ritualised manner. The parents had decided that certain family mealtimes could routinely happen on the couch or around the coffee table in the lounge room. The children knew in advance when this occurred and were able to describe it quite clearly. At the Lebrun household (int. mid. class) from Lyon, on each Wednesday evening only the two boys of Laëtitia were there, Pierre's three children being at their mother's home. Laëtitia had decided that this evening would constitute a special mealtime with just her boys and they had their dinner on the couch while the father was usually busy elsewhere in the house:

*With Laëtitia, Nolan (9) and Nathan (11), we were settled on the couch. Nathan had set up the TV and prepared the series to the last episode of Friends, which they watched every Wednesday evening for their dinner on the couch. Laëtitia and Nathan had brought out on the coffee table glasses, a water pitcher and cutlery. A few minutes after settling down on the couch, Pierre brought us the plates. He prepared dinner, with the help of Nathan. The boys laid their plates on the cushions and Laëtitia put hers down on her knees. There was not much talk and when there was, it only concerned food and usually occurred at the time of the opening credits of the episode (we watched several episodes). Laëtitia never commented or corrected the boys about how they were sitting. Aurelie got up to get the desserts. The meal began at 7:30 and ended around 9PM. Laëtitia cleared away, without the help of the boys, contrary to when they were at the table.*

*(Figure 36. Dinner 4 at the Lebrun household, on the couch, watching Friends; Figure 37. Dinner 4 at the Lebrun household and Figure 38. Dinner 4 at the Lebrun household: eating on pillows on the couch)  
Ethnographic note, dinner 4*

Such family dinners implied a form of non-control over mealtime manners and conversations, as Laëtitia Lebrun reminded:

**Laëtitia:** We like this little ritual. It is a little relaxing evening, it's nice [...]. And for that matter, it is the only evening when I do not ask them to clear away, especially when it is late, so generally, when we turn off, they go to bed. Yeah, it's not an evening like the others.

**Laëtitia:** On aime bien ce petit rituel. Ça fait une petite soirée détente, ça fait du bien [...] Et d'ailleurs, c'est le seul soir où moi je leur demande même pas de débarrasser, surtout quand il est tard, donc en général, quand on éteint, ils vont au lit. Ouai, c'est un soir pas comme les autres.

The alternative mealtime location was usually on the couch, but it could also be sitting on children's chairs or on pillows laid on the floor around the coffee table:



*Figure 36. Dinner 4 at the Lebrun household, on the couch, watching Friends*



*Figure 37. Dinner 4 at the Lebrun household*



*Figure 38. Dinner 4 at the Lebrun household: eating on pillows on the couch*



Jérôme Ferret (up. class) was often absent for Friday dinner, as he was out at his sport activity. Céline talked about their Friday evening mealtimes which she calls “plateau-télé” in French or TV dinner:

**Céline :** It's always [the TV dinner on Friday evenings]. I mean except when we have people over, we don't do it. But otherwise, yes it's a TV dinner with very very simple dishes to prepare, like the pizza from [the supermarket] or even the ramen, you know, the things that are very chemical. But Noémie [7 years old] likes that, so we have a TV dinner. It's often just the two of us because Friday evenings, Jérôme often has a gym class [...].

We talk less. Yeah, we put the pad on the table, it depends what we are watching, and so, we sit side by side. Or we go in the TV room and are sitting on beanbag chairs with coffee tables. We eat with the fingers, we don't necessarily have plates. Usually, I will bring a large wooden board with the pizza on it and we help ourselves directly from it, we don't use cutlery. And for that matter, I realise that Noémie will set the table, organise the table on her own. You see, she will put the beanbag chairs, she will place the coffee table, she will bring the glasses of water.

**Fairley:** And would Friday evening be a decompression airlock, compared to the other meals? Or not at all?

**Céline :** Yeah, a little bit, yes. Because, like, it's the day when you sit any which way, inevitably, because you have your knees at the level of your shoulders, you see [laughter]? Yeah, it's inevitably the day when you are not necessarily sitting properly, when I won't look at how she is eating: we eat with our fingers, we don't even use place mats under the plates, when we have plates. I mean, you see, it's really less conventional indeed, yes. And also, it marked the passage to the weekend.

**Céline :** C'est systématique [le plateau télé du vendredi soir]. Enfin sauf quand on a du monde à la maison, quand on a des invités on le fait pas, mais sinon oui c'est plateau télé avec des plats très très simples à préparer, genre la pizza de chez U express ou voir même des ramen, tu sais les trucs chinois qui doivent être plein de trucs bien chimiques, là. Mais Noémie [7 ans], elle aime ça donc, écoute, on se fait, voilà on se fait des plateaux télé. C'est souvent toutes les deux parce que vendredi soir, Jérôme il a cours de sport [...].

On discute moins. Ouais soit on met la tablette sur la table, ça dépend de ce qu'on regarde, et du coup on se met côte à côte. Soit on se retrouve dans la salle télé et on est assis sur des poufs avec des tables basses. On mange avec les doigts.... heu on a même pas forcément d'assiettes. En fait je vais amener une grosse planche en bois avec la pizza dessus et on se sert directement, on a pas de couverts. Et là pour le coup je m'aperçois que Noémie met la table, organise la table toute seule. Tu vois, elle va mettre les poufs, elle va mettre les petites tables, elle va porter les verres d'eau, l'eau...

**Fairley :** Et est-ce que le vendredi ce serait un sas de décompression par rapport aux autres repas ? Ou pas du tout ?

**Céline :** Ouais. Un p'tit peu oui voilà. Parce que c'est le jour où tu te tiens un peu n'importe comment forcément puisque t'es avec les genoux au niveau des épaules, tu vois [rire] ? Enfin voilà, c'est forcément le jour où tu te tiens pas forcément bien, où je vais pas regarder la façon dont elle mange, où des fois on mange avec les doigts, où on met même pas de set de table sous les assiettes quand on a des assiettes. Enfin tu vois, c'est beaucoup moins conventionnel en effet ouais. Et ça marque aussi le passage au week-end.

For Céline, these mealtimes were highly abnormal as they contained many irregularities: the location and setting were displaced. There was a reversal of the objects that were normally authorised at the table: plates, cutlery and sets were abandoned and the pad was introduced. Watching over table manners was put aside and mealtime conversations lost their importance. Nevertheless, despite this highly unusual manner of having a family meal for the Ferret, the way Noémie (7) set the mealtime area when they ate in their lounge room indicated this Friday night TV mealtime was a ritual in itself: she prepared the eating area by herself, without her mother reminding her to do so. It was also a

mealtime that happened every Friday evenings. This disruption was also possible because it constituted a transitional stage of the week's family mealtimes: after having reproduced 'conventional' mealtime rituals all week long, Céline allowed themselves to let go of the ritual, before the weekend when commensal rules would be followed again. This was also encouraged by the absence of the father who, in this family, tended to be the one watching over the daughter's table manners.

Although the location of the meal appeared as an alternative from eating at the table and was characterised as such by family members, these participated in reinforcing traditional commensality. Some parents allowed themselves to eat elsewhere, more casually, because they sustained the ritual of traditional table mealtime the rest of the time:

**Jérôme Imbert:** From time to time we have a meal, a bite to eat in front of the TV. In order to let go a bit. Because I realise the..., the rigour that it imposes, eating at the table. There's a ritual side to it that's very good, but you've still got all the preparation and you've also got the clearing up side, and sometimes, when there's only one, instead of having both, it's still much more pleasant to have a little more flexibility. It allows you to breathe a little.

**Jérôme Imbert :** Ca arrive de temps en temps qu'on fasse un repas, croque [croque-monsieur] devant la télé. De façon à souffler un petit peu. Parce que je me rends compte de la..., de la rigueur en fait que ça impose, de manger à table. Ca a un côté rituel qui est très bien, mais t'as quand même tout un préparatif et t'as le côté aussi débarassage qui est là et c'est que, des fois, quand y'en a qu'un en fait, au lieu d'avoir les deux, de se laisser quand même un peu plus de souplesse, c'est quand même beaucoup plus agréable. Ça permet de souffler un peu.

The Cellier (*unknown social class*) in Lyon also regularly displaced their family mealtimes. Sébastien, the father, explained that although they regularly had couch dinners on Friday evening, he wanted these to remain quite rare for them to be a unique but festive family moment:

**Sébastien :** And there are also the meals, there are meals for pleasure. Often on Friday evenings [...]. It can be a pizza we bought at the pizzaiolo of the neighborhood. It can be that kind of things.

**Fairley :** And so why pleasure? Is it pleasure in the sense: you eat different things, or in the form?

**Sébastien :** In the sense we will eat things that are not necessarily, that are maybe a bit quicker, we are not going to set the table, we are going to eat with our hands, we will kind of eat in front of the TV. But it remains something exceptional, where I try to make sure it's not the rule [...]. It's pizza every Friday evening [...] because I want it to remain festive, that it is not a taken for granted.

**Sébastien :** Et puis après y'a les repas, y'a les repas un peu plaisir quoi. Souvent le vendredi soir [...]. Ça peut être une pizza qu'on a pris au pizzaiolo du coin. Ça peut être ce genre de chose quoi.

**Fairley :** Et donc pourquoi plaisir ? Est-ce que c'est plaisir dans le sens : vous mangez des choses différentes ou aussi dans la forme ?

**Sébastien :** Dans le sens on va manger des choses qui sont pas forcément, qui sont peut-être plus rapides où on va pas mettre la table, où on va manger avec les mains, où on va être un peu devant la télé. Enfin voilà, ça reste le moment un peu exceptionnel. Où j'essaie de faire en sorte que ce soit pas la règle [...] c'est pas tous les vendredis ça sera la pizza [...], parce que j'ai envie que ça reste festif et je veux pas que ça devienne un dû.

The notion of guilty pleasure underlaid Sébastien's discourse. For these families, bending the rule of eating at the dinner table remained unusual and happened in exceptional circumstances. These exceptions, as well as the guilty pleasure that came from them, indicated the strength of table family

meals. Elsewhere in Lyon, at the Comescu household (up. class), Saturday evenings allowed for eating on pillows on the floor around the coffee table, watching a TV show.

At the Imbert household (up. class), where the family members usually ate at the dining table in a highly ritualized manner, two types of mealtime displacements were regularly performed: the first is what they called an *apéro dinatoire* and happened occasionally but in a ritualised manner. The second occurred when the father was away: Magali, the mother, then allowed her daughters and herself to eat on the couch, in front of the TV. I took part in an *apéro dinatoire* but only for the last visit, after 5 dinners observed at the table. At first sight, it seemed that this *apéro dinatoire* happened in a rather unstructured manner but it actually beared many similarities with conventional table commensality (Figure 39. *Apéro dinatoire Imbert: the coffee table is neatly layed, dinner 6* Figure 39. *Apéro dinatoire Imbert: the coffee table is neatly layed, dinner 6*):

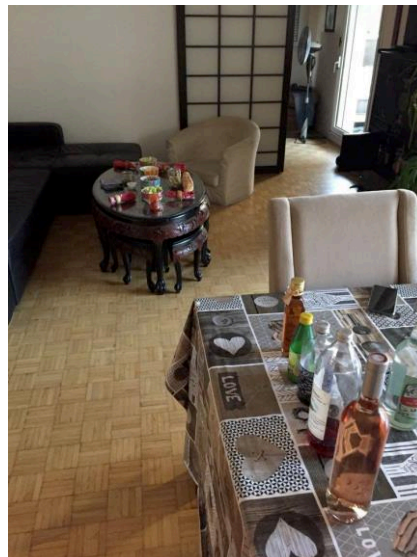


Figure 39. *Apéro dinatoire Imbert: the coffee table is neatly layed, dinner 6*

*The daughters, Louise (8) and Rose (5) are sitting on the small stool. Stéphane, the father is about to sit on a stool as well, beside the couch but Magali and Rose tell him they have reserved him a spot on the couch: so even if it is an apéro, each and everybody has a set place. We toast before drinking. Everybody eats what she or he wants, in the order she or he wants. Rose starts by eating sweets. The girls often get up during the meal: Rose does somersaults in the lounge room, she goes and get things in her bedroom, Louise gets a magazine and reads us some riddles. Rose gets up to go hug her mother: she stands behind her, on the couch, and climbs on her back, then goes on her knees, Magali also hugs her back. Rose mostly eats sweets. Louise does not eat much. The discussion is more rambling than at the table and the girls talk more.*

Ethnographic note, dinner 6

In many ways, the parents were still quite controlling of the way the mealtime happened, similarly to dining table mealtimes and if the daughters transgressed too much table manners, it created tensions with Stéphane. Rose asked if she could begin to eat to which her mother answered: ‘well, we will wait for Dad, right?’ as he had gone out to get more bread at the bakery. A bit later, Rose began to drink

before all of us had our glasses served and Magali then Louise reminded her that it would be best if she waited so that we could all toast together, which we did a few minutes later. Alternative mealtimes usually implied some forms of transgression as it supposedly left more possibilities of action for all the family members, including for the children, as Stéphane explained:

**Stéphane:** The idea is that everybody has fun, that everybody takes her or his time and does what she or he pleases. Within a reasonable limit, of course.

**Stéphane :** L'idée c'est que tout le monde s'amuse, tout le monde prenne son temps et tout le monde fait ce qu'il a envie. Dans la limite du raisonnable bien-sûr.

In the case of the Imbert (up. class), there were many behaviours that the father found unreasonable. Rose tried to do the serving of the food, which was usually restricted to her parents at conventional table mealtimes:

**Rose:** [high voice] Who wants some cheese?

**Magali:** [Taking the cheese bowl from her] That's okay sweetie

**Rose:** No, but I wanted to propose

**Stéphane:** Rose, that is okay, thanks

**Rose:** [to me] Do you want some cheese

**Fairley:** After this, thanks

**Rose:** Okay. [to her mother] Do you want some cheese?

**Magali:** No thanks

**Rose:** [low voice] Do you want some cheese, Mom?

**Magali:** No thanks

**Rose:** Dad, do you want some cheese?

**Stéphane:** Later on, Rose, I will help myself ? Thanks

*She offers some to Louise also, who declines. In the meantime, Stéphane and Louise are talking about Stéphane's work*

**Rose:** [at the same time as her father is speaking, disappointed] You serve people and and I can't serve anybody

*Rose gets up and does a cartwheel beside the coffee table. Her father gets annoyed and corrects her:*

**Stéphane:** Rose! Thanks

**Rose:** I want to do a cartwheel

**Stéphane:** [annoyed] Rose, thanks

*He continues to talk to Louise and corrects Rose again*

*Dinner 6*

**Rose:** [fort] Qui veut du fromage?!

**Magali:** C'est bon ma puce

**Rose:** Non, mais c'est moi qui voulait proposer [sa mère voulait lui prendre le bol de fromage]

**Stéphane:** Rose, c'est bon, merci

**Rose:** [à moi] Tu veux du fromage?

**Fairley:** Après ça, merci

**Rose:** Ok. [à Anne] Tu veux du fromage?

**Magali:** Ça va, merci

*Pendant ce temps, Louise pose des questions à son père sur le chômage partiel*

**Rose:** [à voix basse] Tu veux du fromage Maman ?

**Magali:** Non merci

**Rose:** Papa, tu veux du fromage?

**Stéphane:** Tout à l'heure Rose, je me servirais, c'est gentil, merci

*Elle propose aussi à Louise qui décline. La discussion continue sur le travail de Stéphane*

**Rose :** [en même temps que son père, déçue] Vous, vous servez les gens, alors que moi j'peux servir personne

*Rose se lève et fait la roue à côté de la table basse, dans le salon. Son père, agacé, la reprend.*  
**Stéphane:** Rose! Merci  
**Rose:** Je veux faire la roue  
**Stéphane:** [agacé] Rose, merci!  
Il continue de parler à Louise de son travail et reprend encore une fois Rose.  
*Dîner 6*

Much to Rose's disappointment, none of the adults in the room accepted to play the role of being served by her. She then temporarily lost interest in the mealtime and moved out of the scene to do some somersaults, in front of the reproving eyes of her father. The same type of tensions occurred with conversations. The conversations were rather rambling, much less structured than during dining table mealtimes: the girls were able to bring a larger variety of topics to the table, they spoke much louder and were much more excited than what I had witnessed previously. I saw them singing, which Stéphane also condemned in the following way: 'Rose, shut up, thanks!'. However, Rose's agitation might have been connected to my presence and the fact that her parents were talking a lot to me and she was missing their attention. I could see that Stéphane's annoyance of Rose's agitation was piling up. He finally expressed his annoyance with a reprimanding comment: 'I don't remember that at 5 years-old, Louise took up as much space at the table'.

Asking to take part in these types of dinners implied a greater intrusion into the intimate sphere of family life than taking part in dining table mealtimes. Their dining table mealtimes were easier to perform in front of a guest-observer than alternative mealtimes, as if normative commensality that happened in the private sphere already took place with an audience or as if family members practiced normative mealtimes at home for future audiences. The sociologists James and Curtis (James and Curtis 2010) argue indeed that families today are under such normative imperatives that there remains an 'audience', even in private sphere of households. Nevertheless, it seemed that some types of mealtime displacements, to alternative locations, rather eluded this audience, which explained why I had more difficulties to be invited to them.

#### *1.1.2.2. Dissociating commensality from the dining table*

A couple of families from Lyon (Comescu: up. class; Franquet: up. mid. class; Obecanov: int. mid. class; Rizzo: int. mid. class) and all four families from Adelaide ate on the couch or at a coffee table in the lounge room from time to time and more spontaneously: these displacements were not necessarily planned in advance nor as ritualised.

The parents from Adelaide spoke more frequently and with less complexity about some alternative mealtime locations than did those in Lyon. For the Davies family (low. mid. class), the main rule was to have two separate dinners. One for the children, which usually happened in the lounge room on the couch or at the coffee table (often with distant supervision from the parents) (*Figure 40. Dinner 2,*

*Davies: All three children - and the dog - having dinner on the couch, watching TV) and another for the parents, which they had in the lounge room or in bed, later on in the evening.*



*Figure 40. Dinner 2, Davies: All three children - and the dog - having dinner on the couch, watching TV*

The Chapman (int. mid. class) children often ate elsewhere than at the dining table as well, at the counter. The two other families from Adelaide – the Bennets and the Browns (both up. mid. class) – generally ate at the dining table and occasionally in the lounge room:

**Ivy Brown (8):** We only do the couch sometimes, but mostly, we sit, like, in the lounge room table and sometimes, we sit at the normal table.

**Alison Brown (mother):** Probably four times a year. Like I did this recently, I said to the kids, ‘You can sit at the couch and eat your meal’. And they were like, ‘Oh’ [laughter]. I said, ‘This is a once-off. Don’t think it’s going to become like a normal’. So that was a big thing for them. They loved that.

**Vanessa Bennet (mother):** They tend to be, like, on a Friday night when we’re having chicken wraps or tacos or something like that you can kind of eat in front of the television type of thing. But otherwise we, you know, sort of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday we’re generally at the kitchen table eating.

The dining table did not represent for the parents of Adelaide this relatively sacred character that it bore for the families from Lyon. When Glen Chapman (int. mid. class) was a child he and his family generally had their mealtimes on the couch. His explanation for preferring to eat at the table as an adult, with his family, showed practical concerns, rather than a strong symbolic attachment to the dining table as many parents from Lyon voiced: ‘I don’t trust my kids on the couch with food’. This kind of hygiene concern was also integrated and repeated by Ivy Brown (6) when asked why she preferred to eat at the dining table: ‘Because when I’m on the couch, I normally spill it, and when I’m on the table

sometimes I spill it but on the couch, on the soft couch, I spill it a lot and it can sometimes stain'. In Lyon, only Angélique André associated eating at the table for practical concerns, justifying that she did not want her children (4, 5 and 7 years old) to get the couch dirty with food.

A couple of families from Adelaide mentioned they regularly ate in the lounge room when the table was covered with household objects, although this 'stuff' was characterised differently by the mothers and fathers. Vanessa Bennet (up. mid. class) from Adelaide explained a bit apologetically how they might end up eating in the lounge area instead of clearing away the table for the mealtime:

**Vanessa:** If there's not folded up washing on the kitchen table [chuckles], or you know, stuff the kids have left there, we would normally always sit at the kitchen table. Otherwise, we sometimes move into the lounge area and we all sit around like a little kiddies table. But not very often.

Her husband Craig also gave the same reasons for displacing the mealtime, although he referred to the 'stuff' on the table as 'garbage' rather than household chores:

**Craig:** And it might be that we have to sit on the couch because Vanessa has got all her garbage all over across the kitchen table as well [laughter].

**Fairley:** So it's more convenient?

**Craig:** Yeah, correct, otherwise we have to move all the clothes off the table or all the paperwork, that sort of stuff, so yes, it's just a convenience just to go sit on the couch instead.

In Adelaide, Sally Davies (low. mid. class) justified in the same way not eating at their table. Adam and her rarely ate together with their children and neither of their dinners regularly happened at the dining table:

**Sally:** They've got a little table out here [in the lounge room] that they eat at. We don't very often eat at the big table because it's usually covered with stuff, with rubbish. Not rubbish, just junk [laughter]. Big dumping ground.

However, contrary to Vanessa, Sally did not sound apologetic when revealing this. Her interview took place during the children's dinner which happened indeed at the coffee table in the lounge room, with the TV on. Sally gave me a virtual tour of the house and described the kitchen table: 'so there's our dining table, it's just currently covered in washing at the moment'. At the Brown household (up. mid. class), family mealtimes happened quite regularly in the lounge room at a low children's table because the dining table was located in an open plan room where it was too cold in winter or too hot in summer to eat:

**Alison Brown:** It ... [laughter] sounds sort of silly, when it's really cold weather, because where we're at the moment, we've got no heating out the back here in this room, so the only heating's in the lounge room, so we're about to get some more heating into this room. So it's very cold to sit out here<sup>90</sup> so we, we might sit in the lounge: the kids have got a little table there and we huddle around it [laughter].

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<sup>90</sup> It is not unusual for houses in Adelaide to be cold in winter as many of are not insulated for cold weather, as the winter is relatively short and mild.

Alison was not completely at ease telling me they displaced their mealtime for this reason. Her husband was less apologetic:

**Luke Brown:** We try to eat at the kitchen table [but] we've got glass doors facing east and west in our sort of dining area which, unfortunately, where we live, in summer, can get very hot so we may, if the weather is so inclined, we might end up in the lounge room which can be a bit cooler. So, you know, I'd say we aim to eat in the kitchen. I say kitchen, but kitchen-dining room, well, it's not really a dining room, it's just an open plan to the kitchen with a table to the left. Sometimes in the lounge, depending on circumstances: we'll sort of all crowd around a small table in there as best we can when we do that.

Overall, this did not seem to be the ideal mealtime setting for the Brown parents (up. mid. class). Luke preferred to eat at the table and Alison explained they were planning to install some heating in the open plan dining room/kitchen area, which would then allow them to dine at the table more often.

If the TV screen was not visible from the dining table and some family members wanted to watch a program during the mealtime (as a last-minute decision), the entire family could sit on the couch or gather around the coffee table, sitting on the floor or on small chairs:

**Craig:** Maybe if there's some sort of sporting event on that I like watching and don't want to sit at the kitchen table. If we've got something simple which we know the kids aren't going to spill we'll go and sit on the couch...

**Fairley:** Okay, so they would just be sitting on the couch with their plates in their hands? Or would there be a table?

**Craig:** No, so they generally sit on the couch, but they have a little kid's table that we bring in there and they have their plates on that. Whereas I just sit on the couch and have it on my lap.

Spontaneously deciding to eat on the couch still required some particular food preparation (or ordering of food) as parents would rather the children eat food that spilled less easily or was easy to eat with the hands in order to keep the lounge room clean. These type of couch mealtimes, which were not necessarily planned a long time in advance or conditioned to a special occasion also happen in Lyon, at the Franquet (up. mid. class), Rizzo (int. mid. class), and Obecanov (int. mid. class) households. This was associated with less control over children and more conviviality. Sophie Obecanov confessed:

**Sophie:** It happens sometimes, the weekend meals or when from time to time it's online orders, when it will be on the coffee table of the lounge room. Those are also convivial moments, a bit more relaxed. But otherwise, we eat at the table.

**Sophie :** Ça nous arrive des fois, les repas du weekend ou quand il arrive de temps en temps que ce soit des repas commandés sur internet, où ça va se faire sur la petite table du salon, c'est aussi des moments convivial, un peu plus à la cool, mais sinon on mange à table.

The way she added 'but otherwise, we eat at the table' indicated she found couch dinners to be a kind of guilty pleasure. Guillaume Rizzo also found eating on the couch more convivial than being at the table. Zoé (10), his daughter, recounted that it was indeed her father who usually proposed that they eat there, for a TV dinner:

**Guillaume :** But it's true, we do eat a lot at the table.

**Zoé:** Yes, mm-hmm, yes



**Guillaume** : I like that we are at the table from time to time. And sometimes, when she can't be bothered, I bring it to you over there, on the couch. A bit like a princess...

**Zoé**: Yes

**Guillaume**: Can we say that as well...?

**Zoé**: Oh yes, oh yes!

**Fairley**: And do you watch anything?

**Zoé**: Well often when there are, you know, programs on. And after, Dad, when he says we eat at the table, well we eat at the table.

*Dinner 4*

**Guillaume**: Mais nous, c'est vrai qu'on mange quand-même pas mal à table...

**Zoé**: ... oui, ben oui

**Guillaume**: ... j'aime bien qu'on soit quand même à table de temps en temps. Et des fois, quand elle a la flemme, j't'emmène le plat là-bas aussi, sur le canapé. En mode princesse un peu...

**Zoé**: Oui

**Guillaume**: Ca, on peut le dire aussi... ?

**Zoé**: Ah oui, ah oui !

**Fairley**: Et vous regardez quelque chose?

**Zoé**: Ben, quand, t'sais y'a des émissions à la télé, souvent. Et après, Papa, quand il dit, on va manger à table, ben on mange à table.

*Dinner 4*

Nevertheless, the four dinnertimes in which I took part in their apartment all happen at the dining table. Zoé once suggested I come for a TV dinner but Guillaume preferred for me to take part in mealtimes at the table. Overall, he appeared quite conflicted between his liking of eating on the couch and also his strong adherence to the normative family mealtime as a convivial moment, which he associated to the dining table.

Grignon writes about these forms of unusual mealtimes, which he characterizes as ““weak” exceptional commensality’ which ‘expresses a relaxation of the “stressed times” (vacations, weekend), in opposition to the unstressed times in everyday life’ (2001, 27). He opposes segregative commensality, which reinforces a pre-existing group, to transgressive commensality: ‘it is because it recognises these borders that it can temporarily and symbolically transgress them, for establishing, in the neutralised and ritual parenthesis of a meal, a relation of exchange’. This mechanism is at place for the mealtime displacements I have observed. Parents allow the family to transgress the norm, by eating together elsewhere than at the dining table because they usually managed to rigorously sustain conventional commensality throughout the week.

## **1.2. *Sitting together and its interruptions***

The mealtimes observed were spatially delimited by the eating location but also by the family members’ seating at the table. Perhaps the most symbolic aspect of the togetherness of family mealtimes was represented through the image of individuals sitting together, which portrayed family mealtime as a rather static ritual. In majority, the parents and children remained indeed seated through the whole mealtime but, getting a closer look at the different mealtimes, only one family did

so for the entire meal. In all the other households, there was some to a considerable amount of movements happening. There were multiple reasons for getting up and leaving the table: some movements were inherent to commensality and they sustained it, others disrupted and weakened it, whether these were authorised movements or not.

### 1.2.1. The significance of children eating separately

In a couple of families in Lyon and in all four families in Adelaide, parents sometimes made children eat before them during what I call a children's dinnertime. The materials to be able to compare these dinnertimes was quite thin nevertheless, they suggested that there would be marked cultural differences between the French children's dinnertimes and the Australian ones.

#### 1.2.1.1. *Sustaining commensality without eating altogether*

At the Bourdon household (up. class), parents and children regularly ate separately, the children having their dinner before the parents and later eating in the lounge room once the children had gone to bed. While this may not appear at first sight as a family mealtime, it unfolded according to some central commensal dimensions. Although all the family members were not sitting and eating together, when children ate beforehand, at least one of the Bourdon parents was present with them, to supervise. They watched over their eating, their table manners. They also communicated with their children, asking them about their day, similarly as parents who ate with their children did:

*For the first visit at the Bourdon household, I arrived at their place on a Friday evening, at 7PM. The father opened the door and welcomed me into their apartment, then into their kitchen, where both their children were sitting at a small two people size, triangle table. The father had an apron on and both parents were occupied with cooking and cleaning. The children were sitting on stools, eating but the parents regularly kept an eye on the way children were eating as well as they were asking them questions about their day.*

Ethnographic note, dinner 1

Benoit explained how this type of dinnertime still implied conversation work and forms of supervision of table manners:

**Benoit:** The idea is that we make them eat in the kitchen precisely because there can be things to do: preparing the meals for the grownups [the parents], doing a bit of dishes, things like that. We are still altogether, we tell each other stories, which can, by the way, sometimes, slow down the rhythm of the meal [laughter]. Especially with Lucie who talks a lot, a lot. After a while, she forgets a bit to eat. But you know, it's also a time to exchange actually, a time when they can talk about their day [...]. It's really only them who are speaking. Generally, it's really their moment.

**Benoit :** L'idée c'est qu'on les fait manger dans la cuisine justement parce qu'il peut y avoir des trucs à faire: préparer le repas pour les grands [les parents], faire un peu de vaisselle, des trucs comme ça. On est quand même tous ensemble, on s'raconte des histoires, voilà. Ce qui, d'ailleurs, parfois, peut ralentir un peu le rythme du repas [rire] ! Surtout avec Lucie qui parle beaucoup, beaucoup. Au bout d'un moment, elle oublie un peu de manger. Mais voilà, c'est aussi un moment d'échange en fait, un moment où ils peuvent raconter leur journée [...]. C'est vraiment eux qui tiennent le crachoir quoi [...]. En général, c'est vraiment leur moment à eux.

The Bourdon gave up their organisation of having first a children's dinnertime and then the adult's one during the first lockdown episode in France, in March 2020. The parents made this decision to eat all together at lunch and dinner as they felt it reassured the children who were, at times, quite upset by the lockdown. Magali expressed at first some weariness of having to eat each meal with her children (I interviewed her during this lockdown), especially because the conversations were entirely oriented towards the children's interest, including their video games. Nevertheless, she reported me later on (after the lockdown), after having set some family mealtime rules, that they would have made this change anyway, as she considered her children were at an age (5 and 7 year old) when they needed to be socialised to commensal norms.

In another case, at the Ferret household (up. class), Noémie, their single daughter (7) ate alone on rare occasions, if the parents were going out for dinner but this was not the mother's ideal eating situation for her daughter:

**Céline** : Many parents get their children to eat before them because, well, it's true they get to be just the two of them. I understand that, but you know, it's just her, I don't see myself getting her to eat alone, you see? Maybe if they were three of them, then maybe. But now I would find that a bit sad... For me, I mean, naturally, in my family, the meals have always been a very joyful and fun moment. And I want to transmit that.

**Céline** : Y'a beaucoup de parents qui font manger leurs enfants avant de manger eux, parce que, bah c'est vrai qu'ils se retrouvent à deux aussi. Ce que je comprends aussi mais, voilà, elle est toute seule, je me verrai pas de la faire manger toute seule tu vois peut-être qu'ils seraient trois on ferait... peut-être ça, mais là je trouverais ça un peu triste... pour moi 'fin en tout cas... naturellement dans ma famille, les repas ça a toujours été un moment très joyeux et très animés. Et j'ai envie de transmettre ça aussi.

Children could still be socialised to commensal rules while eating separately from their parents: such as eating at the appropriate rhythm, eating enough, sitting properly, narrating one's day and identifying the positive and negative experiences.

#### *1.2.1.2. When commensality is impossible*

Parents from all four families from Adelaide reported that children commonly ate alone. The children's dinnertimes in Adelaide seemed to be quite different from those at the Bourdon household (up. class) from Lyon. Description of children's dinnertimes in Adelaide did not always include parents being present with the children. They seemed to do so because the parents were busy with work, whether domestic or professional. While the later remained in the house, they were not necessarily supervising them so closely and talking with them. The children usually watched a show on the TV or their pads. However, Amy Chapman (int. mid. class) did mention she watched her children while they were having their meal at the bench and made sure they ate enough:

**Amy:** They do prefer [eating alone at the counter]. Oh, it's just, it's their norm. I guess they eat a lot more meals at the bench because it's that quick. We're standing here preparing on this side, they're facing us eating. On those mad rush in the morning sort of things [...].

If we're all together having an evening meal, it's always at the table. It would only be if there was like: 'quick, you gotta eat this, and I'm gonna go get this ready', then they'll eat at the bench while I'm running around, because I'm normally probably in the kitchen on the other side of the bench ... so then we've got face-to-face rather than their back to me and just sitting there. It just, it's a bit more flow, I guess for them, that they can see more of what's going on and I can see what they're doing and I can see how much they've eaten and whatnot [...].

Most nights, when we do eat together, that is my absolute, you will sit at the table, we will all be together. But if I have to feed the kids because they're off to go somewhere, they'll sit at the kitchen bench and they'll have their food. They do prefer it, they always opt to sit at the bench but when we are all together and there's a meal made, and we're all eating the same, I am very strict on no, you're at the table, we all eat together.

While she indicated that children mostly ate alone at the bench for breakfast only, they also reported on five dinnertimes of children eating alone at the bench (*Figure 41 Children's dinnertime at the bench, Food diary Chapman*), as Glen Chapman reported:

**Glen Chapman:** Tonight I was first one home and heated up left over pasta bolognese and steamed some veggies. I ate by myself as I was starving. Amy and kids got home. Kids sat at the kitchen counter and ate dinner while Amy sat at table and fed Isla in her highchair. I cleared the plates etc.



*Figure 41 Children's dinnertime at the bench, Food diary Chapman*

Her daughter Hannah also described how they ate at the counter:

**Hannah** [7 years-old]: When my mum and dad aren't ready but are there, we normally sit at the counter, but when they are all ready, we sit at the table

**Fairley:** Does that mean you eat at the counter when you parents aren't ready?

**Hannah:** Hmm yeah. And then we sit at the table when, like, all our dinners are ready

**Fairley:** Okay, okay. But would you actually eat at the counter?

**Hannah:** Yeah, we would eat at the counter and then mum and dad would just sit there, at the table

Isla [1 year-old] still needs to be with her parents when she eats

[...]

**Fairley:** Are you watching something if you are at the counter?

**Hannah:** Hmm, we would eat but then we would probably have to turn around, but we would like, watch something, and then like, turn around and eat something, or just hold our plate and eat

**Amy:** No...! You're not listening and answering it the right way! When you're at the counter, you don't turn around and watch something. When you're at the counter: what are you doing? What do you have in front of you?

**Hannah:** Ipad

**Amy:** There you go! That's how you need to answer the question

**Fairley:** So you'd be watching something on the Ipad?

**Hannah:** [nod]

**Fairley:** Okay. You and your brother would be watching the same?

**Hannah:** Hmm, my brother has his own Ipad and I have mine so we normally just use our own

**Fairley:** So, would you have, like, head...

**Hannah:** Yeah, we have headphone like earplug. When it's dinner, I don't wear my headphones.

Sally Davies (low. mid. class) from Adelaide mentioned supervising her children's dinnertime from the other room, particularly by listening to the vocal level of her children and Alex, the father talked about the way he tries to get his children to eat:

**Sally:** I try and get them to watch their shows. So while they're eating their dinner I'm usually trying to cook my dinner. Usually if I can hear them messing about, then I know that they're not eating, so then I'll try and come and sit with them and one of them will say: "can you feed me?" And then I have to feed all of them.

**Adam:** It's just, it's easier to get them fed first than trying to do both [i.e. eating and feeding] [...]. If it's just me, I feel the need to [stay with them while they eat]. If they're just running amuck, not eating, jumping on the couch, playing with toys, haven't touched their food, yelling about who's watching what on TV, I'll come out here and watch them and feed them, again to make sure that they're eating and not just moving one bit on to another kid's plate, as they do [...]. So, if it's not finger food, I'll get them to use their fork or their spoon. To make sure they're, you know, using it and teach them the right way to eat, not just always grab spaghetti with your hands, but yeah, just little things like that.

The videos that the Davies family (low. mid. class) from Adelaide sent of children's dinnertimes showed indeed the mother coming in and out of the mealtime scene to check on children or remind them how to behave directly from the kitchen (which was a separate room).

These variations observed between children's dinnertimes in Lyon and in Adelaide will need to be explored further, with a larger number of cases. The differences observed between the Bourdon family (up. class) in Lyon, on one side, and the Chapman (int. mid. class) and Davies (low. mid. class) families from Adelaide, on the other, may also be due to the social class positions.

### 1.2.2. Sustaining commensality by getting up

The togetherness of family mealtimes in the strict sense of sitting together was mostly disrupted by parents leaving the table to continue some food preparation in the kitchen. It could also be simply to get a missing item, or some extra food. Even though parents regularly got up, it mostly occurred in between courses. Hugo Comescu from Lyon (10, up. class) explained it was usually his mother taking care of this:

**Fairley:** Before moving on to the next dish, do you have to wait till the others have finished, or not necessarily?

**Hugo:** Sometimes our mother has finished but she has to go to the kitchen, because otherwise, it will burn.

**Fairley:** Okay, so this means she will get up during the mealtime, to do things?

**Hugo:** Yes

**Fairley:** And your father as well?

**Hugo:** Yes

**Fairley:** And what about you?

**Hugo:** Hmm, I can't remember, but I think so, yes.

**Fairley:** Avant de passer au plat suivant, est-ce que vous devez attendre que tout le monde ait fini ou pas forcément?

**Hugo:** Euh, parfois, notre mère elle a fini, mais faut qu'elle aille au fourneau, parce que sinon, ils vont bruler, cramer

**Fairley:** D'accord. donc, c'est-à-dire qu'elle va se lever pendant le repas, pour faire des choses?

**Hugo:** Oui

**Fairley:** Et, ton père aussi?

**Hugo:** Oui

**Fairley:** Et vous?

**Hugo:** Euh, je sais plus, mais je crois que oui

Hugo was less eloquent in his mention of his father or himself getting up as well. In the case of the Comescu (up. class), it was indeed Irina, the mother as well as the children who got up to take care of the remaining food preparation:

*Irina gets up during the meal to make the wraps. Laurent does not get up.*

Ethnographic note, dinner 2, Comescu

At the Bourdon household (up. class), both parents left the table during mealtimes, but only in between courses:

*Marie-Cécile offers the children some dairy products: different types of yogurt or some cheese. Everybody chooses cheeses so she goes into the kitchen and brings back a wooden plate of 4 different cheeses (Brillat Savarin, Comte and one cheese that is yellow but looks like a blue cheese and a type of tome de montagne or saint nectaire). After we have had some cheese, she brings back the plate and cheese knife to the kitchen. She then returns with small bowls for the dessert. Benoit gets up as well to get the fruit: a bowl of cherries, a bowl of pineapple and one of watermelon which he had both prepared and cut up before the dinner.*

Ethnographic note, dinner 1 at the Bourdon household

The children from the different households from Lyon were sometimes asked to take part in this table food work. At the Lebrun household (int. mid. class) this was even turned into a game: if a child got up from the table before they had finished eating, usually after the main course when children were feeling full and becoming anxious to leave the table, then he or she had to get the desserts for the whole family (usually fruits and cream desserts):

**Nolan (9):** So Mum, I'm going to hide so as not to clear the table

*The children laugh*

**Laëtitia [mother]:** It's a good plan

**Lucien (21 year-old nephew):** And, hum, as long as you are up, can you go get the yogurts?

*Everybody laughs*

**Pierre:** The plan was good, but not good enough

*The children continue to laugh*

**Nathan (11):** Nolan, you are up, can you go get the deserts?

### Dinner 3

**Nolan** [9]: Bon, maman j'veais m'cacher pour pas débarrasser la table  
*Les enfants rigolent.*

**Laëtitia** [mère]: C'est un bon plan

**Lucien** [neveu de 21 ans]: Et, euh, tant qu't'es debout, tu peux aller chercher des yaourts?  
*Tout le monde rigole*

**Pierre**: Le plan était bon, mais pas tout à fait  
*Les enfants continuent à rigoler*

**Nathan** (11): Nolan, t'es debout, tu peux aller chercher les desserts?  
*Dîner 3*

I witnessed this game at each visit at the Lebrun(int. mid. class) household in Lyon. The children always played along and enjoyed it. Before Laëtitia and Pierre started living together, they had diverging expectations about children getting up at the table. Pierre allowed his children to leave the table, come back and eat more, but Laëtitia was quite strict about this: leaving the table meant having finished dinnertime. This game represented a compromise that authorised getting up without threatening too much the commensal togetherness.

On the contrary, At the Imbert household (up. class) Magali insisted on putting all the food on the table at the beginning of the meal, including the dessert, so that they would not have to get up during the mealtime, as their kitchen was far away from their dining table (*Figure 42. Table layed at the Imbert: the dessert is already put out, dinner 1*). It was also, according to her, so that their daughters had a precise idea of the food that was available for them to eat.



*Figure 42. Table layed at the Imbert: the dessert is already put out, dinner 1*

Among the authorised reasons to leave the table figured clearing away dishes and bringing them to the kitchen counter in between courses. This was done by parents and children. At the Bourdon

household (up. class), the children always took part in this, by clearing away their own bowl or plate after the first or the main course:

*After eating the soup, everybody brings their bowl back to the kitchen. The children stay in the kitchen watching Irina while she cuts up dry sausage and some comet, which she puts in a dish.*  
Dinner 4 at the Comescu household (without the father), ethnographic note

### 1.2.3. Breaches in the commensal unity

Parents sometimes interrupted the togetherness of shared mealtimes by excluding a child from the table, if a line had been crossed in terms of transgression of mealtime rules. However, this was never mentioned by parents in Lyon and only Céleste André (4) openly recognised that this possibility existed:

**Fairley:** So is there a rule to leave the table?

**Angélique** [mother]: No, hum...

**Céleste:** ... [interrupts] actually, if we are being silly, if we fart, if we burp, actually, actually we leave the table

**Fairley:** Oh okay. So you sometimes leave the table?

**Céleste:** Mm-hmm

**Fairley:** Du coup, y'a une règle pour descendre de table?

**Angélique** (mère): Non, euh...

**Céleste:** ... [interrompt] en fait, si on fait une bêtise, si on pète et si on rote, en fait..., en fait..., on sort de table

**Fairley:** Ah d'accord. Des fois, tu sors de table, du coup?

**Céleste:** Mmm

I did not witness children being excluded at the André household and from the three dinners I observed, it appeared that the parents were much more flexible about mealtime rules than in all of the other families, especially in terms of table manners. I witnessed a son eating directly out of his plate with his mouth, for example (*Figure 49 Enzo André eating like a dinosaur, dinner*). While this required the father to refrain him, the boy did repeat this behaviour later on. The children also got up a lot during the mealtime. I could see parents felt this was not the best mealtime behavior, but it was also evident that they did not want to bother with spending their time reprimanding them. The André's leniency about their children's table manners and the mealtime boundaries may refer to their lower middle-class position. The work of children's education has been reported to differ between working classes on the one side and middle and upper classes on the other. This is due to inequalities in resources, but also to different notions of educational support. Annette Lareau (Lareau 2011) has shown how, in the United States, that parents from working class adhere to the concept of 'accomplishment of natural growth', based on the idea of low parental intervention. The parents from working classes, who had fewer resources, were focused on carrying out their activities and chores and drew boundaries for their children, within which the later were allowed to carry out their lives without much parental intervention. This was especially the case for children's school experiences and their leisure activities. Parents from middle and upper classes followed the principle of 'concerted



cultivation'. Extracurricular activities were viewed by parents as opportunities to 'stimulate their children's development and foster their cognitive and social skills' (2011, 5). This was similar to what happened at the André household: the children were expected to eat during mealtimes, but within this commensal frame, they were relatively free in their behaviour.

In another household from Lyon, at the Obecanov household, I witnessed a child being excluded temporarily from the table:

**Viktor:** We're going to exclude you, with Mom  
**Sophie:** [angry] No, but you have been like that all afternoon long. Already during the study<sup>91</sup>, you have been like that. I told you I don't know how many times to calm down. Now it's becoming annoying, Elisa  
**Viktor:** Get up. It's not because Fairley is here that I won't punish you ...  
**Sophie:** ... it's becoming annoying.  
**Viktor:** [serious] Come on, so you're going to the corner. You're going to calm down and when you're calmed down, you will come back and finish you melon  
**Sophie:** ... it's becoming annoying  
**Viktor:** [to me] Sorry, heh  
**Fairley:** No, don't apologise  
*Viktor and Sophie talk about the beginning of the school year and how it has been tiring*  
**Viktor:** I think we must not be the only families [to find the school start difficult]  
**Fairley:** The beginning of the school year is difficult, right?  
**Viktor:** Yeah, yeah yeah  
*Elisa makes some noises from the corner she is standing at*  
**Sophie:** [annoyed] Do you need any help there?  
**Viktor:** You are not to play Elisa, otherwise, I will put you in another corner, okay?  
*Sophie continues to talk about the beginning of the school year, Elisa's entry into first class, the changing rhythms*  
**Elisa:** Can I come?  
Viktor continues to speak to me, without answering to Elisa  
**Elisa:** Can I come?  
**Sophie:** Yes  
**Viktor:** No. I mean yes, come on  
**Sophie:** Sit down and eat  
**Viktor:** The next time I have to tell you something, I won't prevent you from eating, because it's important that you eat. However, I will delete your kids' shows for a very long time  
**Sophie:** Yeah, but I will delete one thing from the meal, because Dad does not know...  
**Viktor:** ... you bought ice cream?  
**Sophie:** That's right, we added that at the last minute  
**Viktor:** Well the ice-cream, that no for sure if you keep this up, but the kids' shows, that will be no as well, whether it is on Friday night, Ford Boyard on Saturday, no, etc. So think well: next time, when you want to say something, etc., how did we teach you? Raise your hand, don't yell, don't scream, don't interrupt, alright?  
*Silence.*  
*Dinner 5*

**Viktor:** On va t'exclure, avec Maman  
**Sophie:** [énervée] non, mais parce que t'as été comme ça toute l'après-midi, déjà pendant l'étude<sup>92</sup>, t'as été comme ça. Je t'ai dit je sais pas combien de fois de te calmer. Ca devient pénible-là Elisa.  
**Viktor:** Lève-toi. C'est pas parce que Fairley est là que je vais pas te punir...  
**Sophie:** ... ça... ça devient pénible!

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<sup>91</sup> Elena was enrolled by her parents in a neurological study.

<sup>92</sup> Elena was enrolled by her parents in a neurological study.

**Viktor:** [sérieux] Allez! Donc tu vas au coin. Tu vas te calmer et quand t'es calmée, tu reviendras finir ton melon

**Sophie:** ... ça devient pénible...

**Viktor:** [à moi] Désolée hein

**Fairley:** Non, faut pas s'excuser

**Viktor:** Je pense que on doit pas être les seules familles [à trouver la rentrée difficile]

**Fairley:** C'est dur la rentrée, hein ?

**Viktor:** Ouai, ouai ouai..

*Petit bruit d'Elisa*

**Sophie:** [agacée] Tu veux que je t'aide ?

**Viktor:** Tu joues pas Elisa, sinon je vais te mettre dans un autre coin, hein

*Sophie parle de l'excitation de la rentrée, le fait d'aller au CP, le rythme qui change*

**Elisa:** Je peux venir?

*Viktor continue de me parler, sans répondre à Elisa*

**Elisa:** Je peux venir?

**Sophie:** Oui

**Viktor:** Non. Enfin, oui, vas-y hein.

**Sophie:** Assieds-toi et mange.

**Viktor:** La prochaine fois que je dois te dire quelque chose, donc je vais pas te priver de manger, parce que c'est important que tu manges. Mais par contre, je vais te supprimer tes dessins animés pendant très longtemps...

**Sophie:** ... Ouai, alors si, moi je vais te supprimer une chose du repas, pare que papa il le sait pas...

**Viktor:** ... Vous avez acheté des glaces?

**Sophie:** Voilà, c'est ce qu'on a rajouté au dernier moment

**Viktor:** Ben les glaces, c'est sur que ce sera négatif si tu continues, mais les dessins animés, ça sera négatif aussi, que ce soit pour le vendredi soir, le samedi, fort boyard, négatif, etc. Donc réfléchis bien, la prochaine fois quand tu veux dire quelque chose, etc. comment on t'as appris? Tu lèves ta main, tu ne cries pas, tu ne hurles pas, tu ne coupes pas la parole. D'accord?

*Silence*

*Dîner 5*

Here, excluding the daughter from the table was meant to preserve another aspect of the mealtime: the importance of all the family members spending a good moment together at the table. In this case, the parents were not enjoying themselves, but they were also conflicted about excluding their child from the table, as they were also disrupting the most basic aspect of commensality, which was sustaining children's health by feeding them (which explained why Elisa was not punished for very long).

At the Bennet household (up. mid. class) in Adelaide, Craig broke up commensality when his son Charlie (3), who was in his words 'the hardest one', did not want to eat the food he had been served:

**Craig:** I'm probably the task master in the family, so if Charlie..., Henry's very good at eating, and so he doesn't really have much of an issue, he would eat Charlie as well if he gets the opportunity to. But Charlie's probably the one who doesn't eat much and he's a bit harder, so yeah. I try and put rules in place that if he doesn't eat then he gets put in his bedroom and then he can come out once we've all eaten our dinner. And then he can come out and choose whether he wants to eat. If he doesn't then he doesn't really get the choice of having anything for the rest of the night.

As with the Obecanov family, here it was the father who was the 'task master', or the 'bad cop' at the table. He was the one who took the decision to exclude a child, except in this case, Charlie was not excluded for breaking up conviviality but for refusing to eat.

Of all the legitimate reasons to get up during mealtimes, they were either directly connected to the collective dimension of commensality (food work) or to an individual physiological need (for example, going to the bathroom). There were some exceptions that broke up the togetherness, but it was instigated by parents (in exclusion of children) and it usually happened when the parents consider the children were already disrupting the togetherness of mealtimes (except in the case of Craig above). Additionally, there were reasons for getting up that, on the contrary, constituted a clear breach of the togetherness of commensality but which allowed for stronger individual expression. Children thus also often got up when they were not supposed to, 'stepping out the door' (Georg Simmel 1994). This was the kind of difficulty that De Singly described about the distance within family relationships: they are based on the 'principle of alternating' (Singly 2000, 6) between too much and too little distance but family members may not always agree on the timing of this alternation. This type of step out of family mealtime usually constituted an 'offense' to the commensal norm that required reparation efforts from children or what Goffman called 'remedial interchange' (Goffman 1971).

At first sight, play did not seem to be part of family mealtime, whether it was playing between children or children and parents playing together, but it did happen on occasions, in several households (Franquet, Lebrun, Nimaga, André). Parents could trigger it, as explained above, as a relational tactic to get children involved in some of the work of mealtimes. Some adults also mobilised conversation games to get children to talk about their day and communicate their feelings, as Chapter 5 will describe. In these cases, playing was deflected by adults from its initial recreational purpose and turned into educational logics. The games also occurred between children, as a physical play, which usually implied getting up. It was often linked to the posture that children were expected to adopt during a dinner, from a simple swinging on the chair to the complete subverting of the sitting rule, as it happened at the Davies (*Figure 43. Dinner 1, family produced video, Davies: children bouncing on the couch during dinner*):

**Sally:** They're just supposed to sit and eat. But it's usually a lot of yelling, 'Sit down and eat!' Like with Abigail jumping on the couch, doing handstands, when she's not supposed to be. And when she's already been eating, so that's then going upside down. So, just ideally I would love for them just to sit quietly, watch their TV show and eat. But that is very rare that that happens.



Figure 43. Dinner 1, family produced video, Davies: children bouncing on the couch during dinner

At the Davies household (low. mid. class) from Adelaide, these type of games that children played led to clash in family life:

*Oliver and Abigail are playing on the couch (catch). Things get out of control between them, they're hitting each other with their feet, Oliver seems hurt. Their mother comes into the scenes (she was in the kitchen).*

**Sally Davies:** [yelling] Abigail, let go!! SIT, SIT AT THE TABLE!! Sit at the table! Now! Now!

*Lily and Oliver go sit at the table but Abigail lingers on the couch until Sally comes and pushes her off. Sally sits on the couch, with a plate and cutlery in her hands and she starts to eat.*

Children's dinner in the lounge room, Dinner 1, family produced video

## 2. Temporal structures

Parents also aimed at framing everyday family mealtimes through temporal boundaries, which were more or less apparent, according to the family's social position, the family schedule and the type of mealtime (table mealtime, displaced ritual mealtime, displace informal mealtime, children's dinnertime).

### 2.1. *Setting the table for the family, clearing for oneself*

Setting the table was the first attempt of creating a form of togetherness needed for family meals. Children were usually involved in doing so, although rarely independently:

**Vanessa:** Normally as I'm about to serve up Henry sets the table. So I'll be like, Henry: placemats and cutlery. 'Cause I sometimes have to ask him three times [chuckles]. So, especially if he's playing, he doesn't want to leave what he's doing. I'll be like, I'm serving dinner, go set the table [...]. So he'll ask me what cutlery does he need. And then, and he grabs the placemats out and puts them all on the table [...]. That's his job.

Nevertheless setting the table commonly occurred with intergenerational tensions, conflicts or even straightforward confrontation, and ended up in forms of intergenerational negotiations: parents ended up doing it themselves (Bourdon: up. class, André: low. mid. class, for example), children took turns (Franquet: up. mid class), got pocket money for it (Brown: up. mid. clas), or the family members brought the items to the table directly when sitting down. In Lyon, as with the Bourdon, I witnessed children at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class) resisting this aggregative stage of commensality, when they had to quit their own activities and take care of the work of setting the table. At the third visit at their place, the whole family was in the backyard. Pierre was taking care of the garden. The five children were playing different types of games, some alone, some together:

**Pierre:** We are going to eat now

**Laëtitia:** Yes, I asked them to set the table. I've asked them several time so far. I first asked Chloë to set the table

**Pierre:** Chloë?

**Chloë (8):** What?

**Pierre:** Stop

*Chloë is playing with the water hose*

**Chloë:** Okay

**Laëtitia:** The first one I asked was Chloë. She said 'yes, yes'. There [i.e. without success]. Then I asked Nolan and Nathan, they told me 'okay'. There [still no success]

**Fairley:** And now ?

**Laëtitia:** Well now, hum... we are going to try with Léo! Léo, the table needs to be laid

**Léo (6):** hum ... no [teasing his step-mother]

**Laëtitia:** [to me] There you go. [serious] No, I mean now you don't have a choice, you need to set the table

**Pierre:** [authoritative] Hey, hurry up!

**Léo:** It's a joke

**Laëtitia:** Oh I now you are joking Léo [chuckles], I know. That is why I reacted in this way. I knew I could count on you

*Dinner 3*

**Pierre:** On va manger là

**Laëtitia [mother]:** Oui, J'leur ai demandé de mettre la table. J'leur ai demandé plusieurs fois pour l'instant. J'ai demandé à Chloë d'abord de mettre la table

**Pierre:** Chloë?

**Chloë (8):** Quoi?

**Pierre:** Stop

**Chloë:** Ok [elle jouait avec le tuyau d'eau]

**Laëtitia:** La première à qui j'ai demandé, c'est Chloë. Elle m'a dit ' oui oui '. Voilà [sous entendu : sans succès]. Ensuite j'ai demandé à Nolan et Nathan, ils m'ont dit ' ok '. Voilà [idem]

**Fairley:** Et du coup?

**Laëtitia:** Ben du coup euh... on va tester avec Léo! Léo, faut mettre la table

**Léo (6):** euh... non [teasing his step-mother]

**Laëtitia:** Voilà [à moi]. Non, mais en fait, vous avez pas le choix-là, maintenant il faut aller mettre la table [serious tone]

**Pierre:** Eh, vous vous dépêchez! [authoritative tone]

**Léo:** C'est une blague

**Laëtitia:** Mais je sais que tu blagues mon grand [rire], je sais bien. C'est pour ça que j'ai réagi comme ça. Je savais que j'pouvais compter sur toi

*Dîner 3*

The children then reluctantly abandoned their activity and headed towards the house, as they were told to. In other households, some children were quite willing to set the table (the children from the Rizzo and Imbert families in Lyon and the Chapman family in Adelaide). They tried to set out for themselves their favourite plate, glass or cutlery, adding an individualistic aspect to this process. In Adelaide, Ivy Brown (8, up. mid. class) got pocket money for setting the table, which was something she initialled herself.

While setting the table was a task that children were supposed to carry out, and expected to do so more or less independently – altogether such as at the Lebrun (int. mid. class) and the Bourdon (up. class) households, for example, or by taking turns like at the Franquet household (up. mid. class) where the children were older – they were not always involved in clearing, especially during week school nights, when parents wanted them to go to bed early. They had to bring dishes to the kitchen, but parents usually cleared the rest of the table and the kitchen, while the children were getting ready to go to bed.

**Guillaume Rizzo** (int. mid class) [to Zoé, 10]: But when you've gone through a school day, when you have homework and everything... You will have time to clear later, at your home. For now, enjoy!

*Dinner 4*

**Guillaume Rizzo** (int. mid class) [to Zoé, 10]: Mais quand tu t'es tapé une journée d'école, que t'as tes devoirs, machin... Voilà, t'auras le temps de débarrasser, chez toi, plus tard. Là, profite !

*Dîner 4*

This difference between laying and clearing the table suggested that the parting from the family happened more easily than gathering everybody. It shows the greater importance and efforts that were put in the 'making' of the family through collective activities, such as setting the table for everybody (and not just one's own plate and cutlery).

## **2.2. Not eating before the mealtime: exceptions to the rule**

In Lyon, the rule was for family members and especially children not to eat outside of the mealtime, which is a rather health oriented rule to preserve the appetite and time and quantity of food eaten. Nevertheless, it exceptionally occurred – and was authorised by parents – in two different ways: the first is what is called an *apéro*<sup>93</sup>, in French. In these cases, the eating was much less mannered than during mealtimes. Family members, including parents, ate with their fingers directly from the plate or the bowl and they were not necessarily sitting down while doing so. At the Obecanov household (int. mid. class), for the fifth visit, Elisa (6) tried to eat the snack she did not have in the afternoon but her mother Sophie prevented her from doing so. Sophie had already put out a bowl of nuts and was cutting

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<sup>93</sup> Which differs from the *apéro dinatoire* described above, as the later constitutes a mealtime rather than a pre-mealtime snacking.

some dry sausage, for everybody to eat before we even sat down (she was still preparing the meal and I was interviewing Elisa):

**Sophie:** Hey, what are you doing Elisa? No, no [Elisa tries to help herself to the cake in her snack tupperware]

**Elisa:** [small voice] But I'm hungry, I did not have a snack

**Sophie:** Yes, I know, indeed. You did not have a snack. So you can have some almonds if you want, and the cake, it's for your snack tomorrow

*Dinner 5*

**Sophie:** Eh, qu'est-ce que tu fais Elisa? Non, non. [she tries to help herself to the cake in her snack tupperware]

**Elisa:** Mais j'ai faim, j'ai pas goûté... [petite voix]

**Sophie:** Oui, je sais, effectivement, t'as pas goûté, donc tu prends quelques amandes si tu veux et puis le gâteau, c'est ton goûter de demain.

*Dîner 5*

Later on, I asked the parents about the beer and dry sausage we were having as an *apéro* and how often they did this:

**Viktor:** Yeah, often, yeah. Well, we had some at lunch, we had some yesterday. Hum, it's either crisps or dry sausage...

**Sophie:** ... but it's not every evening. It's more during the periods like that, when it is still warm, where there is still that summer air. In winter, it's more grim...

**Elisa:** ... but we still do it in winter

**Sophie:** In winter, we have it a bit less, except if there are guests [...]. But Elisa, you did eat a lot of almonds, so I would like you to eat afterwards also what there will be to eat, please

*Dinner 5*

**Fairley:** L'apéro, c'est parce que j'suis là, ou...?

**Sophie:** Alors, la bière pour Viktor en ce moment non, moi oui.

**Fairley:** Ah oui. Et là, le saucisson comme ça, sur la table... ?

**Viktor:** Ouais, on fait souvent, ouai. Ben on a fait à midi, on a fait hier. Ben c'est soit des chips, soit un saucisson...

**Sophie:** ... mais c'est pas tous les soirs. C'est plus dans les périodes comme ça, où il fait encore un peu chaud, où t'as encore le côté été. L'hiver, c'est plus morose...

**Elisa:** ... mais on en fait quand même l'hiver

**Sophie:** L'hiver, on le fait un peu moins, sauf si on a du monde [...]. Mais Elisa, t'as quand même mangé beaucoup d'amandes, donc j'aimerais quand même que tu manges aussi après ce qu'il va y avoir à manger, s'il te plaît.

*Dîner 5*

Here, it was the mother who was trying to control the amount of food that Elisa ate so that she would still be hungry for the meal. Later on, as apprehended by Sophie, Viktor blamed her for allowing Elisa to eat too much before during this *apéro*:

**Viktor:** What did you feed her?

**Sophie:** She ate some almonds !

**Viktor:** Okay, but it's true there was a lot

**Sophie:** Well yeah ! Elisa ate them all !

*Dinner 5*

**Viktor:** Qu'est-ce que tu lui a donné à manger?

**Sophie:** Elle a mangé des amandes!

**Viktor:** D'accord. mais c'est vrai, qu'y en avait beaucoup

**Sophie:** Ben oui! C'est Elisa qui les a mangées  
*Dîner 5*

This kind of *apéro* was also observed at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class) in Lyon, on a Tuesday evening, when the children did not have school the next day:

*After the interview with Léo (6), I went down to the patio, where were Pierre, Laëtitia, Lucien (Pierre 21 year old nephew) and a few of the children. The other ones were playing on the trampoline. They were sitting around the table where there was a bowl of crisp and some beers opened. Pierre offered me a beer as well, which I accepted.*

**Laëtitia:** Léo, do you know were are the beers?

**Léo:** Yes

**Laëtitia:** Can you go and get one for Fairley, please?

**Léo:** Who wants some crisps ?

**Laëtitia:** No, juste a beer

**Léo:** ... I haven't even finished my crisps

**Pierre:** Well, there are crisps left for us

**Léo:** But no, that's for me

**Lucien:** Yeah, but without calling your brothers and sisters

*Dinner 6*

**Laëtitia:** Léo, tu sais où elles sont les bières?

**Léo:** Oui

**Laëtitia:** Tu peux aller en chercher une pour Fairley s'il te plait?

**Léo:** Qui veut des chips?

**Laëtitia:** Non, juste une bière.

**Léo:** ... j'ai même pas fini mes chips

**Pierre:** Ben il reste des chips pour nous

**Léo:** Mais non, c'est pour moi

**Lucien:** Oui, ben sans appeler tes frères et sœurs...

*Dîner 6*

When Laëtitia refused that Léo open another package of crisps and when Lucien tried to keep the other children away from the table, they hoped to contain as much as possible the eating to the shared mealtime during which healthier food than chips would be served.

There existed another type of transgressive occasion when children ate before the mealtime: tasting the food. This was solicited by children and authorised by the parent who was cooking. For the first visit at the Nimaga household (int. mid. class), Issa, the father, was in the kitchen, preparing some Mafé, a malian dish, while explaining to me the recipe. After a while he asked Lila, his 5 year-old daughter who was watching a kids' show, to turn off the TV and do something else, such as a drawing:

**Lila:** Daddy?

*She gets up from the sofa and comes into the kitchen*

**Issa:** mm-hmm?

**Lila:** Can I have some meat?

**Issa:** Yeah wait, I'll give you some

**Lila:** I want some meat!

**Issa:** I said wait. Move, because you don't have a t-shirt on, it can splash on you and you'll get hurt there  
*Then the father takes a piece of meat out of the saucepan and gives it to Lila. She then comes back for more a minute later.*

*Lunch 1*



This kind of spontaneous eating solicited by children only took place in one other family, at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class) from Lyon. One evening, on the sixth visit, the children were authorized by the mother to finish off what was left from a bowl of chocolate mix for a birthday cake. Allowing this type of eating before the mealtime constituted an opportunity to socialise children to the cooking process. Indeed, the children were not very often in the kitchen with the parents, especially during the school week. Yet, in these two cases, the cooking process happens in particular conditions: Issa the father particularly enjoyed cooking and especially Malian dishes. There was here a notion of transmission but also that of pleasure. In Lyon, at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class), the children were authorised to eat before the mealtime as a treat for one of the children's birthday. At both occasions, eating before the mealtime did not threaten commensality so much as it had a rather collective and socialising dimension. In any case, eating before the mealtime in Lyon, although it was rarely framed by table manners other than sharing the food between all, was still subject to a form of control from parents on the quantity children ate. The main concern was to restrict the amount of food children ate at the *apéro* but also maintaining a relaxed atmosphere that was expected at such an occasion. So while eating before the mealtime constituted a transgressive dimension of the commensal ritual and was initially a subversion of the commensal rule, this stage was still framed by some control from parents, so as not to ruin the appetite for commensality.

### **2.3. *Waiting till everybody is served to begin to eat***

Waiting till everybody is served to begin to eat together was a central commensal rule as well that parent repeated to children and talked to me about, but in practice, this was regularly disregarded by children – especially younger ones – across all household. Angélique André (low. mid. class) realistically acknowledged:

**Fairley:** So everyboy starts to eat when they...?

**Angélique:** ... well we would like them to wait but... no. It hardly ever happens.

Observations at the André household showed the children began to eat without the parents even being seated at the table:

*When the video begins, the children are at the table. They get up for a second to go talk to the camera. Pascal, the father, gives some napkins to the children, who start to play with them by fabricating pistols. They make sounds and noises to imitate the shots. Angélique, the mother, hushes them. Lucas (8) gets up to get his three little portions of cheese from the fridge, which he has – and only him, has for every dinner. Pascal gives a plate to Céleste (4), who is seated on a high chair, with a slice of ham on it, which she begins to eat straightaway. He then gives a slide to Lucas who thanks him and also starts to eat. Enzo (6) is already eating. The parents are talking in the kitchen, standing next the dining table.  
Dinner 2, family produced video*

Yet, in this case, children did not need to produce reparation efforts, because they were still young and they knew there was a certain flexibility with the rule of waiting till everybody was served and also

thanks to their young age. Angélique considered this rule to be a normative aspect of commensality, but also found her children were not at an age of being able to observe it. At times, it was as if the most important was to know how to behave properly at the table for occasions outside the home, which was why daily reminders were repeated by parents until they were integrated by children:

**Marie-Cécile:** [low voice, automatic tone, like a reiteration] we – wait – till – everybody – is – served ...  
**Benoit** [father]: We wait.  
**Marius** (8): Aaah! [impatient]  
**Benoit:** *Bon appétit*  
**Marie-Cécile:** *Bon appétit*  
**Fairley:** *Bon appétit*  
**Marie-Cécile:** You'll have to take up the good manners, you know, because now that we can travel further than 100km, we'll be allowed to go to Grandpa and Grandma.  
**Fairley:** [laughter] And so, at Grandpa and Grandma... you have to...?  
**Marie-Cécile:** Ah, at Grandpa and Grandma, you have to behave  
**Benoit:** We have to behave  
*Dinner 2*

The difference laid in the way children were socialised to the rule. In some households, the children were simply reminded orally about the rule, so as to make sure they knew about it, as with the André, but also the Rizzo (int. mid. class) for example. In other households, parents constantly reminded children to follow the rule, making sure they knew how to perform it, such as at the Bourdon household, the Imbert (both up. class) and the Gar (up. mid. class).

During the interview with Zoé Rizzo (10), a discussion about the absence of napkins on the table – based on the photo elicitation method (*Figure 44. Dinner 2 at the Las: no napkins needed at the table*) – illustrated these differences between households in socialisation norms. Zoé was commenting on what is missing on the table for the mealtime (her father's plate and cutlery). Guillaume added there are missing napkins:

**Zoé:** No! Stop it, we never use napkins!  
**Guillaume:** Well, yeah, that's the point. And normally...  
**Fairley:** ... why are they missing?  
**Guillaume:** Normally we should have napkins, but we rarely use them...  
**Zoé:** But not at all! But why SHOULD we?  
**Guillaume:** Well, when you go to a restaurant  
**Zoé:** I don't really understand  
**Guillaume:** ... there are napkins  
**Zoé:** Yes, but we're not in a restaurant, we're at home...  
**Guillaume:** Yeah, but I told you, it's just that we're used to eating without napkins...  
**Zoé:** Yes  
**Guillaume:** ... but we should put some on  
[...]  
**Zoé:** Yes, but why would it be good to put some on?  
**Guillaume:** Because, traditionally, in France, we eat with a napkin. It's rare that people..., in all restaurants, you go and you have a napkin  
**Zoé:** But we're at home... At Auntie's, there are no napkins  
**Guillaume:** Yes, at Auntie's, there's a napkin. When I was a kid, we had cloth towels that Grandma washed all the time...

**Zoë:** Okay

**Nina:** Nan! Arrête, les serviettes on en mets jamais !

**Fabien :** Eh ben ouais, justement. Et normalement...

**Fairley :** ... pourquoi ils manquent ?

**Fabien :** Normalement, il faudrait qu'on ait des serviettes, mais on en met rarement...

**Nina :** Mais pas du tout ! Mais pourquoi IL FAUDRAIT ?

**Fabien :** eh ben... quand tu vas au restaurant

**Nina :** Je comprends pas en fait

**Fabien :** ... y'a des serviettes

**Nina :** Oui, mais là, on est pas au restaurant, on est chez nous...

**Fabien :** Ouais, mais je t'ai dit, c'est juste qu'on a l'habitude de manger sans serviettes...

**Nina :** Oui

**Fabien :** ... mais il faudrait qu'on en mette

[...]

**Nina :** Oui, mais pourquoi ça serait bien qu'on en mette ?

**Fabien :** Parce que, dans la tradition, en France, on mange avec une serviette. Les gens, c'est rare que..., dans tous les restau, tu vas, t'as une serviette

**Nina :** Mais, là, on est à la maison... Chez Tatie, y'a pas de serviettes, hein

**Guillaume :** Si, chez Tatie, y'a une serviette, hein. Moi, petit, chez moi, on avait des serviettes, en tissu, que Mamie, elle lavait tout le temps...

**Zoé :** D'accord...



*Figure 44. Dinner 2 at the Las: no napkins needed at the table*

Obviously for Guillaume, the use of napkins was not necessary for their everyday mealtimes. Nevertheless, what he might have said, had the argument gone on, was that they 'should' have used napkins on a daily basis in order for Zoé to integrate, in a cognitive and bodily manner, the use of a napkin at mealtimes so that, when it needed to be used (as when eating 'properly', such as at a fancy restaurant), she would be able to do so with ease.

These difference of practices represented differentiated representations of young children's capacities to adopt adult normative norms, varying between social class positions. The children from the Bourdon

(up. class) and the André families were roughly the same age but on the one hand the André parents let Céleste (4), Enzo (6) and Lucas (8) behave in a more child-like manner and the Bourdon parents (up. class) pushed Lucie (6) and Marius (8) to behave more like well-mannered adults.

Marco Franquet's (10) response to my question about having to wait till everybody was served or not showed how, in this family, this rule had been internalised to the point of not needing to mention it anymore:

**Marco:** Usually, we need an authorisation [to start eating], but otherwise, it's when everybody is served, when everybody is at the table that we can start to eat... But otherwise, we need to ask, and we are allowed, depending on the dish... well, I don't know, you need to ask my parents about that...

#### **2.4. Separating together**

The general mealtime rule among the participating families was to all sit together until everybody was finished eating. Marco Franquet (10, up. mid. class) implicitly revealed he had integrated this rule when explaining to me that, usually, leaving the table implied not being able to come back:

**Fairley:** Do you get up, are you allowed, during the meal?

**Marco:** I get up..., often, when I get up it's to leave, I rarely come back after that

**Fairley:** Okay. And do you warn anybody, your family, that you are leaving?

**Marco:** Well I say I'm leaving. Anyway, I clear my things away.

**Fairley:** Et est-ce que tu te lèves, tu as le droit, pendant le repas ?

**Marco:** J'me lève..., souvent, quand je me lève c'est pour partir, c'est rarement pour revenir.

**Fairley:** D'accord, ok. Et est-ce que tu préviens quelqu'un, ta famille que tu te lèves ?

**Marco:** Bah, je dis que je sors. De toute façon, j'débarrasse mes affaires.

At the Comescu household (up. class), there was not much flexibility in the rules for getting up during mealtimes. Irina acknowledged there were authorised reasons for her children to get up, to get food or something that was missing on the table, but otherwise, Lea (7) and Hugo (10) had to stay seated throughout the whole meal:

**Irina:** Usually, they are not allowed to get up from the table. If they get up, it's because the meal is..., well they have finished their meal, so, there. I don't accept that they come back to the table: if they have left, they have left. But they ask, usually, they ask if they are allowed to leave. Or if they leave, it's to get a napkin, a fork that is missing, but otherwise, no, they are not allowed [...]. We are a bit strict [smile].

**Irina:** En général, ils n'ont pas le droit de se lever de table. S'ils se lèvent de table, c'est que le repas est, voilà, ils ont fini le repas donc voilà. J'accepte pas qu'ils se remettent à table: s'ils sont sortis, ils sont sortis. Mais ils demandent, en général, ils demandent s'ils ont le droit de sortir, ou s'ils sortent, c'est pour chercher une serviette ou une fourchette qui manque, mais sinon, non, ils n'ont pas le droit [...]. On est un peu stricts [sourire].

The observations within the Comescu family (up. class) confirmed this and it was also the case with the Bourdon and the Imbert families (up. class):

*The children only got up to clear their bowls. Irina got up often during the meal: to get the salt and pepper, for second servings, to cut some dry sausage and cheese. At the end of the mealtime, everybody cleared their own plate and cutlery and Irina cleared the rest.*

Ethnographic note, dinner 4, Comescu

Craig Bennet (up. mid. class) from Adelaide also talked about the rule of children not being allowed to leave the table before all had finished eating but it was rather meant to be followed above all in the case of extraordinary domestic commensality, when they had guests over:

**Fairley:** And what are the rules for finishing dinner? Do you have to wait 'til everybody is done to leave the table?

**Craig:** Yeah, we try to. Especially when we've got visitors over. That's our number one rule, is that everyone's not allowed to leave until they're finished dinner. Generally, I'm normally the first finished anyway. So the two kids are not far behind, well Henry's not far behind. So generally we still sit at the table and make sure everyone's finished.

In Lyon, it was the reverse: the parents and I sometimes lingered at the table for longer than they would usually have done. When I asked them about their children going off before us, they justified this by having a guest over. This also meant that parents knew they could not expect their younger children to stay at the table as long as older children or adults did. Staying seated for a long time is an acquired capacity, and studies about children at school have shown how it requires practices over time (Faure and Garcia 2003).

## **2.5. When commensality crumbled**

Performing everyday family commensality required synchronisation efforts to articulate the collective and the individual rhythms, and this process called for adjustments to the children's different ages. Contrary to the upper class household of this study, in the intermediary or lower middle class ones (Obecanov, Lebrun, Nimaga, Rizzo, André), more flexibility was adopted towards the end of the mealtime and the family members did not necessarily need to leave the table all together, nor wait till everybody had finished eating their dessert to go off and do their own thing. At the André household, transitioning in and out of mealtimes happened often without clear temporal markers. The mealtime unfolded with little formalisation and was barely ritualised in time and in space. The norm of staying seated during the whole mealtime was much less of an issue than with the upper class families of this research:

*I arrive at Pascal and Angelique André's house (low. mid. class) at 7:30PM. They have not yet started to prepare the food. The meal started at about 8:00/8:15. The children sat down at the table before the table is completely set. Enzo (6) has taken his three small cheeses before the meal. He keeps them with him while playing and then puts them in front of his plate.*

*The children regularly get up from the table. Enzo, who brings his plate to his mother to have some tomato sauce. Enzo, again, gets up to go to the toilet.*

*The children are quite agitated during the meal, but the parents are calm. Angelique asks them about their day. Pascal, the father, does not talk much.*

*The meal is both agitated and unrestrained (or almost). The parents do not correct the children on their behaviour. There is little difference between table manners and the behaviours outside the mealtime. The time of the meal is not very marked in the evening, in the sense that the children sit at the table of their own free will (the mother sets the table). They also leave without warning or special marker for the end of the meal.*

Dinner 1, Ethnographic note

*J'arrive chez Pascal et Angélique le 13 octobre à 19h30. Ils n'ont pas encore commencé à préparer à manger. Le repas débute vers 20h/20h15. Les enfants s'assoient à table avant que la table soit complètement mise. Enzo a pris ses trois petits fromages avant le repas. Il les garde avec lui en jouant et ensuite les met devant son assiette.*

*Les enfants se lèvent régulièrement de table. Enzo, qui apporte son assiette à sa mère pour qu'elle lui serve de la sauce tomate. Enzo se lève pour aller aux toilettes.*

*Les enfants sont assez agités pendant le repas, mais les parents sont calmes. Angélique leur pose des questions sur leur journée. Pascal ne parle pas beaucoup.*

*Le repas est à la fois agité et sans contrainte (ou presque). Les parents reprennent très peu les enfants sur leur comportement. Il y a peu de différence entre les manières d'être à table et la manière d'être en dehors de table. Le moment du repas n'est pas très marqué dans la soirée, dans le sens où les enfants s'assoient à table de leur plein gré (c'est la mère qui met la table). Ils partent aussi sans prévenir et marqueur spécial de la fin du repas.*

Dîner 1, Ethnographic note

Transitioning out of the mealtime happened without following any formalised rule at the André household:

**Angélique :** Well when they are finished, they leave. When they are finished, they leave without necessarily asking, they get up and leave. Occasionally, they ask 'Can I leave'. It surprises us... 'Well, yes, yes' [laughter]

**Angélique :** Bah quand ils ont fini ils s'en vont. Quand ils ont fini, voilà ils s'en vont sans forcément demander, ils se lèvent et ils partent. Parfois ils demandent 'je peux y aller ?'. Ça nous étonne... 'Bah oui, oui' [rire]

Angélique's expression 'it's surprise us' indicated asking permission to leave the table was not expected at their place.

In Adelaide, Amy Chapman (int. mid. class) explained that, as long as her children had had what she deemed a necessary amount of food, her children did not need to wait till everybody had finished to go off and play:

**Amy:** Jacob likes to eat. And he would sit at the table, just constantly having more food. Food, food, food. And that's where Hannah gets annoyed, like: 'Oh! Do I have to wait for him?', 'Well, okay, you've done round three, all right, no worries, you can head off now'. So, yeah, it depends on that as well, but oh, he likes his food, for sure, yeah.

In Lyon, Lucas Franquet (up. mid. class) detailed something similar about the end of the mealtime and the possibility for children to break up the commensal togetherness:

**Lucas :** Well, they don't really ask [chuckles]. So when they leave and we don't know why, we ask them why they left and indeed, we point out they did not ask for permission. We in reality, they never ask for permission, so, you know. So they are allowed to get up for different things: either to go to the kitchen, to go get something.

**Lucas :** Bah ils demandent pas vraiment l'autorisation [rire]. Donc quand ils partent et qu'on sait pas pourquoi on leur demande pourquoi ils sont partis et effectivement on leur fait

remarquer qu'ils ont pas demandé l'autorisation. Mais en pratique ils demandent jamais l'autorisation donc voilà. Après ils peuvent se lever pour différentes choses, soit c'est pour aller à la cuisiner chercher quelque chose.

**Lucas :** In reality, what often happens is that we have different rythms during the mealtime. That is to say we won't all finish at the same time and for example, we regularly eat cheese, and Elliott loves cheese. He eat lots of it, to much, so we refrain him. And Marco hates cheese. We think it's connected to his intestine pains, when he was younger, and he can't bear the smell of cheese. So for example, yesterday, he got up from the table when we put the cheese out. We did not get it at first that it was really that but, you know, he was staying away from the table because he could not bear the smell of cheese.

**Lucas :** En fait c'est qui s'passe souvent c'est qu'pendant l'repas on a des rythmes différents. C'est à dire qu'on va pas tous finir le plat en même temps et typiquement on mange assez souvent du fromage et Jules adore le fromage. Il en mange beaucoup, trop, donc ça on l'freine. Et Marco déteste le fromage. On pense que c'est lié à ses problèmes, 'fin c'est pas lié à la maladie d' Crohn mais on pense qu'il a du avoir des douleurs intestinales quand il était plus jeune, et le, l'odeur du fromage l'insupporte. Donc typiquement hier il s'est levé d'table quand on a sorti l'fromage, on a pas tilté tout d'suite que c'était vraiment ça, mais voilà il restait hors de table parce qu'il supportait pas l'odeur du fromage.

**Lucas :** So, like, they either go into the kitchen for that, they get up. Or they also get up to go to the bathroom. So, well, they more or less tell us that, but we more or less get it, so we also authorize that. Otherwise, often at the end of the meal, at the end of the main course..., Marco does not necessarily have any desert, so he tends to get up just like that and leave, without telling us. We don't really know what he does and, like, he considers he has finished his meal. So we try to get him to return to the table to stay a bit with us. But it's true that there is also that cheese moment, sometimes, we give up. So it's not rare we finish the meal just the three or two of us.

**Lucas :** Donc voilà, soit ils vont dans la cuisine soit pour ça, ils se lèvent, soit ils veulent se lever pour aller aux toilettes aussi. Donc ça bon, ils le disent plus ou moins mais on comprend plus ou moins donc ça on autorise. Après sinon souvent à la fin du repas, à la fin du plat, Marco prend pas forcément toujours des desserts, donc il a parfois tendance à s'lever comme ça et à partir sans rien nous dire, on sait pas trop c'qu'il fait et en fait il estime juste qu'il a fini l'repas. Donc on essaye de l'faire revenir à table pour finir un peu avec nous, mais c'est vrai comme y'a un peu cet épisode fromage des fois on laisse tomber quoi. Donc il est pas rare qu'on finisse le repas à trois ou deux.

At the second dinner at the Franquet household, Marco (10) left the table before the end of the mealtime, between the main course and the cheese and desert. He went to sit on the sofa, looking at his phone. Meanwhile, the discussion continued between the parents and Jules, about his passion for public transport maps. After a few minutes, Nathalie got up to get the desert:

**Nathalie:** Marco, can you come back the table, please?

*He goes and see his mum in the kitchen, before coming back to sit.*

**Lucas:** Marco, do you want some dessert?

**Jules:** I want some cheese

**Marco:** Hum... I am going to have a look

*He gets up to and opens the fridge*

**Lucas:** I would like some apple sauce, please

*Nathalie bring some desserts for everybody*

*Dinner 2*

**Nathalie:** Marco, tu peux revenir à table ste plait?

*Il va rejoindre Nathalie dans la cuisine avant de revenir s'asseoir.*

**Lucas:** Marco, tu veux un dessert?

**Jules:** Moi j'veux du fromage

**Marco:** Euh... J'veais voir ce qu'il y a  
*Il se relève pour voir dans le frigo*  
**Lucas:** moi j'veux bien une compote s'il te plait  
*Nathalie prend le dessert du frigo pour tout le monde*  
*Dîner 2*

After the desert, the boys left the table and went play resting on the couch, while the parents remained at the table. Shortly after, Nathalie asked them to stop, calling them back to the table :

**Nathalie:** Come on, let's stop now  
*They ignore her and continue playing*  
**Nathalie:** Marco, come here for a second, please  
Still no answer  
**Nathalie:** Marco!  
*They arrive a few seconds later*  
**Nathalie:** Can you please clear the plates, that will keep you busy  
*He goes towards the living room*  
**Nathalie:** Marco! Please!  
*He finally starts clearing the table*  
*Dinner 2*

**Nathalie:** allez, on va arrêter maintenant  
*They ignore her and continue playing*  
**Nathalie:** Marco vient voir deux secondes s'te plait-là  
Still no answer  
**Nathalie:** Marco!  
*They arrive a few seconds later*  
**Nathalie:** Tu peux débarasser les assiettes s'il te plait? Ca va t'occuper  
*He goes towards the living room*  
**Nathalie:** Marco! S'il te plait  
*He finally starts clearing the table*  
*Dîner 2*

This flexibility in the end of mealtime was also connected to the type of food parents considered it was most important children ate, the food served towards the end of the mealtime being considered less important (because less healthy) by parents and more optional for children to eat. However, the situation at the Franquet household (up. mid. class) was quite unusual. Marco (10) suffered from Crohn disease and although he was currently in remission, he went through a period when he could hardly eat. During these episodes, he and one parent would go elsewhere during mealtimes in order to diminish the difficulty of not being able to share the same food as others. This meant the impossibility of following commensal norms resulted in the disappearance of commensality in itself, which was a testament to the importance of family meals at the Franquet household:

**Nathalie:** There was a time when he wasn't eating at all, he was drinking reconstituted milk. So we were careful not to eat things that he liked in front of him, we tried not to eat in front of him. And we tried to eat things he didn't like when unfortunately he had to be there [...]. So we all kind of followed his diet [...]. On the other hand, when he's not here we try to eat what he's not allowed to eat.

**Nathalie :** Y'avait un moment où il mangeait pas du tout, il buvait un lait reconstitué. Donc là on faisait attention à pas manger des choses qu'il aimait devant lui, on essayait de pas manger devant lui. Et on essayait de manger des choses qu'il aimait pas quand malheureusement il



devait être là [...]. Donc on s'est un peu tous calqués sur son régime alimentaire [...]. Par contre quand il est pas là on essaie de manger ce qu'il a pas l'droit de manger.

The dessert often appeared as a distinct stage of the whole family mealtime when the commensal ritual was let to fall apart and family members transitioned into some more individualistic activities. The family togetherness loosened up in several ways in particular in the temporal rhythm. In some families (Rizzo, Nimaga, Obecanov: all int. mid. class and André: low. mid. class) children were authorised to begin to eat their dessert before their parents, although the later usually asked that all the children be finished eating their main course before moving on to the dessert. Parents were also more lenient about children getting up before the dessert was served, or before everybody had finished their own desert. Not only was there tolerance on parents' side, but parents also appreciated spending a few minutes together at the table, without the children. They enjoyed this as a moment to talk about 'adult' topics, as a moment when there was often more space to do so than during the mealtime, which was highly child oriented:

**Nathalie :** So we stay five more minutes at the table, not really much more than that, but we often stay a few minutes longer, yes [...]. It depends on the time. If we have time, we linger a bit at the table. And if we don't have time, we try to hurry, but if we can, we stay. Yes, yes, it happens that we eat and take some time at the end.

**Nathalie :** Oui on reste cinq minutes de plus hein, c'est pas non plus, pas beaucoup plus long mais on est souvent quelques minutes de plus oui [...]. Ça dépend de l'heure qu'il est. Si on a l'temps, on traîne un peu à table. Et si on a pas l'temps on essaie de s'dépêcher mais si on peut, on reste. Oui oui ça arrive qu'on mange ou qu'on prenne le temps en tout cas à la fin.

Amy Chapman (int. mid. class) from Adelaide pointed out that family mealtimes ended when the children were done and left the table, even if parents lingered for a few minutes more at the table, still eating and discussing between themselves:

**Fairley:** How do you decide when the meal ends? What's the, what's the rule for ending the meal and cleaving the table?

**Amy:** Well, if there's nothing on [such as child extracurricular activity planned after dinner], then we don't have to rush out, it will be once pretty much everyone's done. Sometimes it'll be if the kids are done, then their meals have ended and Glen and I might continue sitting there. We might still be eating, because we've been a bit slower, or we've had to stop halfway through, go get their next bit of the fruit or the yogurt or whatever and then come back. So, um, we may let the kids go, before we've even finished. So it doesn't always have to end because the last person has then finished their thing. I guess it's the moment that the kids are done that, then, it's done.

This showed how, more and more, according to a certain model of education in contemporary occidental societies, children have a greater role to play in the making of the family (Singly 2014; Banwell and Dixon 2004). Family mealtimes were actually defined according to children's temporality, which was telling of the way middle and upper class families constructed themselves around the children. It was also indicative of the role of the mealtime in children's education and socialisation. Once the children had left the table, the mealtime turned into something else, more related to adults as a couple. It was as if parents were reconquering part of the mealtime at the dessert. Another way

for parents to do so was to have their dessert later on. In Adelaide, the Bennet and Chapman parents would have some of their dessert later on in the evening:

**Amy Chapman:** We don't eat like the fruit and the yogurt when the kids do, so [once the kids are in bed] might be when we then go back and have, some yogurt, some fruit. Glen tends to get hungry at that 9:00, so he might actually go back and like make some toast. He definitely likes his bread and toast and whatnot. It might be something that we don't want the kids to have, so that's our time to have the treat that we've hidden away from them. Maybe an ice cream, just sometimes I try and make some, like, healthier treats to have in the fridge. So we like might make a hot drink, and then have that snack at that time. I may have baked something for that week, so it might be a cake. It just depends. Nine times out of ten Glen will go back and have the toast that will be his snack, and mine will be probably more the sweet, I'm a sweet tooth, so ...

When Amy described their evening snacking as a 'time to have the treat that we've hidden away from them', she was referring to a particular dimension of commensality, that of sustaining children's health by providing them with food they considered healthy and by sharing this food with them.

Other parents from Lyon also have their dessert after the mealtime. Angélique André (low. mid. class) described how, after the family mealtime – that included children – she put their kids to bed while her husband cleared away the table and took care of the dishes:

**Angélique:** He kindly waits that I come back, to have a dessert, an apple, anything [...]. Except when he has been a bit lazy [to clear and do the dishes] but otherwise, no, usually, he clears the kitchen and waits that I arrive to finish with me. It's really rare that we have all finished, cleared before the children are put to bed. I think it hardly ever happens.

**Angélique :** Il attend gentiment que j'reviennne et pour prendre un dessert, un yaourt, une pomme n'importe quoi [...]. Sauf quand il a été un peu feignasse [pour ranger et faire la vaisselle] mais sinon. Non en général il range, puis il attend que j'arrive pour finir avec moi. C'est très rare qu'on ait tout fini, rangé, avant de coucher les enfants. J'crois que ça n'arrive, pratiquement jamais.

**Laurent Comescu** (up. class): You know, when I eat my cream desert, I am never at the table!

**Lea:** Well he is right, considering he watches TV

**Laurent:** Usually, I am alone with myself [laughter]

*Dinner 2*

**Laurent:** Moi, quand je mange ma crème, je suis jamais à table hein!

**Lea:** Ben, vu qu'il regarde la télé, il a raison

**Laurent:** D'habitude, je suis tout seul avec moi-même, hein [rire]

*Dinner 2*

In Adelaide, not only did parents regularly have their dessert after the dinnertime, but it also happened that children would eat later on in the evening as well. I did not witness nor hear mention of this in Lyon, which could be explained by the fact that the children usually went to bed shortly after the mealtime, which was not so often the case in Adelaide (as they would have the homework and the bathing left to do):

**Viktor:** She is done now

**Sophie:** Hum... maybe

**Viktor:** [at the same time] I think so

**Sophie:** Have you finished? You are not having more ?

**Elisa:** Mm-hmm, yes [low voice]  
**Viktor:** We put her... [to bed]?  
**Elisa:** [louder] I just want a plain yogurt with some honey  
**Sophie:** Ah, well she wants a plain yogurt. So come and sit down. Feed the fish if you want but come and sit down [Elisa is in the lounge area]  
**Viktor:** I already gave some  
**Sophie:** Ah, well come and sit down, Elisa  
*Dinner 1, video conf.*

**Viktor:** Elle a fini là  
**Sophie:** Euh... peut-être  
**Viktor:** (en même temps) J'pense  
**Sophie:** T'as fini? T'en veux plus  
**Elisa:** Hmm oui (petite voix)  
**Viktor:** On la met...[au lit] ?  
**Elisa:** J'veux juste un yaourt nature avec du miel  
**Sophie:** Ah ben elle veut un yaourt nature. Donc viens t'asseoir. Donne à manger au poisson si tu veux mais viens t'asseoir (Elisa est dans le salon)  
**Viktor:** J'ai déjà donné  
**Sophie:** Ah, ben viens t'asseoir, Elisa  
*Dinner 1, video conf.*

Elisa temporarily left the table to feed the fish but was authorised to come back to have a desert, without questioning from her parents.

In a few families of upper classes (Imbert, Bourdon, Ferret, Comescu), everybody had to leave the table at once:

**Irina :** We all leave at the same time. We all sit at the table at the same time, except if Laurent is late, so in that case, we do not wait for him because we have our meals are a relatively fixed time. But otherwise, we all leave at the same time.

**Irina:** On sort tous en en même temps. On se mets tous à table en même temps, sauf si Laurent il a du retard donc du coup, on l'attend pas parce que on se met relativement à heure fixe à table. Mais sinon, on sort tous en même temps.

### 3. Conclusion

In all the households from Lyon, the dining table was the centrepiece of the families' eating practices and it was strongly associated in parents' discourses to the notion of commensality and the making of the family. In Adelaide, the dining table was not so much a pillar of commensality in the discourses nor in the practices for most families. In one household from Adelaide, the lounge room was even the principal commensal space for children, who ate on the couch or around the coffee table. Yet in all except two households (in Lyon), family mealtimes were regularly displaced and occurred elsewhere in the participants' home. These displacement had different causes and significances according to the households.

In some families – from intermediary or lower middle classes and some upper middle classes in Adelaide – this was done rather spontaneously, as an adjustment to other aspects of family life (a

parent being temporarily absent, the dining table being covered with laundry, for example), because parents were longing for a more relaxed mealtime frame or when material conditions in Adelaide pushed the family to eat in the lounge area (uncomfortable room temperature).

In other families – situated in intermediary and upper middle class – these types of mealtime displacements were planned in advance and occurred once a week on a regular day. To understand this, we need to consider family mealtimes within a weekly frame. Because most of these upper class households sustained normative forms of commensality over several days, they then temporarily allowed themselves to displace the mealtime from the conventional table to other household spaces, such as the couch or the lounge room coffee table. The mealtime displacement also implied temporarily abandoning other commensal rules (eating with cutlery, sitting properly, talking together, for instance).

In the 4 families from Adelaide, the children regularly ate on their own. In Lyon, a couple of families only mentioned having two separate mealtimes (one of which happened rarely): a children's dinnertime and then parents eating on their own later on. There were clear cultural differences between the children's dinnertime in Lyon and the ones happening in Adelaide homes. In Lyon, observations showed that although children ate before the parents, the latter strived to produce this as a family commensal occasion, by supervising the children's eating, their table manners and by engaging them in conversation. This was quite different in Adelaide: while parents did make sure children were eating, they did not stay with them during their mealtimes and the latter were usually watching a program on screens (TV or pads), carrying out their mealtime more independently.

Family mealtimes were also spatially delimited by the configuration according to which individuals sat together or not and whether they did so during the whole mealtime. Sitting together remained a highly valorised and practiced commensal norm in these middle and upper class families and parents produced many efforts to maintain the family cohesion and commensal unity through it. Nevertheless there were also various reasons for which parents and children got up during mealtimes and left the table: reasons to get up that sustained commensality (clearing, food work) were authorised while disrupting the rule of staying seated was frowned upon, although it still happened in the intermediary and lower middle class households.

Family mealtimes were framed by several temporal structures as well: transitioning into the mealtime, synchronising the beginning and the end the eating and transitioning out of mealtimes. I observed two ways of transitioning into the mealtime: the first was setting the table and in the vast majority of the families, children were expected to take part in it on some level, from doing all of it themselves to participating with parents. Getting children to do this and then getting them to come to the table rarely

happened spontaneously and smoothly. In any case, this bared some level of collective, aggregative effort. The second way to transition into commensality was eating before the mealtime and this corresponds to a transgressive stage, when normative commensal rules were inverted. Nevertheless it was still controlled and framed by parents, to make sure this phase did not 'ruin' commensality in itself, by ruining the commensal's appetite. Children were often eager to transition out of the mealtime and parents regularly asked them to remain a bit longer at the table. At times, they took longer than parents hopped to eat and so children were urged to eat more quickly and parents forced to be patient. Contrary to setting the table, children were only asked to clear their own dishes, which some did spontaneously and others with reminders. When the children left before the parents, the family mealtime temporarily turned into a couple's moment. The dessert constituted an unravelling stage of the mealtime, and it could be so in particular in terms of temporal delimitations. Children were regularly authorised to leave the table before everybody had finished their dessert or temporarily get up. In this case, when parents lingered on for a short time, the mealtime was turned into an adult phase when they could finally take the time to talk in between themselves, as a couple, as adults and not only as parents.

The construction of a space and time favorable to the unfolding of family mealtimes lies on norms that can vary from one household to another. These do not necessarily rely being at the table, or eating all at the same time but can imply, on the contrary, the ritualisation of the laying and clearing of the table as well as the synchronisation of the beginning of eating and leaving the table. All these norms were not necessarily and systematically respected; they were more or less followed at the different mealtimes and could even be 'forgotten' for the exceptional (and sometimes ritualized) mealtime displacements. The most important seemed to be that these norms were known and shared by all the family members (which, in the case of reconstituted families, can imply having to renegotiate them) rather than they be followed strictly all the time. The question now remains if this differentiated and at times loosened relationship to norms exists in other commensal dimensions, starting with the health concerns that underlie everyday domestic commensality.



# Chapter 6. The health equation of commensality

## 1. Introduction

At the end of the seventh dinner at the Lebrun household, an intermediary middle class household living in a residential suburb of Lyon, the adults – Pierre (father), Laëtitia (mother) and Arthur (Pierre's 23 year old nephew) – were lingering on at the table on their patio after the children had gone off to play in the garden. We were discussing about the way their family mealtimes happened:

**Laëtitia:** If they have never tasted, they need to try [...]. We ask them to taste several time and after that, when you see they don't like it, well there you go [...].

**Pierre:** But somebody who does not like something, what is the point of forcing him? Maybe he or she will like it later on. On the contrary, the more you force him or her...

**Arthur:** Yeah, but forcing a little bit, you see ... [...]. Chloë likes to complain, so as not to finish her plate

**Pierre:** But it's not that she complains, it's that she is captivated by telling things

**Arthur:** Yes, but when she is the only one having to finish her plate, she does not want to finish her plate

**Pierre:** Oh no, no, no. She stops eating, well yes, yes

**Laëtitia:** But it's never a conflict

**Pierre:** It's never a conflict, because from the moment the children fed him or herself [miming he does not care]

**Laëtitia :** There are times when, you know, we have to ask her to finish her plate ...

**Arthur:** ... bend her arm a bit...

**Laëtitia:** ... but it's mostly, as you said earlier, when the others have already finished and she is alone at the table, I mean, you know... [comprehensive]

**Arthur:** The problem is that she is too inattentive, she lets herself wander, when everybody starts to talk

**Pierre:** She prefers to be in the discussion, in the contact with others, rather than eat. But because she is not focused on eating

**Arthur:** Yes, but she still eats slower, naturally, than the other. I mean, you know, at the beginning, when hardly anybody is talking, they are all eating and her, there is always food left when the others begin to talk

**Laëtitia:** That is right

*Dinner 7*

**Laëtitia:** S'ils n'ont jamais goûté, ils doivent essayer [...]. On leur demande de goûter plusieurs fois et ensuite, quand tu vois qu'ils aiment pas, eh ben voilà [...]

**Pierre:** Mais quelqu'un qui aime pas quelque chose, à quoi ça sert de le forcer ? Peut-être qu'il aimera plus tard, au contraire, plus tu le forces...

**Arthur:** Ouais, mais en forçant juste un tout petit bout, tu vois...[...]. Chloë, elle aime bien râler, pour ne pas finir son assiette.

**Pierre:** Mais c'est pas qu'elle râle, c'est qu'en fait elle est captivée par raconter des choses.

**Arthur:** Oui, mais quand elle est toute seule à finir à manger, elle a pas envie de finir son assiette

**Pierre:** Ah non, non, non ! Elle s'arrête de manger, oh ben oui, oui

**Laëtitia:** Mais c'est jamais un conflit.

**Pierre:** C'est jamais un conflit car à partir du moment où l'enfant s'est nourri, le reste [il mime qu'il s'en moque. ...]

**Laëtitia :** Y'a des fois où il faut, voilà, un peu lui demander [à Chloë] de finir son assiette...

**Arthur:** ... un peu lui forcer la main...

**Laëtitia:** ... mais c'est surtout, comme tu disais, quand tous les autres déjà ont fini et qu'elle est toute seule à table, enfin, voilà... [se montre compréhensive]

**Arthur:** Le problème, c'est qu'elle est trop inattentive, elle se laisse trop vagabonder quoi, quand ça commence à parler.

**Pierre:** Elle préfère être dans la discussion, dans le contact avec les autres, que de manger. Mais parce qu'elle est pas concentrée sur manger

**Arthur:** Oui, mais même, elle mange moins vite, naturellement, que les autres. Enfin tu sais, au début, personne parle quasiment, ils mangent un peu tous et elle, il lui reste toujours des trucs quand les autres commencent à parler quoi.

**Laëtitia:** C'est ça.

*Dîner 7*

This discussion revealed central dimensions of everyday domestic commensality and the tensions that existed between their social, physiological and health aspects. Family mealtime were occasions to satisfy a physiological need, as Pierre argued. Laëtitia and Arthur reminded him that feeding children during mealtime required repetitive efforts of socialising them healthy eating, through a variety of food (or the same ingredients cooked in different ways) and eating the appropriate amount. This resulted in the establishment of commensal rules requiring children to finish their plate and taste the food they were served, which the later constantly tried to negotiate.

These processes varied according to adults' perceptions of children's development of their sense of taste and their food preferences. Laëtitia required children tasted several times before she could accept their decision of disliking certain food. For Arthur, children could be nudged to like food. For Pierre, on the contrary, forcing children to eat products they disliked may traumatise them and prevent them from ever liking them later on in life. Contrary to Laëtitia and Arthur, he considered children did not finish developing their taste buds until there were older.

These commensal norms of eating and tasting were tied up to other social dimensions of mealtime, such as conversing, and children were expected to take part in the different aspects of eating together.

Finally, all these commensal imperatives – tasting, eating, social exchanges – needed to unfold according to synchronised rhythms between all the participants. This required competences to articulate these somewhat contradicting expectations (eating and talking), which children managed to articulate differently according to their age and their individual eating rhythms. As Arthur noted, Chloë (8) also ate slower than the others, even when nobody was talking, which seemed to be why the synchronisation becomes difficult. He also pertinently described the otherwise successful synchronisation, at least at the beginning of the mealtime, when 'nobody really talk[ed], they [were] all kind of eating', suggesting the articulation of the biological and social rhythm varied throughout the different stages of mealtime, the appetite of the commensal taking over the verbal exchanges. In this case, failure to follow the commensal synchronisation resulted in Chloë not wanting to eat anymore, because she did not want to eat alone.

The previous chapter on the boundaries of family mealtimes ended on an examination of the peripheral temporal structures of everyday domestic commensality. This chapter focuses on the



internal structuring of family mealtime food socialisation and the health norms that underlie the control of the rhythm of eating and of the equal sharing of food.

The initial purpose of eating together can become lost in the analysis of family mealtimes, especially as they constitute incredibly rich occasions to socialise family members to social and cultural values and into family life in particular. Among the many reasons that family members evoked for eating together regularly or systematically, social dimensions came first, such as spending time together and communicating, as the next chapter will describe. Nevertheless, behind these socially valued dimensions of family mealtimes appeared other physiological priorities. In 1910, Simmel published a newspaper essay called *The sociology of the Meal* (Frisby and Featherstone 1997). He put forward the sociological nature of the shared meal, emphasising the general fact that everybody has to eat, in so doing creating the basis for collective action. He stated aesthetics and regulation of shared mealtimes emerged from this social aspect of eating. From then on, Simmel argued 'all the regulations concerning eating and drinking emerge, not with regard to the unessential standpoint of food as matter [itself], but specifically with regard to the form of its consumption' (1997, 131). The social form of eating together transcends the content of the meal. Simmel then developed on the aesthetics and regulations of shared mealtimes: their particular spatiality and temporality, the use of utensils and plates, the table manners, the mealtime conversations and so on. He also reminded us, however, that the whole stylisation of table manners should not make us forget the initial purpose of a mealtime: 'the satisfaction of a need located in the depths of organic life and therefore absolutely universal' (1997, 133). If 'communal eating and drinking [...] unleashes an immense socializing power' (1997, 131), we should not forget that what this allowed us to overlook in the first place: (that one is not eating and drinking 'the same thing' at all, but rather totally exclusive portions' (1997, 131). Eating, even together, is above all a primitive, physiological and selfish act; it bears an 'egoistic' and 'exclusionary quality' in itself. The fact that food is impossible to share, as the portions one eats can be eaten by nobody else, enfolds into several other individualistic aspects. The sense of hunger and satiety are unique in their degree, satisfaction and timing. The sensory experience of eating associated to the likes and dislikes of certain foods is also singular to each individual. Commensality is constructed foremost on the satisfaction of physiological needs, which satisfaction is necessary for sustaining healthy bodies. Nevertheless, commensality is also built on manners that aim at transcending, modeling through family socialisation and harmonising these individualist sensory and temporal variations.

The concept of sharing in the context of mealtimes is multifaceted. Sharing can also be sharing the time and space of eating, as discussed in the previous chapter. Sharing can mean eating the same food: everybody eats portion of the same food preparation, implying a single menu is prepared for all. Sharing is dividing the food (whether a unique menu or not) into relatively equitable portions, adjusted

to the appetite and physiology of the eaters. In this chapter, I focus on the way everyday domestic commensality is constructed around the management of the quantity of food shared and eaten, the variety and balance of the food ingested as well as on the individual and collective rhythms of eating together. By doing so, I investigate the health norms that underlie the unfolding of everyday domestic commensality. I look at how this management varies according to social categories, gender, the age of children, the context of commensality (day of the week) and the stage of the mealtime (eating norms vary according to the first course, the main dish and the desert). This poses the question of the way these dimensions of mealtimes were orchestrated by parents, how they socialised children to the mealtime manners of eating at the appropriate rhythm (neither too fast nor too slow), eating the right amount and type of food (a bit of everything, finishing one's plate).

## 2. From the satisfaction of physiological needs to sustaining healthy bodies

The way some parents talked about not eating altogether, with their children, pointed to the first purpose of mealtimes: satisfying satiety. The alternative to eating altogether was for parents to dine after the children, later in the evening, as explained in the previous chapter. A couple of the mothers of this study argued against this, for satiety and health reasons: eating after their kids had gone to bed would imply eating too late and thus not eating enough or eating too much. Doing that for Amy Chapman (int. mid. class) from Adelaide meant that 'by then I probably would have gotten past being hungry' and so she would not be eating at all. The Bourdon (up. class) used to have two separate mealtimes, until the first lockdown in the spring of 2020 in France disrupted their habits. Although Marie-Cécile expressed some weariness about having to eat every dinner with her children, she also considered it was a more appropriate time to satisfy hunger and ultimately an overall healthier eating practice:

**Marie-Cécile:** I like it. I like it because I am not hungry until 9 o'clock, at the time when we used to have dinner [...]. Actually, what I found great about eating at set hours, during the lockdown, was that I never ever hungry. I mean, I was hungry before going to the table, but I did not have the feeling of hunger [she also explains that this was due to less physical exercise]. And so, eating at 7PM, actually, I no longer snack. Yes, I mean, I was hungry; I used to finish the children's plates. It was not unbalanced or anything, but you know, I was hungry! And now, it's perfect, it suits me very well.

*Dinner 3*

**Marie-Cécile :** Moi j'aime bien. J'aime bien parce que j'ai pas faim jusqu'à 21h, à l'heure où on dînait avant [...]. En fait, ce que je trouvais génial de manger à heures fixes, pendant le confinement, c'est que, j'avais plus faim, jamais. Enfin j'avais faim avant de passer à table, voilà, mais j'avais plus la sensation de faim [elle explique aussi que c'est dû à une baisse de son activité physique]. Et puis, manger à 19h, en fait, je grignote plus quoi. Oui, j'avais faim, je finissais les assiettes des enfants. C'était pas déséquilibré ou quoi que ce soit, mais j'avais faim quoi! Et là maintenant, c'est parfait, moi ça me va très bien.

*Dîner 3*

**Marie-Cécile:** We continue to have meals together, it is nice to eat early, when we're hungry and to have the evening off.

*Food diary Marie-Cécile, during the 1<sup>st</sup> lockdown in France*

**Marie-Cécile :** On continue les repas tous ensemble, c'est qd même agréable de manger tôt, au moment où on a faim et d'avoir la soirée.

*Food diary Marie-Cécile, during the 1<sup>st</sup> lockdown in France*

Eluding family commensality implied for Marie-Cécile eating more than usual. And even though the food consumed was healthy (as in varied), she considered the quantity of food she ended up eating was unhealthy. Eating later in the evening also encroached upon the necessary time for parents to unwind at the end of the day, as explained in Chapter 3. Among the other benefits that her husband Benoit mentioned for eating together with their children is this notion that one needs to have sufficient time to digest food before going to bed:

**Benoit:** We eat much earlier, we eat nearly two hours earlier, but it's for the best. It's probably best because, you know, we have time to digest before going to bed, and all that.

*Dinner 2*

**Benoit :** On mange beaucoup plus tôt, on mange quasiment deux heures avant, mais c'est pas plus mal, c'est probablement mieux parce que, voilà, on a le temps de digérer avant d'aller se coucher, tout ça.

*Dîner 2*

Both Marie-Cécile and Benoit justified having family mealtimes as a healthier choice for themselves than eating after their children.

In another family in Lyon, Marco (10) Franquet (up. mid.class) reminded me of the principle purpose of mealtime and why he enjoyed it: eating together is above all to satisfy hunger:

**Marco:** I like the mealtime, because we are together and because, well, often, I am also hungry when I eat, it's logical and well, when we finish, I don't mind so much.

**Marco:** J'aime bien le repas, parce qu'on est ensemble, et parce que, bah, j'ai faim, souvent quand on mange quand-même, c'est logique, et, bah, quand on termine, ça me gêne pas trop.

When asked if she enjoys family mealtimes, Sally Davies (low. mid. class) from Adelaide brought up as well of the fundamentally physiological purpose of mealtimes:

**Sally:** [pause] Not necessarily ... Um, guess it depends sort of what we're eating as well. But usually, just based on all the drama that goes along with this, it's just, let's just get everyone fed, get us fed and get into bed as quick as possible. Especially in winter.

**Fairley:** Yeah. What about weekends? Is it different on the weekends?

**Sally:** Not necessarily. Beause my weddings are at 4:00 [she is a wedding planner], we probably don't start dinner prep until like 5:30, 6:00. We have a lot of school sports and things in the mornings, so a lot of ... I guess we would probably have more takeaway on the weekends, just as I guess some reward for during the week.

Sally's discourse also linked commensality with health: her children had difficulty to eat the food that was served, depriving the mealtimes from a potentially convivial aspect and bringing it back to the physiological purpose. On the weekend, because they had sustained commensality throughout the

week, they allowed themselves to order take away food that everybody would like, which resulted in the mealtime to become more enjoyable, adding a wellbeing dimension to it.

Amy Chapman (int. mid. class) from Adelaide explained a similar relationship to eating during week mealtimes: ‘we keep it simple with like Bolognese, things like hotdogs, like a simple carbonara. like I said, like a lot of carbs to fill up the kids’. Because of lack of energy and time during the week to prepare food, or at least food that she considered interesting, the mealtime in itself lost its potentially enjoyable dimension as well:

**Amy:** I think during the week it’s definitely get the meal in, we’ve got to eat pretty much. We tend to spend more time on the weekends choosing the foods that we want to enjoy and have the pleasure of eating because we’ve got the time to prepare for it and think about it, and it’s not a mad rush. So, definitely during the week is just, oh! You know, the thought of food and the thought of doing it is like, whatever happens, just get it down, eat, I don’t... If I enjoy it, I enjoy it if I don’t, it’s food, it’s done. But definitely during the weekend that’s more about, like, yeah, what, what do we feel like eating, now we’ve got time to spend to prepare it and then even the kids might want to get involved and stuff so yeah, it’s probably more of the pleasure on the weekend.

Mealtimes were narrowed down to physiological needs when the rest of family and professional life put pressure on them. In Lyon, Sébastien Cellier (*unknown social class*) stressed that a central dimension of mealtimes was also about this physiological need:

**Sébastien:** There is the mood and there is what they eat. What they eat remains important because, in fact, it’s their energy, you know. It’s their energy. I mean, I really notice there are days they won’t eat much and they nod off.

**Sébastien :** Y’a l’ambiance et y’a ce qu’ils mangent. Ce qu’ils mangent reste important parce que, mine de rien, c’est leur énergie quoi. Et leur énergie, enfin voilà, je vois très bien qu’il y’a des jours ils vont pas manger beaucoup et ils piquent du nez quoi.

For Sébastien, the initial purpose of mealtimes – eating and feeding – could become overshadowed with other commensal dimensions like family communication and cohesion.

### 3. Sharing food

In the etymological origin of commensality comes from the Latin ‘mensa’, which also stands for food<sup>94</sup> (Jönsson, Michaud, and Neuman 2021), suggesting commensality would not only be about eating at the same table but eating the same food as well. Observations showed that family members in Lyon usually ate the same food for the main dish and the first course, if there was one. They rarely ate the same food for dessert, except if a parent had cooked a dessert, which was unusual during the week. Yet, there were also occurrences, in Lyon and in Adelaide, when children and parents ate different food, either because it was planned that way by parents, when they were preparing the mealtime or,

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<sup>94</sup><https://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/commensal> (accessed on 12 March 2021).

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/commensal> (accessed on 5 November 2021)

more rarely, it happened in a more spontaneous way, during the mealtime: when, for example, children refused to eat some sort of food, they were offered something else. There existed a continuum of practices in the sharing of food: from eating the same food throughout all courses, daily to partially differentiated servings and, on the other end, parents serving completely distinct food to children. I have shown in Chapter 4 how some parents chose serving their children different food, to make the mealtime an easier process. Sharing the same food implied indeed extensive efforts from family members in terms of socialisation to taste.

### **3.1. Socialising to taste: from the display to the ingestion of new food**

There exist several steps in the socialisation process of children to eating novel foods, which varied according to their age and the family's social position.

#### **3.1.1. Socialisation through the display of consumption**

Sharing food in the context of family mealtime did not necessarily imply that everybody was actually *eating* the same food, and in particular eating vegetables. At the Nimaga household (int. mid. class), parents put out a dish of vegetables on the table from which they served for themselves: even though their children would not necessarily accept to be served any, Ana, the mother in law, felt that children needed to get used to vegetable being part of a proper menu and thus to *seeing* vegetables consumption *displayed* during commensality:

**Ana:** Well, actually, let's say [we eat] European, like with fried vegetables, and some rice, and meat separately, for instance. Or baked potatoes... Actually, we always have some meat [...]. We try to have a bit of vegetables, even if they do not eat, but you know, that they are there. And also some pasta or rice, or semolina, I mean there needs to be something, they actually don't eat much bread.

**Ana :** Bah, en fait, on va dire européen, genre des légumes à la poêle, et puis avec du riz, et puis une viande séparément, ça par exemple. Ou des patates au four... On met toujours une viande en fait [...]. On essaye d'avoir un peu de légumes, même s'ils mangent pas, mais voilà, qu'ils soient là, et puis des pâtes ou du riz, ou de la semoule, enfin il faut un truc, ils mangent pas trop le pain en fait.

The youngest child of the Nimaga household was 5 years old (Lila) and showing her the vegetables and performing themselves as vegetable eaters was the first step in socialising her into accepting vegetables. At the André household (low. mid. class), Pascal agreed that having vegetables out and displaying their own eating of vegetables on the table may have had some effect on the socialisation process of some of their children:

**Pascal:** I mean, us, we do eat quite a lot of seasonal vegetables ... Now, there are tomatoes that are arriving, so we eat a lot of tomato salad. And we do try to eat something nice, so as not to eat only pasta

**Pascal:** And so the children, do they eat the same thing?

**Pascal:** Enzo (6) he can very well taste, so the second boy, yes, but otherwise, the first (8) and the youngest girl (4) to get them to eat vegetables, that is not possible. They also eat a lot of the same thing, well they only eat pasta, for instance, or potatoes

**Pascal** : Mais bon, nous, on mange quand-même pas mal de légumes de saison... Là y'a les tomates qui arrivent donc on mange pas mal de salades de tomates. Et puis on essaye quand-même de manger un peu sympa, de pas manger que des pâtes

**Fairley** : Et, donc les enfants, est-ce qu'ils mangent la même chose ?

**Pascal** : Enzo (6), lui, il peut très bien goûter, donc le deuxième garçon, oui, mais sinon, le premier (8) et la petite dernière (6) pour manger des légumes, non c'est pas possible. Ils mangent aussi beaucoup la même chose, ben ils mangent que des pâtes, par exemple, ou que des pommes de terre

Seeing their parents eat novel food was a way for young children to decide if it was actually eatable, in the sense of good, tasty. Amy Chapman (int. mid. class) from Adelaide considered her youngest child (1 year-old) needed to see them eating, as a reassuring way for her to assess that the new food that was served – whichever type – and decide if it was actually edible:

**Amy**: I think it helps [eating together], especially with Isla being so little, she needs to see us eating to then also..., so tonight, we just had a quick spaghetti Bolognese and she refused to eat it until she saw us eating it. So she thought: "oh, it must be okay, I can eat it". It was like: "it's okay, it's not going to poison you".

This type of socialisation to novel food for children was also based on a differing conception of children's development of taste. Contrary to upper middle class families, parents from lower and intermediary positions also considered that their children's taste was inherently different from theirs, and that they would develop their "taste buds" later on in life. Amy described during an interview her own eating behaviours as a child and how she was a "picky eater" who would only eat fish fingers for dinner and who gave her parents "absolute grief". She justified her children's difficulty to eat what she tried to serve them as an hereditary trait:

**Amy**: So I say to Glen, we can't blame them. It's in their genes! If that's what they're gonna eat ... [laughter] Unfortunately, that's just what they have to eat! So I think we've come to that realisation, that they'll grow their taste buds, they'll develop. At the moment, it's just making them survive, I guess. Yeah, feeding them. Getting them to eat.

She concluded that the most important for her children's health was first for them to eat and accept that they would be socialised to novel tastes later on.

### 3.1.2. Socialisation through taste

In some families in Lyon (Bourdon, Imbert, Ferret, Comescu: up. class; Obecanov, Lebrun: int. mid. class) and in a couple in Adelaide (Bennet, Brown households, up. mid. class), parents mentioned the rule of having to actually taste the food that was presented on the table, which was an intermediary form of ingestion, between simply having the food in front of the eyes and eating a whole portion:

**Magali**: For me, the most important is [...] that they eat a bit of everything, that they taste a bit of everything. Even if they do not finish, that is not a problem, but that they at least taste

**Magali** : Pour moi l'important c'est [...] qu'elles mangent de tout, qu'elles goûtent de tout. Même si elles finissent pas tout. Si elles finissent pas c'est pas grave mais au moins qu'elles goûtent

At the fifth dinner at the Imbert household, the meal was constituted of 5 elements: aubergine puree as a starter; as a main dish, a carrot tops pie, then some cheese and as a dessert fruits and finally ice cream. Magali prepared all of it, and it was the first time she prepared eggplant puree:

**Magali:** [to the girls] If you don't like it, it's not a problem, but I want you to still taste  
*The girls taste and eat some, unenthusiastically*

**Louise:** I am not a fan  
*Dinner 5*

**Magali:** [aux filles] Je veux que vous goutiez, après, si vous finissez pas, c'est pas grave  
*Les filles goûtent et en mangent, sans enthousiasme*

**Louise:** J'suis pas fan  
*Dîner 5*

**Céline:** We don't ask that she finished her plate, but we always ask her to taste, even something that, at first sight, she does not like. It will be a teaspoon. You see, I had done some split pea purée and she tells me "I think that I don't like really like it", I say "well listen, you still taste this"

**Céline :** On lui demande pas de finir l'assiette par contre on lui demande toujours de goûter même un truc qu'à priori, elle aime pas. Mais ça va être la valeur d'une cuillère à café. Tu vois, j'avais fait d'la purée d'pois cassés et elle me dit 'j'crois qu'j'aime pas trop' j'dis 'bah écoutes tu goûtes ça quand même'

**Benoit:** When we offer something new, the children need to taste. So they can at the first mouthful: "oh, I don't like that. But afterwards, if they don't like it, well, they don't like it..."

**Marie-Cécile:** ... but actually, they end up liking it  
*Dinner 5*

**Benoit:** Lorsqu'on proposent quelque chose de nouveau, les enfants doivent goûter. Après, il peuvent dire, à la première bouchée : ' oh, j'aime pas ça '. Mais après, s'ils aiment pas, ben voilà, ils aiment pas ça....

**Marie-Cécile:** ... mais il y reviennent en fait.  
*Dîner 5*

**Marco:** We are always obliged to take a bit [of everything that is on the table]

**Fairley:** Take a bit, does that mean taste?

**Marco:** Yes, at least taste

**Fairley:** Okay. And if you don't like it, what happens?

**Marco:** Well, if you we don't like, well often, give we had a bit, and if we really don't like, well we are allowed to leave some

**Marco :** On est toujours obligé d'en prendre un petit peu

**Fairley :** Prendre un petit peu, ça veut dire goûter ?

**Marco :** Oui, au moins goûter, oui

**Fairley :** D'accord. Et si t'aimes pas, qu'est-ce qui se passe ?

**Marco :** Bah, si on aime pas, bah souvent vu qu'on en a un petit peu, et si on aime vraiment vraiment pas, bah on a le droit de laisser un peu

These examples show how parents feel they have to recognize and respect their children's individual taste preferences.

In another household in Adelaide, tasting food was more important than the quantity of food eaten. Alison explained: 'Luke and I are both, you know, say that if..., even if you don't finish your meal, if

you've eaten a bit of everything...'. Amy Chapman described how this tasting rule was a successful long-term method to get her children to eat a variety of food:

**Amy:** we definitely say you have to try it. They both have to try it [...]. And Hannah, I don't know where it came in, but she always gives us like a thumbs-up, a thumbs [down]. And I ... "just talk! Just use your words!" But she always gives us a rating of what the food is, and she surprises herself sometimes! She's like: "Oh! Actually that's pretty good". So I think she's learnt: "just at least try it because you'll never know". So she's pretty good with that.

### 3.1.3. Socialisation to self-constraint

If several parents mentioned children only had to taste the food they were served, steering clear in that manner of authoritative parental practices, in reality, parents commonly negotiated with their children to get them to eat enough, or even finish their plate. The most common form of socialisation observed in families with older children, in upper middle class families as well as in some intermediary households was actually getting children to eat the food they were served – especially the vegetables – whether it was new or not, whether children liked it or not. Pierre Lebrun (int. mid. class) spoke about his step-son's ability to do this : 'Nolan will complain about the vegetables, but he will always eat his vegetables'. When the Bourdon (up. class) decided to transition from two separate evening dinners to shared mealtimes, they adapted the menus towards what parents would usually eat, although with some exceptions such as spicy food or fish with pronounced taste. The parents tried to socialise their children to new tastes and the later usually responded positively to this process.

**Benoit:** We try to avoid the things that are too exotic, but at the same time, yeah, I did some pig's cheeks, they did not like it much, but ...

**Marie-Cécile:** ... Marius ate some...

**Benoit:** ... but they still eat some ...

*Dinner 2*

**Benoit:** on essaie d'éviter les trucs trop exotiques, mais en même temps, voilà, j'ai fait des joues de cochon, ça leur a pas plus énormément mais...

**Marie-Cécile:** ... Marius il en a mangé

**Benoit:** ... mais il mange quand même...

*Dinner 2*

At the Obecanov household, Elisa (6) also agreed to eat some vegetables although she would have preferred not to:

**Viktor:** Do you want some tomatoes?

**Elisa:** Yes

**Viktor:** Well then maybe take some tomatoes

**Sophie:** ... no, you are having some salad as well. [to Viktor] No

**Sophie:** Yeah, just tomatoes

**Sophie:** No!

**Viktor:** No

**Sophie:** That is what Dad said, he said not all the the tomatoes

*And she actually gets served salad as well and ends up eating it*

*Dinner 2*



**Viktor:** Tu veux que des tomates?  
**Elisa:** Oui  
**Viktor:** Ben prends en peut-être, des tomates  
**Sophie:** ...non, tu manges de la salade aussi... [à Viktor] Non  
**Elisa:** ouai, juste des tomates  
**Sophie:** non!  
**Viktor:** non  
**Sophie:** Papa, c'est ce qu'il t'a dit, il t'as dit pas toutes les tomates  
*Finalement, est elle servie de la salade puis fini par la manger*  
 Dinner 2

This ability to eat something without really wanting to was a process that children learned over the years and the older children got, the more they incorporated this disposition. Ana Nimaga (Lyon) compares the eating practices of her two stepdaughters:

**Ana:** So typically, what happens is that I ask Lila “Come on Lila, eat a bit more of this”. She does not like to eat, like, you need to ask her [...]. And so, I ask her “Come on, eat your vegetables, so we negotiate”. It’s rare that she eats [...]. Naya (12) does not eat much either, I mean not for me, I think she does not eat much. But it’s not up to me to..., I mean, those are habits she has with her mother, so I do not meddle to much... I tell her as well: “but finish your meat”, or “eat your vegetables”. She is older, so obviously, if I tell her, she listens, but overall, she does not eat much either.

**Ana :** Après ce qui se passe typiquement c'est que je demande à Lila 'Allez Lila mange encore un peu de ça'. Elle aime pas manger, donc elle est un peu du genre à... Il faut lui demander [...]. Et donc voilà, je lui demande 'Allez mange tes légumes, donc on négocie'. C'est rare qu'elle mange... [...] Naya (12) elle mange pas beaucoup non plus, 'fin pas à mon goût, je trouve qu'elle mange pas beaucoup. Mais c'est pas à moi de... 'fin ce sont des habitudes qu'elle a avec sa mère, donc j'me mêle pas trop... J'lui dis à elle aussi, j'lui dis 'Mais finis ta viande' ou 'mange tes légumes'. Forcément elle est plus grande donc si j'lui dis elle écoute, mais de manière globale, elle mange pas beaucoup non plus.

Younger children from upper middle classes also ended up eating food they were not necessarily fond of. This happened thanks to greater amount of intergenerational negotiation:

**Benoit:** Come on sweaty, do you think you will manage to eat your three green beans?  
*Marie-Cécile repeats the same thing. Lucie points out there are seven of them*  
**Benoit:** Well eat for of them  
**Marie-Cécile:** ... I think you can eat the seven of them, no?  
**Benoit:** Eat four of them and then we will see  
 Dinner 2

**Benoit:** allez ma puce, tu penses que tu vas arriver à manger tes trois haricots verts?  
 Marie-Cécile répète la même chose. Lucie leur fait remarquer qu'il reste sept haricots verts.  
**Benoit:** Ben mange-en quatre  
**Marie-Cécile:** ... je crois que tu peux manger les sept, non?  
**Benoit:** Mange en quatre et puis après on va voir  
 Dîner 2

When the father told her daughter ‘you think you’ll manage to eat’ he was appealing to her self-constraints abilities that were valued for children in her social position. Then, Lucie tried to undermine her parent’s authority by showing she could count better than her father did. Benoit gave in to the agreement to which her mother disputed by resorting, again, to Lucie’s self-constraint capacities. Despite a parental discourse valuing children’s choosing possibilities – steering clear of the negative

image of forcing food down children – many children still had no other choice than to eat what they were served. To get their children to do so, the parents socialised children to self-constraint capacities, through the consumption of food.

As with many other families, it was often the mother who pushed children to eat more vegetables. In the end, the father cut Lucie eating process into several steps: she first had to eat four green beans then the discussion might be reopened about the rest of her plate. At times, the negotiation or as Lucas Franquet sugarcoated it, the ‘debates’, failed and children got to eat something else:

**Lucas:** Usually, they eat, sometimes it's more or less easy according to what we did, if they like it or not. We do try to force it, I mean, force it..., not force it, but to nudge them to eat. If it's really difficult, well we say to eat part of it. Like yesterday, for example, the spinach puff pastry, Marco did not like it, so as there were leftovers from the previous day and also vegetables, well we told him, you can switch, take the other [...]. They often tend to say straightaway they do not like it, when they don't know it, to judge on the appearance. I have the feeling that sometimes, they taste, they say straightaway they did not like it, I wonder if they really had the time to taste [laughter]. And often, we have big debates during which they tell us : “I do not like it”, and we tell them “well, it's the first time we've made it” and they say “yes, you already did it”, ou “I already ate it”, or “I already ate it elsewhere, it's not good”. So, we have big debates like that.

**Lucas :** En général ils mangent, des fois c'est plus ou moins difficile selon ce qu'on a fait, si ils aiment ou pas, on essaye de forcer quand même, 'fin de forcer..., pas forcer mais de les pousser à manger. Si c'est vraiment dur bah on dit de manger qu'une partie. Comme hier typiquement le feuilleté aux épinards Marco il a pas aimé donc, comme y'avait des restes d'la veille et y'avait aussi des légumes bah on lui a dit tu bascules, tu prends l'autre [...]. Ils ont souvent tendance à dire qu'ils n'aiment pas d'emblée quand ils connaissent pas, à juger sur l'apparence. J'ai l'impression que des fois ils goûtent, ils disent qu'ils n'aiment pas tout de suite, je me demande si ils ont vraiment eu le temps de goûter [rire]. Et souvent, on a aussi des gros débats où ils nous disent ‘j'aime pas ça’ et nous on leur dit ‘bah c'est la première fois qu'on l'a fait’ et ils disent ‘si si tu l'as déjà fait’ ou ‘j'lai déjà mangé’ ou ‘j'en ai déjà mangé ailleurs c'est pas bon’. Voilà. On peut avoir des gros débats comme ça.

This type of micro-management by parents of children's eating showed also how parents from upper class families did not expect children to be that independent in their eating but that they wanted them to learn self-constraints capabilities (Wills et al. 2011a).

It also showed how upper class families controlled children's practices by managing closely the flow of time (‘eat four or them, and then we will see’ ; “manges-en quatre, et puis après on va voir”). Vanessa Bennet (up. mid. class) from Adelaide resorted to similar micro-management of her children's eating at mealtimes and she pushed her children to mobilise self-constraint skills as well:

**Fairley:** And during the meal um if like um I guess my question is, are your kids are picky eaters and um would they ask for something else during the meal? Does it happen that at the meal time they would like be I don't eat this and you would give them something else? Would that, was, is that something that could happen?

**Vanessa:** Sometimes Henry does. What did we have last night? We had, oh they had, oh last night was not an issue because they love sausages, but he was eating all of his sausages and I said, you need to eat your vegetables as well. And so I try and encourage him to put a bit of broccoli and a bit of meat on the fork together so that he will eat it... together. But if he loves sausages, that's fine. Sometimes for me, like he might want, not want to eat the chicken so it's kind of like I cut the chicken up a little bit

smaller which means that then I tend to have to feed him so to make him eat it. Um sometimes he'll be like, I don't want that, that vegetable. Like he'll go, I don't like that. And I'm like, you do like it. He's just is being fussy and doesn't want to eat it. Um Henry, no issues with vegetables. Henry will eat the vegetables off his plate first. Um if it's something different on his plate, the meat, he'll be like, I don't like that. I'm like, you haven't tried it. Because it might be something new. So if I cook something that I haven't done before, which I have done, you know over a few, you know, um a few weeks, we might have, like they're not a big fan of, say, like a beef goulash or something that's in the slow cooker. They're not big fans of that. Um but I make them eat it. Sometimes I might be like, go get a piece of bread and put your meat and your vegetables and make like a little sandwich out of it. Or I do um, I might do a mash potato because I know that they like mashed potato, and if they put their meat with their mashed potato it kind of encourages them to eat it. Um but I don't often cook things that they don't like but I might cook new things that they'll tell me they don't like until they try it. So I think I did that last week, I cooked something that we hadn't had before and, yeah, Henry tried to tell me that he didn't like it then he ate it anyway. So he didn't mind it. So but Cade's a ...I think... when it comes to the time.

Yet, her husband Benoit mobilised quite differing feeding practices during mealtimes: he would exclude his children from the table if they did not want to eat.

This contrasted with other households who were expected to be autonomous in their eating at an earlier age than children from intermediary and upper middle classes. In Adelaide, the Davies (low. mid. class) children (7, 5 and 5 years old) normally had dinner before their parents did and ate in front of the TV:

**Fairley:** So do you stay with the kids while they are having their dinner, or are they just in front of..., watching their shows, or?

**Sally:** I try and get them to watch their shows [...]. So while they're eating their dinner I'm usually trying to cook my dinner then [...] Um, so yeah, usually if I can hear them messing about, then I know that they're not eating, so then I'll try and come and sit with them. And one of them will say: "Can you feed me?" And then I have to feed all of them. Um, or they get given half an hour and a couple of shows, and if they haven't eaten, then it's bed, um, bath time, and so, if they haven't eaten, then too bad, they don't get to finish eating. So usually by then, one of them has rejected their meal, which is usually Oliver. "I don't want this!" Um, but if I do come and sit with them, and they let me feed them, they will eat more.

**Fairley:** Okay. So do you, so then do you tend to sit a lot with them? Is that what happens?

**Sally:** Um, I usually just get impatient with them, to be honest, and say, "Sit down and eat your dinner." "You're five and seven, like just eat it." Um, but yeah, sometimes then I'm just like, oh, I just need to get my mum on and just come and sit with them. So yeah, probably 50-50, just depends on how much I've got to do in the kitchen still.

Here, screens constituted a medium for the mother to get children to sit still and eat. The children were given a certain time to eat, which they could appreciate by the number of shows they got to watch, and Sally expects them to manage their eating rhythm on their own. However, her three children often resisted fulfilling their mothers' expectation, forcing her to put on hold the food preparation she was doing in the next room and go and feed them. At other occasions, she got her mother to call in by visioconference, who would help in making sure the children ate.

### 3.1.4. Socialisation tricks

A rare form of socialisation that the André parents mobilised is the dissimulation of vegetables within prepared dishes. In this context, dissimulation was understood as cutting up in small piece or mashing vegetable and mixing them up with other ingredients that children usually like to eat:

**Pascal** : So we try to make them discover vegetables, but it's complicated

**Fairley**: It does not work?

**Pascal**: We try to hide them, before, in steaks, thing like that, but they figured out the trick

**Pascal** : Du coup on essaye de leur faire découvrir les légumes, c'est compliqué

**Fairley** : Ca marche pas ?

**Pascal** : On essaye de les dissimuler, avant, dans des steaks tout ça, mais ils ont vu la magouille

Pascal recognised, however, that this remained a failed attempt at socialising children to green vegetables and it was not observed during the visits.

**Amy Chapman** (int. mid. class): Like, we try and introduce something, so we might cook the vegetables but we'll only choose the ones that we know they'll eat and then you know, a few nights in we'll go right, now we'll put an extra piece or something different, and then that's when it will, you know, spark an argument.

This was more or less successful for Issa Nimaga:

**Issa**: [Lila, 5] is very difficult, oh my, to eat... well, before, when she was little, she ate [vegetables], but after, when she grew up .... She prefers to eat rice all the time, or pasta

**Fairley**: Not too many vegetables?

**Issa**: Oh no. The vegetables, as I make the African dishes, I put them in, she eats. But she is really fussy

**Fairley**: And in quantity?

*Issa tells me that she can eat a lot, for example, rice with sauce or pasta*

*Dinner 2*

**Issa**: [Lila, 5] est très difficile, oh là là, pour manger... ben avant, quand elle était petite, elle mangeait [des légumes], mais après, quand elle a grandi.... Elle préfère tout le temps manger du riz, ou des pâtes

**Fairley**: Pas trop de légumes?

**Issa**: Ah non. Les légumes, comme je fais les plats africains-là, je les mets dedans, elle mange. mais elle est vraiment difficile

**Fairley**: Et en quantité?

*Issa me dit qu'elle peut manger beaucoup, par exemple, du riz avec la sauce ou des pâtes*

*Dîner 2*

This showed how much power the children had at the table. Amy Chapman's attempts to mix up (or hide?) new vegetables into a dish that children already like was met with resistance from them as well.

Allowing children to only taste certain food was also allowing them to eat less, in quantity. In most intermediary and upper middle class families, variety was more appreciated than quantity. Guillaume Rizzo (int. mid. class) from Lyon argued he did not put the emphasis on the quantity of food eaten and would like his daughter to adopt an hedonistic relation to food:

**Guillaume** : But really, I am not for forcing children, actually, it needs to become a pleasure, naturally. And her mom, is a bit in adequation with her, and I think that is why, with me, Zoé (10) feels quite free

to do as she pleases, because her mom, she forces her and Zoé, she actually never ate well. But little by little, she discovers, she will discover little by little.

**Guillaume** : Après, vraiment, moi je suis pas pour forcer les enfants en fait, faut que ça devienne du plaisir, naturellement. Et sa maman, elle est un peu en adéquation avec elle, et je pense que c'est pour ça qu'avec moi, Zoé (10) elle se sent un peu tout permis, parce que sa mère elle la force et Zoé elle a jamais bien mangé en fait. Mais ptit à ptit elle découvre, elle va découvrir ptit à ptit.

He nevertheless felt torn as Zoé did not eat much according to his standards and so he insisted on her finishing her plate, though without success. Zoé was a strong minded child and easily confronted her father's authority:

**Zoé** : I don't want any more, Dad

**Guillaume**: And your egg, a bit of it, no? Come on

**Zoé** : No, I don't want any more

**Guillaume**: I a bit of the yellow, with...

**Zoé**: No

*Zoé starts telling something about her weekend*

**Guillaume**: Don't you want to eat it with a bit of bread?

**Zoé**: No, Dad, really, I don't want to

*She continues with the anecdote*

*Dinner 4*

**Zoé**: J'en veux plus Papa

**Guillaume**: Et ton oeuf, un peu, non? Franchement

**Zoé**: Non, j'en veux plus

**Guillaume**: Un peu le jaune, avec, euh...

**Zoé**: Non

*Zoé se met à raconter autre chose sur son weekend*

**Guillaume**: Mange avec un peu de pain, tu veux pas?

**Zoé**: Non, Papa, vraiment, j'en veux pas

*Elle continue à raconter sur son weekend*

*Dîner 4*

### **3.2. Contradictory apprehensions of the socialisation to taste process between parents and children**

Children's dislike of certain food was often thought of by parents as being temporary; they were expected to eventually like the food they tasted and accept to eat it, on a long term basis. There were tolerable exceptions to children's dislike of certain food: they were allowed to single out a type of product that they did not like and would not be forced to eat. This showed children's autonomy and their expression of individual taste, which was quite valued by middle and upper class parents and commensality also allowed space for the expression of individual singularities. Pierre Lebrun (int. mid. class) was very acceptant of his daughter's particular dislike and seemed to find it quite unique: 'Lena (10) et Nathan (11) eat everything, all the time, except Lena, with corn' [laughter]. Nevertheless, this dislike was supposed to be consistent over time, as parents viewed food preferences as a linear acquisition. They accepted that children needed to socialise their taste buds to novel food but this was viewed as a rather non-reversible process. Many children did not experience it in this way. They

commonly refused to eat food that they previously ate and seemed to enjoy. In this case, parents felt their children were simply being 'fussy', testing their authority:

**Benoit** : They can try things several times. Lucie (6), for instance, there were a lot of things she did not eat, that she refused to eat. And that now, she eats without much...

**Marie-Cécile**: ... she had an episode this year where she only ate zucchinis. From one day to another: 'I do not like zucchinis', and finally she ate zucchini in the ratatouille [laughter, dubitative that she does not really like them]

**Benoit** : Marius (8) also had a little issue, in relation to his sister: that is to say that when she likes a thing, usually, he does not like it anymore. For instance, coco beans or cauliflower gratin, that Lucie likes. Or he likes chards and she does not.

*Lunch 5*

**Benoit**: Lorsqu'on propose quelque chose de nouveau, les enfants doivent goûter. Après, ils peuvent dire, à la première bouchée, oh, j'aime pas ça. Mais après, s'ils aiment pas, ben voilà, ils aiment pas ça....

**Marie-Cécile**: ... mais il y reviennent en fait.

**Benoit**: Ils peuvent réessayer des choses. Lucie (6), typiquement, y'avait plein de trucs qu'elle ne mangeait vraiment pas, elle refusait de manger. Et que maintenant, elle mange sans trop de...

**Marie-Cécile**: Elle a eu un épisode cette année où elle aimait pas les courgettes. Du jour au lendemain: 'j'aime pas les courgettes' et puis finalement elle a mangé des courgettes dans la ratatouille [fait mine qu'elle est dubitative qu'elle n'aimait vraiment pas les courgettes. Rire.].

**Benoit**: Y'a Marius (8) aussi qui nous fait un petit blocage vis-à-vis de sa sœur: c'est-à-dire quand elle aime un truc, lui, en général il n'aime plus. Par exemple, les haricots coco ou le gratin de chou-fleur, que Lucie aime. Ou il aime les blettes et elle non.

*Lunch 5*

**Stéphane Imbert** (up. class) : We consider that the girls, they do not have their definitive taste, we will we always tend to, even if they say they do not like it, to give them more, to give them a bit, so that they taste.

For instance, carrot. Before, Rose (5) used to eat a staggering amount of it, and one day, she told us she no longer liked it, she did a scene each time we have carrots. Now, again, she eats them again, even large quantities.

But it is true we tend to insist that they at least taste what is prepared. If they do not like it, never mind, that is what happens, it means there is nothing else to eat. Maybe it is a bit mean or barbaric: either you eat, either not, but if you don't eat, we are not going to prepare something special for you.

**Stéphane** : On part du principe que les filles ont pas leur goût définitif donc on aura toujours tendance, même si elles disent qu'elles aiment pas, à leur en rajouter, leur en mettre un p'tit peu de façon à ce qu'elles goûtent.

Par exemple, la carotte, Rose avant elle en mangeait des quantités faramineuses, un jour elle nous a dit qu'elle n'aimait plus, elle nous faisait un sketch chaque fois qu'on des carottes. Là, de nouveau, elle est en train de nous en manger, même des grosses quantités. Mais c'est vrai qu'on a tendance à insister pour que au moins, elles goûtent ce qui est fait. Si elles aiment pas, tant pis quoi, ce qui se passe, c'est qu'y'a rien d'autre à manger. C'est peut-être un peu méchant ou barbare: c'est soit tu manges, soit tu manges pas, mais si tu manges pas, on va pas te préparer des choses spéciales pour toi.

Some parents found it particularly difficult to deal with their children's changing preferences. When asked what he felt was important during family mealtimes, Luke Brown (up. mid. class) wished his children displayed 'good behaving', which was regularly disrupted by their dislike of the food served:

**Luke**: It never happens how you, exactly how you want. It would be good if they ate, they don't have to eat it all, but it would be good if they had a reasonable effort at eating most things. But more often than not they'll cherry pick the things they like and then leave the broccoli or you know, they leave the bits

they don't like [...]. One of the other difficulties I find is a meal that they'll love and they'll eat all of one week, the next week when you make it because you knew they liked it, suddenly ... they'll be a bit off it, they don't like... Or you know, one week they love chicken and then they're not going to eat chicken. I think we had chicken schnitzels last night which was a favourite for a while, and yeah. Sometimes it does change, what they like, which is frustrating. We got it because they liked it...

**Adam Davies** (low. mid. class): They're very, very fussy picky eaters, so we'll sit there, you know, one night, they'll eat spaghetti bolognaise and then eat the whole bowl, because 'Oh, it's the best one ever'. Next night, they won't even touch it. We kind of hide vegetables as most parents do in the bolognaise sauce and that kind of stuff [...]. The other night, I ended up cooking three different meals, because like, 'Do you know what? I want you guys to eat ...' [...]. It's like if they don't eat something, they'll be up till 9:00, 'I'm hungry, I'm hungry', and they'll just eat stuff that's not good for them, so ...

**Amy Chapman** (int. mid. class): [We would argue with the kids about the foods we served them] only when they're tired, when they're really tired, that we have the battle. It will be when we've served them something they absolutely don't want and that's when the arguments come, so no, it's not every meal. Most meals are quite pleasant. When we actually get to sit and eat together. It, it's more if it's something we've chosen that we thought they would like and then they chose no, they actually don't. Or it's a, it's not a new thing but it's, newish that, it's like you just have to try it [...]. So, oh, I can't win! I can't win!

The manner children refused to eat the food served and especially their rather random refusal (according to parents) relates to parents' experiences of food work explained in Chapter 4. The way Amy Chapman concluded "I can't win, I can't win", recalled how she began to describe her children's relationship to eating at the table: she instinctively compared their intergenerational mealtime interactions as a power relationship such as the type of situation she and Glen were engaged in at work. Her husband explained how, as parents, they negotiated to get their children to eat enough vegetables:

**Glen:** Jacob isn't big on his veggies, so it'll be, we'll put a bit on there knowing full well that he won't eat all of it, but "Come on, mate, if you can try that little bit, then ...". You know, we'll put two bits of broccoli on there even knowing that he'll eat half of one. We do that a little bit but. We probably don't put a huge amount on there that we know that they're not going to eat. There'll be stuff there where we'll say, "No, this is what we're having tonight, you're eating it or you're going to be hungry" and they do, they'll eat, they'll be stubborn and leave a couple of bites just so that they know they haven't eaten the whole thing, even though we've asked them to. They'll be stubborn about it like that, but you know, we'll put a bit more in there than what we think they're going to eat, so if they don't finish it, they've sort of gotten through what we wanted them.

This showed very well the amount of agency children had to resist parents' socialisation process to eating enough vegetables. In reaction to this resistance, parents tried to trick children into eating more by serving larger portions. This meant that parents accepted that children could have some negotiation power, which has become a norm in intermediary and upper classes (Lareau 2011). But as providing children with healthy food was a normative expectation, parents found tactics to combine these two somewhat contradicting norms. Laëtitia Lebrun from Lyon (int. mid. class) tried to get her youngest step-son to accept the food she served him by mobilising the register of pleasure:

*Aurelie (mother) is serving the food. She puts green beans on Léo's (6) plate.*

**Léo:** ... I do not want any

**Laëtitia:** You do not want any? Well yes, you like them. Look, I did not serve you many...

### *Dinner 6*

*Aurelie (mother) fait le service. Elle met des haricots verts sur l'assiette*

**Léo:** ... j'en veux pas

**Laëtitia:** T'en veux pas? Si, tu aimes. Regarde, j't'en ai pas mis beaucoup...

*Dîner 6*

Instead of telling him that she wanted him to eat vegetables, that he needed to eat them, she tried to trick him into making him think he liked them, which perhaps he did because he ended up eating them but his first remark was that this was not what he felt like eating.

### **3.3. Sharing equals quantities as a moral value and a way to control the diet**

Another etymological origins of meal comes from an Indo-European root, 'malhl', meaning to measure. Fieldwork has indeed shown that a mealtime was about measuring quantities even if in an approximate manner, it was about sharing equitable portions that were adjusted to the age of children and their related physiological consumption ability but also teaching them to eat a right and healthy portion of food. In some cases, equally sharing portions of food or drink during mealtimes appeared as an essential social dimension of commensality that was meant to sustain harmonious relations between the participants. Unequal distribution could disturb the mealtime's atmosphere:

**Laëtitia :** Yeah, you already served yourself some apple fizzy juice? [serious] Hey, no, that is not nice. You served yourselves some enormous glasses [...], that is not how you we serve ourselves

**Pierre:** [serious, to the children] I thought you were serving the others, when I saw you doing it

**Lena (10):** But she gave her, ... she did like that [extending her glass, understanding the tone is now serious]

**Pierre:** Well you serve everybody, but share it, Chloë (8)

**Laëtitia:** [serious] Initially, you did not respect the things, kids. We said a round for the children, then a round for the adults

*Dinner 3*

**Laëtitia:** Ah ouai, vous vous êtes déjà servi en champomy [apple fizzy juice]? [sérieuse] Eh non, par contre, ça c'est pas cool. Vous vous êtes servis des verres énormes [...], on se sert pas comme ça

**Pierre:** [aux enfants, sérieux] Moi j'ai cru que vous servez les autres, quand j't'ai vu faire

**Lena (10):** Mais c'est elle qui m'a tendu... qui a fait comme ça [tend son verre, elle a compris que le ton était sérieux]

**Pierre:** Ben vous vous servez tout le monde, mais tu partages Chloë (8)

**Laëtitia:** [sérieux] A la base, vous avez pas respecté le truc les enfants. On avait dit: on fait une tournée pour les enfants, ensuite on fait une tournée pour les adultes...

*Dîner 3*

Laëtitia was concerned with the children sharing equal portions but also sharing portions between all of them. These concerns differed when, instead of having a bottle or a drink to share, individual portions were proposed, such as yogurt pots.

**Pierre :** We remind them when they get up to get a yogurt for themselves and they do not ask everybody who wants what, and to bring, you know, yogurts for everyone. For example, Laëtitia always eats yogurts at the end of the meal, so it's not very kind, not being respectful, really



**Pierre:** On les reprend quand ils se lèvent pour aller chercher un yaourt pour eux tout seul, et qu'ils ne demandent pas à tout le monde qui veut quoi et pour amener, voilà, des yaourts pour tout le monde. Par exemple Laëtitia elle mange toujours des yaourts à la fin du repas, donc à un moment donné c'est pas bienveillant, c'est pas respectueux de la personne

This anecdote disrupted the otherwise jolly atmosphere that was created during the mealtime. In another household of Lyon, Elisa Obecanov (6, int. mid. class) was allowed to have an ice cream for dessert, which she geted from the freezer:

**Viktor :** Hey, hey, no, that is not how you do it. When you take something..., okay, we said yes for the ice cream, but you offer. Is there enough for everyone, or not?

**Elisa:** [to me] Do you want..?

*Dinner 4*

**Viktor:** Et te te, non, c'est pas comme ça qu'on fait. Quand tu prends quelque chose, ok, on t'as dit, c'est bon pour la glace, mais tu proposes. Y'en a pour tout le monde ou pas?

**Elisa:** [à moi] Est-ce que vous voulez...?

*Dîner 4*

However, in these cases, the equal sharing (or at least proposing) of food may have been insisted upon because they were being observed. This may be a dimension that served as a social distinction when in the situation of extraordinary public commensality.

The equitable share of food was also used by parents as a means to control the quantity of food children ingested and as a means to sustain healthy bodies, therefore signaling a social normalisation of appetite. Parents mobilised the moral value of equal share of food and turned it into an instrument to control what children were eating and particularly the quantity of food they ingested. During a dinner at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class) from Lyon, the father applied this control. The mealtime menu was small size pancakes made directly at the table, first savory then sweet ones. Pierre made most of the pancakes and mainly served the children. Two bowls of dough were prepared.

**Laëtitia :** Shall I get the second bowl [of batter]?

*She gets up to get it*

**Pierre:** From now on, the children are not allowed to eat, they need to leave the table

**Lena:** But I only had a sweet crepe

**Laëtitia:** Well us, we did not have any

**Nathan:** And we did not even do the weird crepes

**Pierre:** Hey, oh! Well that's okay, if you do not do the weird crepes tonight, there are many of us around the table

**Nathan:** Oh

**Pierre:** When there are seven of us, it's okay, but now were at too many

*Dinner 3*

**Laëtitia:** Je vais chercher le deuxième saladier? [de pâte à crêpes]

*Laëtitia ramène le second saladier de pâte à crêpes*

**Pierre:** à partir de maintenant, les enfants ils ont plus le droit de manger, ils doivent sortir de table

**Lena:** mais moi, j'ai eu qu'une crêpe dessert

**Laëtitia:** ben nous, on en a pas eu

**Nathan:** et on a même pas fait les crêpes bizarres

**Pierre:** eh oh! ben c'est pas grave, si vous faites pas les crêpes bizarres ce soir, on est quand même nombreux autour de la table

**Nathan:** oh...

**Pierre:** quand on est sept, ça va. mais là, on est trop nombreux

*Dîner 3*

What Nathan called the 'weird' pancakes were ones that he topped with chocolate and ham. His stepfather openly disapproved of this practice and by referring to the equal share of food, which is never contested per se, he was able to win over the negotiation with Nathan.

#### **4. Sharing time**

There are recent studies putting forward the synchronisation of eating rhythms at the macro level of families (in between families) (de Saint Pol 2006; Brannen, O'Connell, and Mooney 2013; Lhuissier et al. 2019). To the best of our knowledge, however, we are lacking research examining the synchronisation of eating rhythms during mealtimes, that is to say the way family members coordinate the rhythms with which they eat, who orchestrates and who resists the coordination. Morgenstern and colleagues described family dinnertimes in French middle class households in Paris (a population group similar to the one from my fieldwork in Lyon) as enfolding in a synchronous manner, following the rule of 'waiting till everybody is finished to move on to the next stage' (Morgenstern et al. 2015). The authors described the mealtime with the vocabulary of the classical theatrical tragedy of a unity of time, a unity of space and a unity of action. Nevertheless, as with other commensal norms, the rules I observed were often broken and family members were socialised to them through numerous mismatches.

Yet an alternative etymological origin of meal is 'meel', meaning appointed time in Middle English or the Old High German "*māl*", which stand for time<sup>95</sup>. There were undeniable temporal dimensions about commensality which were about the sharing of food through the sharing of time. The temporal structure of mealtimes was about much more than gathering at the same time, although even this was not a simple endeavour in contemporary families, as discussed in Chapter 1. It was also about sharing portions of food synchronously. In practice this required socialising efforts, particularly in families with younger children but which was often met with resistance by them. Making children follow the commensal rhythm was a way to control that they did not eat too quickly and sometimes too much, but also that they ate enough. While most of the times the family members ate at a similar pace, there were numerous occasions when unsynchronised eating rhythms created tensions between parents and children. This happened either when the children ate too quickly and

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<sup>95</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meal>

were in a hurry to leave the table, which parents disapproved of or because they ate too slowly and it was parents who felt anxious to leave the table. Luke Brown (up. mid. class) from Adelaide explained the imperative of synchronicity during family mealtimes and also suggested that the coordination of rhythms was not really reached:

**Luke:** I suppose it depends on what the meal is [the content] and how long it takes to eat it. We don't want it to be..., we don't want to speed eat. I suppose you're going to be driven by the person who eats the slowest or eats the most and be there the longest.

#### **4.1. Controlling food ingestion through multiple courses**

Most mealtimes in Lyon were structured around two or three courses: the appetiseer, the main course and dessert. Instead or additionally to the appetiser there could be the cheese course before the dessert. In Adelaide, there were usually two courses only: a main course and then desert. Structuring commensality into chronologically divided courses provided parents with an extra negotiation power to get children to eat what they had served them. The negotiation power could come from the lure of the next course, such as dessert:

**Amy Chapman** (int. mid. class): We do ask, or we do say you can't have the next thing, um, we call it dessert, it might not always be dessert. It might be fruit or, you know, there's not always a sweet thing, but it is always something, like yogurt, fruit, or something like that, where we always say you can't have that until you've had majority of your food.

Hannah's (7) pretty good. She's a lot better now she's older. She will eat it knowing that she has to. Jacob is a bit more challenging, because he..., I wouldn't say he's a vomiter, but he, if something he doesn't like, he will gag and it and it can work him up and he can then go and vomit ...so we don't really force ... something that we know he's just go- [vomit noise] so yeah. Isla's a bit more challenging. If she doesn't want something, she does a [tooting noise]. So that one's a bit hard [...]. Jacob (5) we have to push a bit more, he's a bit more bribery. Like you eat that, then you can have that and he will go 'oh okay', and he'll quickly eat it, just to get to that end point.

**Céline Ferret** (up. clas): And we wait that everybody has finished. Maybe that is also why it lasts a while. We wait till everybody has finished to move on to the cheese, we wait till everybody has finished the cheese to move on to the dessert, you know, roughly.

**Céline Ferret** (up. clas): Et on attend que tout le monde ait fini. C'est peut-être pour ça que ça dure un peu longtemps aussi. On attend que tout le monde ait fini le plat pour passer au fromage, on attend que tout le monde ait fini le fromage pour passer au dessert, globalement hein.

For families with younger children, having several courses was also a way for parents to get children to 'forget' about the next course: if they did not see the next course, then they were less likely not to finish their plate. Structuring mealtime into courses rather than, for example, serving all the food at once on the plate (or at least serving the savory together and then the sweet) entailed the orchestrator of the ritual was left with extra food work during the mealtime: multiplying the serving of food. Mothers more often than fathers took care of the service of food. However, when the father was the one who prepared the food, then he took care of the service, alone or jointly with the mother.

#### 4.2. *Unsynchronised rhythms: when children eat too quickly and are in a haste to leave*

Some parents also considered children ingested food too quickly, which raised concern. Amy Chapman (int. mid. class) from Adelaide explained how the eating rhythm of one child impacted the rest of the children:

**Amy:** Hannah (7) will always want to just scoff her food so that she can leave and go do whatever she wants.

**Fairley:** What does scoff mean?

**Amy:** Oh, sorry. It's like quickly eat, like: yep, yep, down the go-fast. So she will do that because she can't sit still. She honestly has ants in her pants. She is just: [rushing noise]. So that's when then Jacob wants to get up, so I am very, like both Glen and I are very strict on: 'no, you will sit there until we are all finished because the moment you leave, Jacob (5) wants to leave, and then Isla (1) loses interest as well'. And I know that Jacob wants to finish his food, but he also is torn between eating and playing. So it is very much 'you don't leave'. I know I speak to Mum about it as well, and she said the same rule on Tuesday nights: 'nobody leaves until everything's done', so it is consistent then between us, with that.

In another household, at the Lebruns (int. mid. class) from Lyon, Pierre was also trying to control the eating rhythm of one of his daughters, who was trying to put as much food as possible in her mouth at once, as a game :

*Chloë (8) has put a large piece of meat in her mouth, such as she has trouble chewing.*

**Pierre :** No, no, no, stop, stop, stop-it !

*Pierre continues to serve and the discussion continues around the table about the food served*

**Pierre:** Chloë, now don't be silly! If you are not okay, leave the table

*A few minutes later, he corrects her again:*

**Pierre:** Don't do that, you are going to choke

*A few minutes later:*

**Pierre:** Can you swallow?

*The children laugh and Chloë tries to stifle her laughter, which makes it worse:*

**Pierre:** No, hey, calm down, this is no joke

**Arthur:** Chew slowly and swallow bit by bit

*The children continue to laugh*

*Dinner 2*

*Chloë (8) a mis un très gros morceau de viande dans sa bouche, au point où elle a du mal à mâcher*

**Pierre:** Non non, arrête, arrête, arrête, a-rr-ête !

*Pierre continue le service ; diverses discussions ont lieu autour de la table au sujet de la nourriture qui vient d'être servie*

**Pierre :** Chloë, n'importe quoi-là ! Si ça va pas, tu sors [sous-entendu : pour recracher]

*Quelques instant plus tard, il la reprend à nouveau sur la quantité de viande qu'elle a encore dans la bouche :*

**Pierre :** Fais pas ça, tu vas t'étrangler.

*Quelques instants plus tard :*

**Pierre:** T'arrives à avaler?

*Les autres enfants rigolent. Chloë étouffe un rire aussi, ce qui empire la situation :*

**Pierre:** Non, eh, calme toi, c'est pas drôle.

**Arthur:** Mâche doucement, t'avale au fur et à mesure

*Les enfants continuent de rigoler*

*Dîner 2*

Elsewhere in Lyon, Pascal André (low. mid. class) voiced his concern that one of his sons was eating too much and his control over this implied managing his son's eating rhythm:

**Pascal** : Enzo (6) is the one who eats the most a bit of everything. After, we tend to refrain him a bit, because he can very well eat a whole pizza, he can swallow I don't know how many crepes, a piece of pizza...

**Pascal** : Enzo (6), c'est celui qui mange le plus de tout. Après, on a tendance à le freiner un petit peu, parce qu'il peut manger très bien une pizza à lui tout seul, il peut enchaîner, quoi, je sais pas combien de crêpes, un bout de pizza...

Pascal described their mealtimes as being pretty 'animated' and talked about the uncoordinated rhythms between parents and children:

**Pascal** : And us parents, we do not always have the time to settle down, we always have a thing to do. We serve the children, after we serve ourselves, the other has already finished, we need to serve him again...

**Pascal** : Et puis nous les parents on a pas toujours le temps de se poser, on a toujours un truc à faire. On sert les enfants, après on se sert, on essaye de se mettre à table, l'autre il a déjà fini, faut resservir...

In the case of the André, the eating rhythm of children prevailed on that of the parents, particularly within each course, when children wanted to be served multiple times. However, they did try to make sure that children had their courses at the same time:

**Enzo (6)** : Can I take my dessert?

**Pascal**: Wait a bit please?

**Angélique**: Two minutes?

*A few minutes later:*

**Lucas (8)**: Mum, I am going to take my dessert

[...]

**Angélique**: ... can you wait two minutes?

*Dîner 1*

**Enzo (6)**: Je peux prendre mon dessert?

**Pascal**: Tu attends un petit peu s'il te plait?

**Angélique**: Deux minutes ?

*A few minutes later :*

**Lucas (8)**: Maman, je vais prendre mon dessert

[...]

**Angélique**: ... tu peux patienter deux minutes?

*Dîner 1*

This went on for several minutes : Lucas and Enzo both wanted to have their desserts before their little sister had finished her main course. They got up and went to the fridge, but Angélique called them back each time. This was also what happened at the Bennet (up. mid. class) in Adelaide: Vanessa (mother) tried to get their son who ate the fastest to remain seated so that the youngest would eat enough:

**Vanessa**: Because Henry (7) is the slowest eater and sometimes you know, if his brother finishes beforehand and he wants to go off and play, Henry will be like, I'm not hungry anymore. And then they come back going we're hungry, can we have something else to eat? But yeah, we make sure that everybody stays at the table until everybody's finished otherwise, yeah, it's distracted otherwise...

Lucas Franquet (up mid. class) explained how he tried to slow down their son's eating pace:

**Lucas** : Jules (12) tends to eat well, eat well rather quickly. So not necessarily too quickly, even though, sometimes, we try to slow him down. However, Marco, he has a rhythm that always surprises me: he is capable of eating nothing for ten minutes, because he is thinking of something else, because he is doing something else. And after, he will quickly gobble. We try to tell him not to eat too quickly, but at the same time, we try to tell him to still eat, you know.

**Lucas** : Jules (12) a tendance à bien manger, bien manger plutôt rapidement. Alors pas forcément trop rapidement même si des fois on essaye de le freiner quand même. Par contre Marco, lui il a un rythme qui me, m'étonne toujours : il est capable de rien manger pendant dix minutes, parce qu'il va penser à autre chose, parce qu'il va faire autre chose, et puis après il va gober rapidement. On essaye de lui dire de pas manger trop vite mais en même temps on essaye de, 'fin on essaye de lui dire de manger quand même quoi.

There were indeed several occurrences at the Franquet household when the children ate faster than their parents:

**Jules** : However, I hope that the pasta hurries up, because otherwise, I will have finished the ham BEFORE the pasta arrives

**Nathalie**: The pasta is there, just wait, what ... 3 or 4 minutes, I can't see from here ...?

**Lucas**: [from the kitchen] 4:30

**Nathalie**: 4 :30. Is that okay ?

*Dinner 3*

**Jules**: Par contre, j'espère que les pâtes se dépêchent, parce que sinon, moi j'aurais fini le jambon cru AVANT l'arrivée des pâtes

**Nathalie**: Les pâtes sont là, t'attends quoi..., 3 ou 4 minutes, je vois pas d'ici...?

**Lucas**: [de la cuisine] 4:30

**Nathalie**: 4:30. Ca va aller?

*Dîner 3*

For Nathalie, Marco's hastiness was due to his difficulty to remain seated for too long. His parents asked him that he stayed seated at least for the main course and accepted that he left the table before the dessert. The dessert has often less importance within commensality as a means for sustaining health:

**Nathalie** : In terms of mealtime, we try to eat more or less at the same rhythm. Marco tries to eat really fast, I mean not really fast, but he wants to leave the table, he needs to be up all the time. So we try to keep him at the table, at least until the end of the main dish, because he does not usually take a desert. At the beginning, we used to argue to get home to stay with us until we were done, but we gave up fighting

**Nathalie** : Au niveau des repas, on essaye de manger tous à peu près en même temps. Marco à tendance à manger très vite, 'fin pas très vite mais il a envie de se lever de table, il a besoin d'être debout tout l'temps en tout cas. Donc on essaye de le maintenir à table, au moins jusque la fin du plat, parce qu'il prend pas de dessert généralement. Alors au début on se battait pour qu'il reste jusqu'à ce que nous on ait fini tout, mais on a arrêté de se battre.

#### **4.3. *Unsynchronised rhythms: when children want to stay longer at the table and parents are anxious to leave***

In the families from Lyon, some children ate too slowly, according to their parents' standards. This was mostly the case in the intermediary or upper middle class families. Children got 'distracted' from the initial mealtime purpose because they were talking a lot, because they ate at a slower pace than adults

or because they were busy ‘playing’ around with their food. At the Bourdon household (up. class), where conversation at the table were highly important, the children sometimes forgot about other dimensions of the mealtime such as eating:

**Benoit Bourdon** : But as we are at the table at the same time as them, we remind them

**Marie-Cécile Bourdon**: ... we tell them “remember to eat”

*Dinner 2*

**Benoit Bourdon**: Mais du coup, comme on est à table en même temps qu'eux, on les recadre...

**Marie-Cécile Bourdon**: ... on leur dit : ‘ pensez à manger ’

*Dîner 2*

**Benoit** : There are times when we are not necessarily very available – there is a lot of talk going on, they require us to be available – but it is not necessarily linked to the meal. And there can be things like the fact that Lucie talks a lot, and so the mealtime lingers, lingers, lingers. I mean, Lucie (6) will still be at the main dish when Marius (8) a finished his meal. From time to time, we need to regulate.

**Benoit** : Y'a des moments où on a pas forcément l'esprit très libre, ça parle beaucoup, ils demandent beaucoup de disponibilité, mais c'est pas lié au repas quoi. Après, il peut y avoir des trucs comme le fait que Lucie (6) parle beaucoup, et que du coup le repas traîne, il traîne, il traîne. Enfin, Lucie sera encore au plat principal quand Marius (8) a fini son repas. De temps en temps, faut réguler.

During a dinner at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class) from Lyon, Nolan had to remain seated at the table and finish the green beans that were on his plate before the whole family could move on to the next course, which was a cake for Nathan’s (11) birthday. However, in the case of the Lebrun, children’s slow eating rhythm would rather break up commensality, with one child staying at the table to eat while his or her siblings were allowed to leave (*Figure 45. Dinner 6 at the Lebrun household: Nolan has to remain at the table to finish his main dish while his siblings have left before the dessert is served*):



*Figure 45. Dinner 6 at the Lebrun household: Nolan has to remain at the table to finish his main dish while his siblings have left before the dessert is served*

Pierre Lebrun also talked about how his daughter Chloë (8) slowed down the commensal rhythm:

**Pierre** : Each has his own faults. So I have a daughter [Chloë] who eats really, really slowly, so yes, after a while, yeah, she needs to speed up a bit

**Pierre** : Chacun a ses petits défauts. Donc j'ai une fille [Chloë] qui mange très, très lentement, donc oui, donc à un moment donné ouais, il faut qu'elle s'active un peu

**Laëtitia** : Come on, Nolan (9), finish your green beans, you do not have many left  
*The parents and the some of the children are clearing away their plates, to prepare for dessert*

**Pierre**: Chloë, finish eating first, Chloë

**Laëtitia**: Come on Nolan (9), we are clearing away

**Pierre**: No, clear away your plate, Chloë

[...]

**Laëtitia** : And it will be for Chloë, when she will have finished her greens beans with her fork... and several at once. Chloë, take your fork and finish pick lots of beans at once, you will finish faster  
*(Figure 46 Dinner 6 at the Lebrun household: Chloë is trying to finish her peas while the other children are getting the table ready for dessert)*

*Dinner 6*

**Laëtitia**: Allez Nolan (9), tu termines tes haricots verts, il t'en reste pas beaucoup

*Les parents et quelques enfants débarrassent leur assiette, pour le dessert*

**Pierre**: Chloë, tu vas d'abord finir de manger, Chloë!

**Laëtitia**: Allez Nolan (9), on débarrasse

**Pierre**: Non, tu débarrasses ton assiette Chloë [...]

**Laëtitia**: Et puis ça sera à Chloë quand elle aura fini ses haricots verts avec sa fourchette.... et puis de haricots à la fois. Chloë, si tu prends ta fourchette et que tu piques plein de haricots en même temps, tu vas finir plus vite

*(Figure 46 Dinner 6 at the Lebrun household: Chloë is trying to finish her peas while the other children are getting the table ready for dessert)*

*Dinner 6*



*Figure 46 Dinner 6 at the Lebrun household: Chloë is trying to finish her peas while the other children are getting the table ready for dessert*

Synchronised rhythms seemed to be more successfully implemented in upper rather than lower and intermediary middle classes, such as at the Ferret and the Bourdon (up. class) households. At the



Bourdon household, parents made efforts to get children to eat at a collective rhythm, particularly with their younger daughter Lucie (6) and this was quite successful, as the father noted:

*Marie-Cécile is serving*

**Marie-Cécile:** Lucie, first of all, because considering how fast she eats

*Marie-Cécile comments more on how slowly she usually eat. Benoit argues it is better now*

**Benoit:** It's not too bad this evening

*Dinner 3*

*C'est Marie-Cécile qui sert*

**Marie-Cécile:** Lucie d'abord, parce que vu la vitesse à laquelle elle mange

*Marie-Cécile fait une remarque sur le fait qu'Lucie mange très lentement, ensuite Benoit dit que ça va mieux*

**Benoit:** c'est pas trop mal ce soir.

*Dîner 3*

At the André household (low. mid. class) Angélique indicated they tried to maintain some form of synchronisation among their children, mostly so that the youngest daughter, Céleste (4) would eat her main dish:

**Angélique :** We do try that there is not one who tries to take his dessert while little missie here [Céleste] has not finished, because otherwise, she stops eating and moves on to the dessert

**Angélique :** On essaie quand même qu'y en ait pas un qui commence à prendre son dessert alors que la miss [Céleste] a pas terminé, parce que sinon elle arrête de manger et elle passe au dessert

In reality, efforts to produce and maintain synchronisation were often meant to coordinate the eating rhythms of children rather than that of children and parents, which was another testament as to how commensality was child centered. Angélique showed how commensality was about sustaining children's health as well: 'because otherwise she stops eating and... moves on to the desert', which was usually considered by parents as less important food to ingest. In another household in Lyon, Ana Nimaga (int. mid. class) explained how she had to closely monitor her step-daughter Lila (5) to get her to eat vegetables :

**Fairley :** These negotiations take up a lot of the mealtime?

**Ana:** With her, yeah. She is often the last to finish. We have all finished and her, she is still picking things on her plate

**Fairley :** Ca prend beaucoup de temps du repas ça, ces négociations?

**Ana :** Avec elle, ouais. Elle est souvent la dernière à finir. Nous on a tous fini et elle elle est encore en train de choisir les choses dans son assiette

At the Obecanov household (int. mid. clas), Elisa (6) ate much lower than her parents. She liked to talk during mealtimes, she also easily got distracted by what was on the table or elsewhere in the room and tended to get up spontaneously. This issue was recurrent in the parents' discourses and they talk about it extensively:

*Elisa got up to go in the living room*

**Sophie :** [annoyed] Come and finish your croque-monsieur please, Elisa

*She comes back, making a small noise*

**Sophie:** Sit down and eat

*Dinner 4*

*Elisa s'est levée de table pour aller regarder quelque chose dans le salon*

**Sophie:** agacée] viens finir ton croque monsieur s'il te plait Elisa

*Elle revient en faisant un petit bruit*

**Sophie:** assieds-toi et mange

*Dîner 4*

Elisa may have been taking advantage of my presence to leave the table nevertheless, this was still quite representative of the way Elisa delayed the commensal rhythm:

**Viktor :** Actually, we do not have the same eating rhythm So, I do not know if you noticed, but she...

**Fairley:** ... I noticed and you told me

**Sophie:** And after a while, when you are there, waiting ... [annoyed]

*Viktor explains that had they best just the three of us, without me, Sophie and her would have done something else*

**Viktor:** Actually, I do not like to remain at the table

**Sophie:** Neither do I, I don't like to remain at the table. I mean, I do not like to remain at the table in front of an empty plate [...]. Maybe, if we are having a coffee, I don't mind, but now, staying in front of an empty plate, I actually don't like that. But it is true that it happens, if we are only the three of us, sometimes, that one of us stays seated and the other clears away.

*Dinner 4*

**Viktor:** en fait, on pas le même rythme de manger. Alors je sais pas si vous avez remarqué, mais elle est...

**Fairley:** ... j'ai remarqué et vous m'aviez dit

**Sophie:** Et y'a un moment donné, quand toi t'es là, t'attends ... [lassée]

*Viktor explique que s'ils avaient été que tous les deux, ils auraient fait autre chose*

**Viktor:** En fait, j'aime pas rester sur la table

**Sophie:** Moi non plus, j'aime pas rester à table. Enfin, j'aime pas rester à table devant une assiette vide [...]. Après, à la limite, rester à table, si on boit un café, ça me dérange pas mais là, rester devant une assiette vide, j'aime pas ça en fait. Mais c'est vrai que du coup ça arrive, si on est que tous les trois, des fois, qu'y en ai un qui reste assis et que l'autre, débarrasse en fait.

*Dîner 4*

In this case, the parents seemed to give in to the un-synchronicity of commensality, although they did feel annoyed by it. One of the parents would leave the table before her daughter to clean up and take care of the dishes but they still sought to maintain the synchronisation during everyday mealtimes by trying to regulate her daughter's rhythm:

**Sophie :** After, when it is just the two of us [parents], it does go quickly [Elisa eats faster], because there is less stuff. And also because we remind her more [...]. But I think there is not a mealtime when we do not tell her "no". And whatever it is. I mean, croque-monsieur, she likes that, it is quick to eat. Whether it is soup, sometimes, she is fed up. I mean, everything

**Fairley:** Yeah, even an ice-cream

**Sophie:** Exactly, an ice-cream, pasta... it can last hours

*Dinner 4*

**Sophie:** après, quand on est tous les deux, ça va quand même plus vite [Elisa mange plus vite], parce que y'a moins de trucs. Et puis parce qu'on la recadre plus aussi [...]. Mais je pense qu'y pas un repas où on lui dit pas 'non'. Et quoi que ce soit en fait. Je veux dire, les croques monsieur, elle aime ça, ça se mange vite. Que ça soit, la soupe, des fois, elle en a marre. Enfin tout.

**Fairley:** Oui, même une glace.

**Sophie:** Voilà, une glace, des pâtes... ça peut tout durer des heures

*Dîner 4*

#### **4.4. The unity of time and content crumbles at the desert**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the dessert constitutes a stage for transitioning out of commensality, as family members did not necessarily take their dessert altogether, not at the same rhythm. I have discussed how some parents ate the unhealthy options for dessert after the mealtime. Additionally, the crumbling of commensality also happened in the content of the mealtime. It was the only occasion when individuals across all social class positions ate different food. Choices and portions were individualised, family members usually chose between some fruits and a selection of dairy products. Only on three occasions in Lyon did the dessert consist of a baked cake or pie shared between all and in two of those occasions, it was due to extraordinary commensality circumstances. This individualisation was fully integrated into the ritual, in the sense that it did not constitute a disruptive practice. And contrary to the rest of the mealtime, the products eaten for dessert (other than fruit) were rarely made from scratch (store bought yogurt, cheese, chocolate, apple sauce) and yogurt and apple sauce were individualised portions. Perhaps the variety of products available (multiple pots of yogurt and pouches of fruit sauce, with multiple flavours) allowed for commensality to become destructured and individualised. Indeed, on the rare occasions that a common dish was prepared for the mealtime (a baked dessert), the synchronisation held for longer. Some parents also valued less the type of food served for dessert, from a nutritional perspective. They offered it to children but the latter were rarely monitored as closely to finish their portion and it was occasionally acceptable not to eat anything for dessert. Some parents were witnessed telling their children they were obliged to have a yogurt, or a fruit (for instance, at the Bourdon household, Imbert, Comescu: up. class; Obecanov: int. mid. class) but they were offered more choosing possibilities:

**Magali Imbert (up. class):** What do you want as a dessert? Pear or apple?

*Louise (8) hesitates, Rose (5) says apple*

**Stéphane:** [to Louise] You can say pear

**Magali:** You can take the pear, there is one in the fridge, if that one is too big

**Louise:** Hum...

**Stéphane:** I will with you

*Dinner 5*

**Magali (up. class):** Qu'est-ce que vous voulez comme dessert? poire ou pomme?

*Louise hésite, Rose dit pomme.*

**Stéphane:** Tu peux dire poire (à Louise)

**Magali:** Tu peux prendre la poire. y'en a une petite au frigo si celle-là elle est trop grosse

**Louise:** euh...

**Stéphane:** Je la mange avec toi hein

*Dinner 5*

**Magali Imbert:** So our habits are partly modified because of the lockdown, even if the general principles remain the same [...]. A bit more fruit for the girls, we insist more on them having a dessert at almost every meal for the vitamins, whereas before we didn't insist if they didn't want a dessert.

*Food diary during the lockdown*

**Magali Imbert :** Alors nos habitudes sont en partie modifiées à cause du confinement même si les principes généraux restent les mêmes [...]. Un peu plus de fruits pour les filles, on insiste plus pour qu'elles prennent un dessert à quasi tous les repas pour l'apport en vitamines alors qu'avant on n'insistait pas si elles ne voulaient pas de dessert.

*Food diary during the lockdown*

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter focused on the health equation of everyday commensality. I looked at the health concerns that underlie parents' management of the sharing of food at the table, with the notions of equal sharing between the commensal but according to children's age and their needs and eating capacities, with the notion of synchronisation of eating rhythms, which here again varied according to the children's age.

The results presented here demonstrated how children were socialised into commensality through a process of learning how to share food and particularly 'adult' food and how to eat in a synchronised manner. Some mothers talked about the importance of eating the same food especially for this reason. Getting children to actually eat the food parents wished them to have took a long term process of socialisation to novel and healthy tastes: this was done in different ways and at different times according to the family's social position and the age of children. At the one end of the continuum of practices, some parents (of intermediary and lower middle class households) considered their children would develop their taste buds to a variety of food later on in their life and so they did not necessarily consider that it was imperative to get them used to diversity early on. They rather needed to eat in sufficient quantity. However, some mothers did feel guilt about this, for failing to comply with the nutritional health recommendations they had in mind.

In some intermediary middle class families, both parents tried to prepare a varied menu for themselves and they liked to display this variety out on the table, in order to tempt children into eating vegetables, for examples. This showed a hands off approach to children's eating and indicated parents gave their children space to decide what they liked. This could eventually be a successful approach to socialising children into eating diverse food, but it seemed to entail a longer process.

At the other end of the continuum of practices, in some intermediary and in upper middle classes was parents' extensive management of their children's eating practices. They produced many efforts to get children to eat at a similar pace than themselves by exhorting children to mobilise self-constraint skills, such as finishing their plate even though they were not fond of the food or by talking about food in

terms of pleasure. These parents managed children's eating practices at an early age, monitoring quite closely the quantity of food they ate, inciting them through negotiation to eat the food served. They did so through extensive conversation about food with their children, and associating food with pleasure. But parents also managed children's attention capacities and their conversations in order to keep them focused on their plate, although without sacrificing family communication and a positive mealtime atmosphere.

In intermediary and lower middle class families, synchronization efforts seem to cease at the dessert time, when it was tolerated that children left the table before their parents had begun or finished their own dessert. The condition that prevailed was that children's eating be synchronised in between them, rather than with the whole family (i.e. with the parents), which showed, again, how the family was centrally constructed around young children. Overall, the analysis indicated that the parents' efforts to control the rhythm with which children eat was a way for them to control their food ingestion: they strived to control the temporality of mealtime, in order to control the eating. But as a consequence, children's also resist parents expectations by taking control of their own eating temporalities.

There existed a continuum of health practices socialisation through commensality which varied according to the household's social class position and according to the way mealtime rituals are orchestrated. Childrens' age was also a determining factor in this socialisation process. On the one hand, there is what Sally Davies from Adelaide (low. mid. class) described as a very physiological relationship to commensality which is what the lower and intermediary middle class families from Adelaide and the lower middle class family from Lyon tended to experience as well: commensality was about eating and feeding because the parents' work conditions did not allows them to incorporate additional dimensions to the mealtime. At the other end of the continuum was what Stéphane Imbert (up. class) described: commensality was about nourishing bodies, of course, but it was above all about sustaining healthy bodies and about experiencing pleasure during mealtime, which were both mediated through family communication. In any cases, the performance and socialisation to commensality contained a care for sustaining family members' short or long term health.

I have introduced this chapter on the difficulties associated to eating together at the table and in particular the challenges in terms of feeding and socialising children to various tastes, all while unfolding commensality in a synchronised manner. Another challenge mentioned was the coordination of the eating and sharing of food with another central mealtime dimension: having family conversation at the table. The next chapter unfolds and analyses the way mealtime conversations happened.



# Chapter 7. Creating the family through mealtime conversations

## 1. Introduction

Episodes when families had to spend the whole day together, locked down at home because of the COVID-19 health restrictions impacted the role of shared mealtimes in terms of family communication and these changes mirrored what parents usually considered important when it came to exchanging around the dinner table. In Lyon, Laurent and Irina Comescu's (up. class) descriptions of their family meals at that time revealed this:

**Laurent Comescu :** As we have a little bit more time, when I try to have breaks to help Irina, during the daytime, and so to play with the kids or being just the two of us, this means the meal, we also use it more as a playful time, we watch a bit more of TV. Or an information moment, because it's during the news.

**Laurent Comescu :** Comme on a un peu plus de temps, où j'essaie d'avoir des coupures pour aider Irina, la journée, et donc de jouer avec les enfants ou d'être tous les deux, fait que le repas, on l'utilise plus pour un moment ludique aussi, on regarde un peu plus la télé. Ou un moment d'information, puisque c'est pendant les infos.

But the changes they made in their everyday domestic commensal practices also pointed to what mattered most for them, and for many other families of this study in terms of commensality. That Laurent characterised their adapted mealtimes as 'playful' because they had fully included the television in their dinnertimes, in order to fill in a void created by the futility of habitual mealtime conversations. Usually, when family members spend their day apart, a certain volume of conversations was necessary to be part of the lives of others (P. Berger and Kellner 1964):

**Laurent:** As we see each other all day long, we have other moments to talk

**Fairley:** So the meals are a bit different ? There's less... ? It's less a discussion moment ?

**Irina:** So we talked all day long. Well, we already talk during lunch time, because usually, we don't see each other at lunch time, so we see each other for the first time in the evening, so everybody talks a bit about their day. But now ... [laughter]

**Fairley:** But now, you don't have anything to say to each other anymore?

**Laurent:** Well, yes, but...

**Irina:** ... yes, but...

**Laurent:** ... there are always things ...

**Irina:** ... but it's not the same.

*Silence*

**Laurent:** We do, we talk about work, we talk about other... but it's different.

*Dinner 1, video conf.*

**Laurent:** Comme on se voit toute la journée, on a le temps de discuter dans d'autres moments.

**Fairley:** Donc les repas sont un peu différents, y'a moins de...? C'est moins le moment de la discussion ?

**Irina:** Mais du coup, on s'est..., on a parlé toute la journée... Bon, on parle déjà le repas de midi, parce que d'habitude on se voit pas aux repas de midi donc on se voit pour la première fois le soir, donc chacun raconte un peu sa journée. Mais là... [rire]

**Fairley:** Mais là, vous avez plus rien à vous dire ?

**Laurent:** Oh, si, mais...

**Irina:** ...si, mais...

**Laurent:** ... y'a toujours des choses...

**Irina:** ... mais c'est pas pareil.

*Silence*

**Laurent:** Si, on parle boulot, on parle autre... mais c'est différent.

*Dîner 1, vidéo conf.*

Iriana importance of mealtimes as a site to recollect what had happened individually, to each family member, outside the household, whether it was childrens' or parents' day. Everyday mealtimes were ordinarily a site to construct the family as a collective of individuals who spent most of their time apart.

The previous chapter began by illustrating how a central aspect of mealtimes – eating and feeding – could be hindered by the great importance attributed to intergenerational table talk. I have shown also in the previous chapter how there was a strong health aspect present in the commensal socialisation to food and eating. In this chapter, I focus entirely on mealtime conversations, and examine them as well in relationship to parents' health concerns in terms of commensality and family life.

Most of the parents in this study talked about family meals as a reason to get the family to eat together and more generally, family conversations were regularly mobilized as a means to promote family meals. Nevertheless, mealtime communication norms are socially and culturally variable, on top of varying upon the family members' social activities, as described above. In some cultures, for example, the rule is for children to remain silent during the meals, as in the 1950's in France (Marenco 1992) or with the Matsigenka in Peru (Izquierdo 2001). Blum-Kulka reported about Israeli middle class households that parents largely occupied the narrative space and children had more limited participation in adult-centered conversations (Blum-Kulka 1997). In Sweden, Geer described how mothers dominated the conversations (Geer 2004).

Table talk has been observed quite extensively according to three main research trends: conversational analysis inspired by ethnomethodology, studies in discourse psychology (which is closely related to the latter) and a linguistic anthropology perspective on socialisation. Developed since the 1960's by American linguists, the ethnomethodological conversation analysis approach offers a detailed literature based on audio and video recordings of dinner conversations in private households (Schegloff 2007; C. Goodwin 1981; Laurier and Wiggins 2011; Mondada 2009; M. H. Goodwin 2007). According to this approach, family mealtimes are understood as 'a prototypical context for use of language, a practice in which sociability is maintained, and in which socialisation into a culture and into



family norms, as well as acquisition of language are achieved' (Mondada 2009, 559). From this perspective, dinner conversations are mainly investigated in order to construct a general model of social interaction rather than to analyse commensal communication *per se*. There exists the notable exception of Blum-Kulka's work on family mealtime conversation in middle class American and Israeli families (Blum-Kulka 1997). The author investigated the specificities of mealtime communication but even within this study, the instrumental aspects of mealtime discourse - which relate to the practical and temporal aspects of eating - were put aside.

Discourse psychology examines how psychological concerns are dealt with in interactional mealtime discourses. Wiggins, in particular, based her research on audio-recorded mealtime interactions in families in England and looked at the interactional achievement of satiety. Many of the sociological and anthropological research on commensality neglects to look into the practical and interactional details of what is happening during family mealtimes while still considering them as a whole, and a lot of the studies specifically focused on mealtime with a grounded approach, from the fields cited above, do not take into account the food and eating practices *per se*, focusing mainly on the way conversations are constructed (Laurier and Wiggins 2011; Mondada 2009).

The linguistic anthropology perspective on socialisation was developed mainly by the UCLA Center on Everyday Lives of Families, under the direction of the anthropologist Ochs (Ochs and Shohet 2006a; Ochs and Kremer-sadlik 2013). Several ethnographies were conducted by this multidisciplinary research team, in particular a comparison between middle class families in the United States (US) (Los Angeles) and in Italy (Rome and Naples) (Ochs, Pontecorvo, and Fasulo 1996). Ochs and her team have focused on investigating socialisation of taste in the context of family commensality, as well as they have examined family mealtimes in the US as cultural sites where children are socialised into commensal communication but also to moral and affective meaning of food and ultimately, into competent members of their family and society. The researchers looked at the interactional discursive aspect of mealtimes, as a means to understand the construction of cultural dynamics.

In this chapter, I approach family mealtime conversational interactions as well. I seek to examine the way family members were socialised into commensal norms (and not only language or taste socialisation) through so called 'table talk'. I pay particular attention to the social occupation of conversation space, according to gender and generations and the family's social class position, which leads me to identify power relationships and contrasted roles in terms of producing and sustaining the family.

## 2. A traditionally privileged scene for conversations

### 2.1. Representations of commensality as a communication facilitator

Nearly all the parents of this study, except the Davies parents (low. mid. class) in Adelaide and to a lesser extent the parents from the André household (low. mid. class) in Lyon spontaneously talked about the importance they attributed to mealtime family conversations. Both mothers and fathers used during their interviews the common expression of ‘an exchange moment’ to qualify these family gatherings:

**Magali Imbert** (up. class): We exchange with [the girls], it’s an exchange moment for all four of us [...]. So it’s kind of a French culture thing, but we’re really into it. It’s really a sharing moment, it’s not just to feed ourselves: we’re together around a table, it’s an important family moment.

**Magali Imbert** (up. class): On échange avec [les filles], c’est un moment d’échange tous les quatre [...]. Après, ça c’est un peu la culture française mais on est à fond dedans. C’est vraiment un moment de partage, c’est pas juste pour s’alimenter quoi : on est ensemble autour d’une table, c’est un moment familial important.

**Stéphane Imbert** (up class): I think the meal is a sharing moment. Maybe it’s about education, or something [*Stéphane comes from a working class background*]. But for me, it’s something that is really important.

**Stéphane Imbert** (up class): Je considère que le repas est un moment de partage [...]. C’est peut-être un côté éducatif ou autre qui fait ça [*Stéphane vient d’un milieu ouvrier*]. Mais pour moi c’est quelque chose qui est très important.

The Ferret family (up. class), for example, had lengthy dinners, which was connected with a dimension of family mealtimes she and her daughter particularly valued<sup>96</sup>:

**Céline Ferret**: And actually, we take a lot of time at the table. So it's true, it's an important point, she discusses a lot, she talks... we talk a lot at the table. So, if we sit down at the table at 7.3PM, we go out at 8.20PM. So yeah, it can be long and it's really because we're together as a family, because the times when I make her have dinner on her own, either because we go out afterwards or there's something special, she eats in twenty minutes [...]. The meal is really the moment when we take the time to talk to each other.

**Céline Ferret** : Et on prend, en fait on prend beaucoup de temps à table. Alors c’est vrai, c’est un point qui est important, elle discute beaucoup, elle parle..., on parle beaucoup à table. Donc, si on se met à table à 19h30 bah on ressort à 20h20 quoi. Donc ça peut être long et c’est vraiment parce qu’on est en famille parce que les fois où je la fais dîner toute seule, soit parce que nous on sort après ou voilà y’a quelque chose de particulier, elle mange en vingt minutes [...]. Le repas c’est vraiment le moment où on prend le temps de se parler.

For the parents from this study, eating together was closely related to family communication, therefore positioning commensality as one of the main scenes for building and maintaining family unity through discussion:

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<sup>96</sup> Jérôme Ferret did not mention the importance of mealtime conversations. But his interview was the least thorough. I interviewed him before the COVID-19 pandemic (as a preliminary interview), and I had planned to conduct an in-depth interview after the fieldwork with all the participants. This preliminary interview with Jérôme was mainly focused on the food work process, rather than the mealtimes. I did not have the opportunity to interview him a second time.

**Laëtitia Lebrun** (int. mid. class): The mealtime has always been an important moment for me, I mean an important sharing moment [...]. And it's the same for dinnertime: I always had it with my children so that we exchange, you know, to be together. Now, it's all the more important as there are many of us [...]. We really take our time, and we also enjoy it, to take that time with them.

**Laëtitia Lebrun** : Le repas a toujours été un moment important pour moi, enfin, un moment de partage important [...]. Et le repas du soir, c'est pareil: je l'ai toujours pris avec mes enfants, pour qu'on échange, voilà, pour qu'on soit ensemble. Là, c'est d'autant plus un moment important parce qu'on est beaucoup [...]. On prend vraiment le temps, et on apprécie en fait de prendre ce moment avec eux.

**Pierre Lebrun**: To me, the mealtime is really a moment for sharing, exchanging, discussing, chatting that I really enjoy.

**Pierre Lebrun** : Pour moi le repas est vraiment un lieu de partage, d'échange, de dialogue, de discussion que j'apprécie beaucoup.

**Bianca Armand** (*unknown social class*): The mealtimes have always been moments we dedicate to being together, not in a rush, in ten minutes in front of the TV [...]. And for the kids, it's an opportunity to chat, to talk about their day, so my husband likes it.

**Bianca Armand** (*unknown social class*): Les repas, les moments de repas ça a toujours été un moment où on réserve pour le passer ensemble, pas à toute vitesse en dix minutes devant la télé [...]. Et puis les enfants c'est l'occasion de papoter, de raconter leur journée, donc mon mari il aime bien.

**Sophie Obecanov**: We try to get her to talk about her day. So, we also try to leave some space for everybody to talk, so that she understands that we also, sometimes, have things to talk about together, so that she also lets us speak between us and so that everybody gets their turn to speak.

**Sophie** : On essaie de lui faire parler de sa journée, alors on essaie aussi de laisser un temps de parole à chacun, qu'elle comprenne que nous aussi, des fois on a des choses à se dire, donc qu'elle nous laisse parler aussi entre nous et que chacun ait un peu son temps de parole.

Amy Chapman (int. mid. class), in Adelaide, associated a successful mealtime with the notion of being able to talk, without any screens being on. Other mothers from upper middle class positions in Adelaide (Vanessa Bennet and Alison Brown, up. mid. class) considered mealtimes as the best moment in the day to 'catch-up' with the rest of the family:

**Alison Brown**: I find it's a good opportunity to sit down together. There's not many opportunities these days to do that. [... It] is probably really the only opportunity you have to sort of sit together. So I think it's a really good point to sort of have that [catch-up] discussion.

**Alison Brown**: The meal was shared at the kitchen table as a family [...]. Dinner was eaten together as a family, a time to chat about the day  
*Food diary*

Mealtime conversations seemed to be all the more vital for sustaining the family unity as parents conveyed a sense of time scarcity for spending moments altogether:

**Laëtitia Lebrun** (int. mid. clas): At the mealtime, indeed, we talk a lot because it's the moment when we're altogether, and when it's important.

**Laëtitia Lebrun** (int. mid. class): Le repas, effectivement, on parle beaucoup, parce que c'est le moment où on est tous réunis et où c'est important.

**Sébastien Cellier** (*unknown social class*): The mealtime, you know, it is the moment when we have the time to talk. I try to make sure that it is a moment when we are settled down, when we can talk to one another, when we can exchange.

**Sébastien Cellier** (*unknown social class*) : Le repas c'est quand même le temps où on a, où on a l'temps de parler quoi. J'essaie de faire en sorte que ça soit un temps où on est posés, où on peut se parler, où on échange.

**Céline Ferret** (up. class): It's actually about the only time in the day when we are all four of us together, so it's really a moment, yeah, an important moment to talk about what we've done, you know, to follow a bit our lives.

**Céline Ferret** (up. class) : C'est le seul moment, quasiment, de la journée, en fait, où on est vraiment tous les quatre en même temps, donc c'est quand même un moment, ouais, un moment important pour discuter de ce qu'on a fait quoi, pour suivre un peu nos vies.

The parents of this study also considered that the unity of time, space and action of family mealtimes facilitated the development of conversation, making them easier to unfold than in other family settings. Contrary to other activities, such as cooking together, mealtimes better allowed parents to frame and regulate conversations:

**Benoit Bourdon** (up. class): In fact, [compared to] when we interact in the kitchen, etc., it's not really the same thing, to be actually at the table.

**Benoit Bourdon** (up. class) : Parce que l'air de rien, quand on interagit dans la cuisine, etc., c'est pas tout à fait la même chose, d'être vraiment à table.

These discourses conveyed a vision of family communication as an automatic result from the physical co-presence of family members. We are left with the impression that mealtime conversation is a logical and naturally occurring result of family members gathering, that conversation will inevitably fill up the time spent at the table. Stéphane Imbert (up. class) talked about 'easily' exchanging; Benoit Bourdon (up. class) described their conversations as happening 'quietly'. The use of the French verbs 'discuter' (Stéphane Imbert, Nathalie Franquet, Laurent Comescu, Issa Nimaga, Lucas Franquet) or 'papoter' (Bianca Armand), similar to the verb 'chat' in English suggested an easygoing, light conversation atmosphere:

**Stéphane Imbert** : So it's true that the moment when we all sit down around the table, it's a moment when we can exchange, we can chat, we can exchange really easily.

**Stéphane Imbert** : Bon, c'est vrai que c'est le moment où on se pose tous les quatre autour de la table, c'est le moment où on peut échanger, où on peut discuter, où on échange très facilement.

Nevertheless, communicating during mealtimes was far from being a straightforward and simple operation. Eating together, in the context of everyday domestic commensality was foremost trying to unfold several activities at once, conversations being only one of them.

**Laurent Comescu** (up. class): I remember Sunday mealtimes, when this time to chat, taking our time during the meal was important. Which is not the case in Romania [Irina, his wife, is Romanian]. They eat really quickly and also, they eat together but not always and they eat quickly. When we are there [in Romania], it's more a meal when we talk, but otherwise, it's not necessarily part of the everyday customs. And the meal can be over in fifteen minutes in Romania. [At our place], it's more the French

way, except sometimes I remind [Irina] about it, because she tends to want to clear away as we go and so she isn't fully with us, to then all clear at the same time.

**Laurent Comescu** (up. class) : J'ai le souvenir des repas du dimanche qui fait que, que le temps de discuter, de prendre le temps au repas est important. Ce qui n'est pas le cas en Roumanie [Irina, sa femme, est roumaine]. Ils mangent vite et après, ils mangent ensemble mais pas tout le temps et ça mange vite. Quand on est là, c'est plus un repas où on discute, mais sinon c'est pas forcément dans les mœurs de tous les jours. Et le repas il peut être fait en un quart d'heure en Roumanie. [Chez nous], c'est plus à la française, sauf que des fois je la reprends [Irina], parce qu'elle a tendance à vouloir débarrasser au fur et à mesure et donc elle est pas complètement avec nous, pour tout ranger en même temps.

Laurent's frustration with Irina's anticipation of the post mealtime food work showed how the transgression of certain mealtime boundaries challenged the unity of space and action which was suppose to facilitate family communication.

## **2.2. *Shifts in commensal practices: when other times and spaces exist for family communication***

When family members spent most of their day together, such as during some weekends or COVID-19 related lockdown periods, then the conversational aspects of commensality were weakened and other dimensions of mealtimes were favored. A few parents described the somewhat futility of family meal conversations in these contexts. I have introduced this chapter with the way the Comescu family (up. class) transformed their commensal experience when they spent weeks on end together at home, by introducing the TV into their mealtimes. This did not mean that table talk was no longer a priority, simply that it unfolded around other topics (in this case commenting on the news).

Laurent Comescu (up. class) explained they often had the TV on, although it conflicted with the importance granted to mealtime conversations. This meant that during the lockdown, the TV was completely integrated into mealtimes as the family members had other moments during the day to exchange with each other:

**Laurent:** And sometimes, there's the TV on. So we force ourselves not to turn it on all the time, because otherwise, the children really don't have their attention with us, nor do I, for that matter. Because I had this upbringing [working class] where we ate with the TV, especially in the evenings. So I also took on that habit. But we don't always have it, to be able to chat, to exchange. Now since the lockdown period, it's a bit different, since we have moments to eat, to chat throughout the day, this means we have the TV on at the table. Now this is a real change, there. It's systematically on, now, I realise. For every mealtime. Well it's the news time, so there you go.

**Laurent :** Et puis des fois, y' la télé. Alors on se force à ne pas la mettre tout le temps, parce que sinon les enfants ont pas du tout l'attention avec nous, ou moi aussi d'ailleurs. Parce que j'ai cette éducation-là où on mangeait avec la télé, notamment le soir. Donc j'ai pris cette habitude-là aussi. Mais on la met pas toujours, pour pouvoir discuter, pour pouvoir échanger [...]. Après, depuis la période de confinement, c'est un peu différent, comme on a des temps pour manger, pour discuter tout le temps dans la journée, ça fait que du coup, on met la télé à table, mais ça nous dérange moins. Il y a un vrai changement pour le coup, là. Elle est systématiquement là, maintenant, je m'en rends compte. A chaque repas. Ben c'est l'heure des journaux donc en fait voilà.

The Bourdon parents (up. class) felt similarly about mealtime conversations during the lockdown, when all the family members were home together for a long period:

**Marie-Cécile:** We end up having conversations together even though we've been together the whole day, so in the end, we don't have much to talk about [laughter]!

**Benoit:** Yes [laughter]! That's the worst [laughter]!

*Dinner 2 (observation in the kitchen, without the children)*

**Marie-Cécile:** On se retrouve à avoir des conversations ensemble alors qu'on a été ensemble toute la journée, donc finalement, on a pas grand-chose à se dire [rire]

**Benoit:** Oui [rire], c'est ça le pire [rire]

*Dîner 2 (observation in the kitchen, without the children)*

**Marie-Cécile:** So they tell us about their life. So their interior life is very rich during this lockdown period [sarcasm, laughs]. So we find it difficult... Myself, personally, hearing it several times a day... [sigh, because she takes care of the children most of the time]. So there, I'm fed up with the interior life of the kids [laughter].

**Fairley:** [...] As you're saying you are a bit fed up, are you putting anything into place so that the meals happen differently?

**Marie-Cécile:** Oh but yes, it's goes well, the kids are great, you know...

**Fairley:** ... I mean so that it's nicer for you? [laughter]

**Marie-Cécile:** For the moment no [...]. Now, I'm kind of waiting for the holidays to see how we'll be able to ... [...]. But it's also nice and the kids are really happy, you know [...]. But as they have less things to talk about and so do we, inevitably [laughter], in terms of interactions and of exchanging, it's kind of more limited.

**Marie-Cécile:** Donc ils nous racontent leur vie. Alors leur vie intérieure est très riche en cette période de confinement [sarcasme, rire]! Voilà. On a un peu demal... Moi, personnellement, pour l'avoir en version plusieurs fois pas jours... [souponne, parce que c'est davantage elle qui s'occupe des enfants pendant le confinement]. Je sature un peu de la vie intérieure des enfants. Voilà [rire] !

**Fairley :** [...] Comme vous dites ça, vous saturez un peu, est-ce que vous mettez en place des choses pour que les repas se passent un peu différemment?

**Marie-Cécile :** Ah oui mais ça se passe bien, les enfants ils sont super chouettes hein...

**Fairley :** ... enfin pour que vous vous les viviez mieux [rire]

**Marie-Cécile :** Pour l'instant non [...]. Là j'attends, j'attends un peu les vacances pour voir comment on va pouvoir ... [...]. Mais c'est chouette en plus et puis les enfants ils sont vraiment contents quoi [...]. Mais comme ils ont moins de trucs à raconter et nous aussi, forcément [rire], en terme d'interactions et d'échanges c'est plus limité quoi.

However, the Bourdon family (up. class) did not introduce screens during their mealtime to compensate for this void in conversation topic. In Adelaide, for Luke Brown (up. mid. class), if the family had spent the whole day together during weekends, mealtimes as shared events lost some of their importance:

**Luke:** If it's a weekend and we've been out doing stuff together all day, it's probably less important. But if they've been at school or we've been at work or involved in activities for a couple of nights and we haven't seen them, it is good to just get everybody together and just get to eat together.

Luke did not actually mention mealtime conversation or talk, but his discourse suggested a central dimension of mealtimes was catching up, as a family. It was not only that parents had not seen their children enough: mobilising mealtime as a communication occasion was also important to compensate

for the fact that the family members had been scattered throughout the day in different activities and especially in different spaces, therefore potentially weakening the family unity.

At the Davies household (low. mid. class) in Adelaide, mealtimes were not viewed as a privileged conversation occasion nor as an opportunity to catch-up on family members' daily life. Adam, the father, never mentioned anything about family mealtime discussion, catching up with his kids while they were eating. He mainly talked about the challenge to get them to eat and remain seated. When asked if she conversed with her children at mealtimes about what happened during the day, his wife, Sally replied:

**Sally:** No, not usually then. I usually ask on the way home from school, and later on when we're in bed, but usually we're just focusing on getting the food into you, aren't we? [addressed to Lily (7), her eldest daughter].

Popular discourses lamenting the declining of family mealtimes mobilise the importance of table talk as a moment to sustain family cohesion and as an opportunity to check that children were doing well in their lives outside the household. Such discourses did not account for other time-spaces that were available to family members for catching-up. As mentioned by Sally, car talk offered such an opportunity and car interaction have been investigated by anthropologists (M. H. Goodwin and Goodwin 2012) and cultural geographers (Laurier et al. 2008) as an interaction space-time that provided similar benefits to family mealtimes. Laurier and colleagues argued about car experienced in the United Kingdom:

'Conversations that we typically imagine taking place over dinner or breakfast tables have been shifted into the space of the car [...]. For families, in particular, the car is a setting where, as passengers and drivers, parents and/or carers and children are assembled tightly together. It has become an unexpectedly significant place for parents to learn about and dialogue with their children, and for children to learn from their parents.' (Laurier et al. 2008, 20)

For Goodwin and Goodwin, the car provided an interactional occasion that eluded some of the hectic aspects of family life at home. It allowed for 'forms of focused interaction that constitute family life: recounting accomplishments, helping children with homework, and learning how to see the world and interpret events.' (M. H. Goodwin and Goodwin 2012, 283).

The importance attributed to mealtime conversations translated the need for parents, and especially mothers who usually faced greater normative expectations regarding family life, to reunite the family in a centripetal movement of reciting and sharing activities and experiences that had happened to each individual outside the household, sharing them, bringing them 'back home'. This created a sense of cohesion, and was also a way for parents to control and 'resignificate' (P. L. Berger and Luckmann 1967) what had happened in the children's daily life, at school or elsewhere.

### 2.3. *When screens support mealtime communication*

In some households, screens were occasionally integrated into the mealtimes as an alternative means to sustaining conversations. At the Comescu household (up. class), a family from Lyon who did not usually have the TV on for weekday evenings, watching a TV program during the first lockdown was a means for the whole family to communicate and bound on a common topic. It was also a means to determine common projects to carry out as a family, even within the confined sphere of the household:

**Irina:** We all ate in front of the same TV cooking program and during the whole mealtime we talked about recipes that we could prepare in the next days.

*Food diary during the first lockdown*

**Irina :** Nous avons mangé devant la même émission de cuisine et pendant tout le repas on a discuté des recettes qu'on pourrait préparer les prochains jours.

*Food diary during the first lockdown*

Even though they had the television on, they still managed to have family conversations and plan projects together. At the Chapman family (int. mid. class) in Adelaide, if the TV was occasionally on during mealtimes, then everybody watched the same program, as opposed to children watching different programs on their individual tablets, which happened when the children ate alone at the counter:

**Amy:** The kids always want a device. I'll let them have it at the counter but if we're at the table, nup, there's no devices. If we do need them to have a show on, we'll put it on the telly, we'll choose a kiddies' show and everyone watches the same thing.

This reminds us of what Kaufman described about the use of the television during mealtimes in French households. Having the television on did not necessarily hinder conversations, it could nourish it, except when it was on too loud or when everybody was facing it: 'the television is a third party, invited to the family table and instrumentalised as a regulator of conversations'<sup>97</sup> (2011, 130). The use of other types of screens during mealtimes also happened (usually phones) and they served similar purposes. At the Imbert household (up. class), the appearance of phones at the table was actually a source of conjugal conflict:

**Stéphane:** It's really rare that we have the television on. And from the moment a phone appears on the table, it's something that tends to strongly irritate me

**Fairley :** And it's happens that phones appear on the table ?

**Stéphane :** Yes, it happens. Yes, it happens [irritated]

**Stéphane:** C'est extrêmement rare qu'on ait la télévision. Et à partir du moment où il y a un téléphone qui apparaît à table, c'est quelque chose qui a tendance à m'énervier copieusement

**Fairley :** Et ça arrive que des téléphones apparaissent à table?

**Stéphane :** Oui, ça arrive. Oui, ça arrive [agacé]

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<sup>97</sup> Personal translation



Indeed, for his wife Magali, this rule of keeping telephones away from the table was not that important and she even appreciated integrating screens into their mealtimes, as a way of creating a basis for communication with her daughters:

**Magali:** Dinnertime, it's true, it's a mealtime when we eat at the table, all four of us, we try not to necessarily have the TV on. Well... Stéphane does not really like that. Me, I'm a bit more liberal about that but he reminds us if we watch... Sometimes, I put on some short videos of the cousins, or something and he tells me : 'oh, put that phone away ! What are we going to tell our girls when they'll be teens..? If we begin with phones now like tha now...' [laughter] Oh, he's right, you know [light tone].

**Magali :** Le repas du soir c'est vrai que c'est un repas où on mange à table, tous les quatre, on essaye de pas forcément avoir la télé, enfin... Stéphane il aime pas bien ça, moi, j'suis un peu plus libérale là-dessus, mais... bon il nous rappelle à l'ordre au cas où on regarde... Des fois je mets des petites vidéos des cousins ou autre et il me dit : ' oh enlève le portable ! Qu'est-ce qu'on va dire à nos filles quand elles seront ados...? Si on commence par le portable comme ça maintenant... ' [rire]. Oh il a raison hein (d'un ton léger).

Nevertheless, she said 'oh, he is right, you know' in a detached manner, indicating how their diverging positions remained and created forms of tensions during mealtimes. Sophie Obecanov (int. mid. class) described a similar use of screens as a means to sustain conversations:

**Sophie:** So [screens] can be there exceptionally, when there are photos, things, I mean, like that we want to share with one another, that happened during the day. But not for the use of social media, no, we don't have meals with one being on the phone and the two others waiting beside.

**Sophie :** Après, [les écrans] peuvent être là de manière exceptionnelle quand y'a des photos, des choses, enfin voilà, qu'on a envie de se montrer, qui se sont passées dans la journée. Mais pas pour l'utilisation des réseaux sociaux, non, on fait pas le repas avec un au téléphone et les deux autres qui attendent à côté.

Kaufmann also noted that it could be difficult for some households to sustain conversations over the whole mealtime. The television then served as a 'prosthetic' to 'mask the silence and revive talk' (2011, 130). This explained, for Kaufmann, the high frequency of the use of television during shared mealtimes, as opposed to during individualised mealtimes. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, in France, one out of two people in France had the TV on during dinnertimes (Guilbert and Perrin-Escalon 2004) 'the television lure *stricto sensu* is secondary: the television during the mealtime has first a family function<sup>98</sup>' (2011, 131). Nevertheless, the use of television during mealtimes needed to be monitored so it would not completely overcome conversations and hinder the family cohesion.

### 3. The centrality of conversations in the creation of a family unity

Family mealtime conversations were mainly built around two main social and health objectives: the creation of a family unity through table talk as well as making the most of these exchanges to make sure children's health was sustained outside the household. Both objectives participated in creating a

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<sup>98</sup> Personal translation

sense of belonging, a sense of participating in the lives of one another, creating a common world and defining its boundaries, as for Berger and Kellner, 'the reality of the world is sustained with conversations with significant others' (1964, 5).

### **3.1. The family is constructed through children and what is important in their life**

Most parents described mealtimes as a family exchange moment, and based on their first mention of table talk, the conversation space seemed to be equally distributed between family members. In reality, the mealtime discussions were highly oriented around children, not only in the type of discussion but also in the conversational space distribution. My interference in the mealtimes and the fact that parents talked with me instead of with their children was sometimes contested by children and showed how important child oriented conversations were:

**Rose** (5, up. class): Mu...

**Magali**: And so we like to go out to the restaurant, usually...

**Rose**: ... Mum? [at the same time]...

**Magali**: ... We go at least twice a month, if not more, and even every week [...]. And it's true that now, we haven't really gone back to the restaurant, with the girls. We don't really feel like it, you know. We're not so clear about that [because of the COVID-19 restrictions and risks]

**Rose**: No, I want to...

**Magali**: Yes, well you wait, you're hurting me... And so after a while, meals were also a bit too monotonous, so we tried to do things differently at home.

**Louise**: Mum ? We could do a menu card and write down the menus we did

**Magali**: Well you could do it on your board, over there, it's like the entrance of a restaurant

*Rose sneezes twice*

**Magali**: What did you want to say, Rose ?

**Rose**: You're talking too much with Fairley, I find [low voice]

**Magali**: Oh. And you, you want to speak with Fairley ?

**Rose**: Well I want you to speak to me

**Magali**: Oh. You want me to speak to you?

**Rose**: Sometimes

**Magali**: Okay.

*Silence.*

**Rose**: But we're lucky to be together as a family : at least, we can have hugs and kiss whenever we want [happy]

*Dîner 5*

**Rose (5, up. class) : Ma...**

**Magali** : Et puis aussi on aime bien aller au resto, en temps normal..

**Rose** : [en même temps] Maman?

**Magali** : ... on y va au moins deux fois par mois, voir plus, voir presque une fois par semaine [...]. Et c'est vrai que là, on est pas vraiment retourné au resto avec les filles, on n'en a pas trop envie en même temps, on n'est pas encore tout à fait clair avec ça.

**Rose**: Non j'ai envie...

**Magali** : Oui, ben tu attends, tu me fais mal... et du coup, au bout d'un moment, c'était un peu trop monotone les repas aussi, donc on a essayé de faire des trucs un peu différents à la maison

**Louise**: Maman? On pourra faire une carte de menu et écrire les menus qu'on fait

**Magali**: Ben tu peux faire sur ton panneau là-bas, ça fait très entrée de restaurant

*Rose éternue deux fois*

**Magali**: Qu'est-ce que tu voulais dire Rose?

**Rose**: [petite voix] Tu parles trop avec Fairley je trouve

**Magali:** Ah. Et toi, tu veux parler avec Fairley?  
**Rose:** [petite voix] Ben je veux que tu parles à moi  
**Magali:** Ah, tu veux que jte parle à toi?  
**Rose:** Des fois  
**Magali:** D'accord  
*Silence*  
**Rose:** [contente] Mais on a de la chance d'être en famille, au moins on peut faire des câlins et des bisous quand on veut!  
*Dîner 5*

There seemed to be a tacit agreement that children took up most of the conversation space during mealtimes. It was common for parents from across the middle class positions to find their children or child took up a lot of space at the table. This was the case in Lyon for seven out of the ten families (the Bourdon, Ferret: up. class; Franquet: up. mid. class; Obecanov, Lebrun: int. mid. class, Armand: *unknown social class* and André: low. mid. class households). This was not echoed by parents from Adelaide, which may confirm the lesser importance granted to conversation at the table there. Angélique André found she and her husband did not have much space to converse between themselves at the table:

**Fairley:** And discussions, are they rather oriented around children's conversations ?  
**Angélique :** Hah, hum, yes [laughter]  
**Fairley :** Yeah ? Or between adults, parents ?  
**Angélique :** Sometimes, we try to get a word in edgewise, but it's impossible, so we say we'll see later [...]. Because there's always a thing, either to tell about school, or about cartoons or 'earlier on I did this and he broke it', yeah, well.

**Fairley :** Et les discussions est-ce que c'est plutôt orienté sur les discussions des enfants... ?  
**Angélique :** Ah bah oui [rire]  
**Fairley :** Ouais ? Ou est-ce que entre adultes, parents... ?  
**Angélique :** Parfois on essaye de caser deux trois trucs mais c'est impossible, on dit bon on verra ça après [...]. Parce que y'a toujours un truc, soit à raconter de l'école, soit des dessins animés ou 'tout à l'heure j'ai fait ça et puis l'autre il me l'a cassé', enfin bon.

Still in Lyon, the Armand household (*unknown class*) and, at the other end of the social class spectrum of this study, the Bourdon family (up. class) also found their children talked a lot during the mealtimes, to the point of forgetting to eat:

**Benoit:** They are not very concentrated, they tend to tell stories, things, etc. to the point that they sometimes forget that we're at the table to eat.

**Benoit :** Ils sont pas très concentrés, ils ont tendance à raconter des histoires, machin, etc., donc des fois, ils en oublient qu'on est à table pour manger.

**Bianca Armand:** It's a battle for who gets to talk, they both want to talk and, well, they also have to eat. And so we listen to one and then we listen to the other and at the same time 'remember to eat'... So now, yeah, it's lively.

**Bianca :** C'est la concurrence pour qui peut parler, ils veulent tous les deux parler et bon, il faut aussi manger et puis après on écoute l'un et puis on écoute l'autre, et en même temps vous pensez bien à manger... donc c'est, là c'est animé ouais.

This was observed in the intermediary middle class families as well, in households with children who were above seven years-old:

**Fairley:** Sometimes you're the last one [to finish eating] because you eat a lot or because you take your time to eat?

**Jules Franquet** (12, up. mid. class): Mostly because I eat a lot, even if I talk a lot at the table [...]. I mean, we all talk a lot.

**Fairley :** Des fois t'es le dernier [à finir de manger] parce que tu manges beaucoup ou parce que tu prends ton temps pour manger ?

**Jules Franquet :** Surtout parce que je mange beaucoup, même si je parle beaucoup à table [...]. Enfin, on parle beaucoup, tous.

**Nathalie Franquet:** So there's Jules (12) who's very talkative. He's able to talk alone for half an hour. Sometimes, he will be the one starting on a new subject and who will monopolise the discussion.

**Nathalie :** On a Jules (12) qui est très bavard, qui est capable de parler seul pendant une demie heure. Parfois c'est lui qui va lancer [le sujet] et qui va monopoliser la parole.

**Viktor Obecanov** (int. mid. class): [to Elisa (6), at the beginning of the mealtime] I'm timing you [slight irony]

**Sophie:** Yeah, she eats slower than us, for sure, but it's also because she talks a lot

*Dinner 4*

**Viktor:** [à Elisa (6), au début du repas] Moi, je te chronomètre [légère ironie]

**Sophie:** Oui, elle mange surement moins vite que nous, ça c'est sûr, mais c'est qu'aussi elle parle beaucoup

*Dîner 4*

**Sophie :** So Elisa takes a long time to eat. So you'll be able to see that: she takes a really long time to eat [laughs]! It depends on what is it. Sometimes it's a bit better, but she talks a lot so, you know, it's complicated.

**Sophie :** Alors après, Elisa est très longue à manger, donc vous aurez l'occasion de voir ça, elle est très très longue à manger [rire]! Ça dépend de ce que c'est, des fois ça va un peu mieux, mais elle parle beaucoup, donc du coup, voilà, c'est compliqué.

**Fairley :** You were explaining that it was quite long, that Noémie ate slowly also, that she took her time...

**Céline Ferret** (up. class): Yes, yes, also yeah [laughter]! Maybe also because she speaks too much [laughter]!

**Fairley :** Tu m'expliquais que c'était assez long, que Noémie, elle mangeait lentement aussi, qu'elle prenait le temps d'manger...

**Céline :** Oui. Oui... aussi ouais haha ! Peut-être que c'est parce qu'elle parle trop, aussi [rire] !

The great space that children took up during family mealtimes was never described as a problem, per se, as the family was meant to be constructed around them. Parents seemed to appreciate that children were able to talk a lot, as they were thus enacting normative commensal practices. However, it became an issue when it forwent other central commensal dimensions, such as eating. It also became an issue when it encroached upon children's bedtime and parents' evening rest time.

### **3.2. *Getting children to talk about their day: checking their health is sustained outside the household***

One of the reasons why family mealtime conversations were so child-centric was that a central dimension of the commensal practices observed was sustaining the health of family members, as described in Chapter 6. Family commensal communication was oriented, as well, to *make sure that* the health of children was sustained *outside of the home* (Ochs and Shohet 2006a). Children's health was

understood here in the global sense of healthy bodies, healthy minds (particularly through the acquisition of knowledge) and healthy individuals, understood as the child's overall wellbeing. Family commensality was therefore an occasion for parents to fulfil their parental responsibility of health providers and by doing so extend their control of children to their life outside of their supervision. Making sure children were healthy happened first through the enquiry of the food children ate during the daytime, at school. It was most of the time mothers (Nathalie Franquet: up. mid. class, Marie-Cécile Bourdon: up. class, Sophie Obecanov: int. mid. class, Angélique André: low. mid. class) who took care of such inquiries:

**Nathalie** : At lunch, what did you have at school ? French fries again? [disapproving]

**Marco** (10): No

**Nathalie** : Some chocolate éclair a dessert ? [ironically critical]

**Marco** : No

**Nathalie** : Oh [satisfied]

**Marco** : Spaghetti Bolognese

**Jules** (12): And today, there was some hair in the cream cheese

**Nathalie** : Ew [disgusted]

**Jules** : And even worse ! Have you finished eating ?

**Nathalie** : No [all together]

**Jules** : Whatever. So, the ladies of the canteen, sometimes, when there is pasta on the floor, they pick it up and put it back in the dish

**Nathalie** : Ah, nonsense !

*Dinner 1*

**Nathalie** : A midi, vous avez mangé quoi, au collège ? Des frites encore ? (réprobatrice)

**Marco** (10) : Non

**Nathalie** : Des éclairs au chocolat en dessert ? (idem)

**Marco** : Non

**Nathalie** : Oh (satisfaite)

**Marco** : Des spaghetti à la bolognaise

**Jules** (12) : Et aujourd'hui, y'avais des cheveux dans le fromage blanc

**Nathalie** : Oh (dégoût)

**Jules** (12): Et pire que ça ! Est-ce que vous avez fini de manger ?

**Nathalie** : Non ! (en même temps)

**Jules** : C'est pas grave. Euh, les dames de la cantine, des fois, quand y'a plein de pâtes par terre, elle les ramassent et elles les remettent dans l'plat

**Nathalie** : Oh, n'importe quoi !

*Dîner 1*

And he continued saying a classmate had told him that, which Nathalie seemed to doubt, but in the end, still sided with Jules. The whole scene suggested an overall family reprobation of the food served at the school canteen.

**Céleste** (4, low. mid. class): [to her mother] And today, we had some candy and Mum, I had a raspberry one

**Angélique**: Where did you get some candy?

**Céleste**: Er, the teacher gave it to us !

**Angélique**: [exaggerated surprise] The teacher gives out candy ?!?

**Céleste**: Because we played hide and seek

**Angélique**: Oh, because you played hide and seek. But she hands it out every day? It was the first time?

*No answer from Céleste who moves on to another topic*

**Angélique:** It's the only time she gave out candy, the teacher?

**Céleste:** Erm, it's the only time

*Dinner 1*

**Céleste** (4, low. mid. clas) [à sa mère] Et aujourd'hui, on a eu un bonbon, et moi j'ai eu une framboise, Maman

**Angélique:** Où t'as eu un bonbon?

**Céleste:** Ben, c'est la maîtresse qui l'a donné!

**Angélique:** [ton surpris exagéré] La maîtresse, elle donne des bonbons ?!?

**Céleste:** Parce qu'on a joué à cache-cache<sup>99</sup>

**Angélique:** Ah, parce que vous avez joué à cache-cache. Mais elle donne pas tous les jours? c'était la première fois?

*Céleste ne répond pas et commence à parler d'autre chose*

**Angélique:** C'est la seule fois où elle a donné des bonbons, la maîtresse?

**Céleste:** C'est la seule fois

*Dîner 1*

Angélique appeared to be particularly interested in her daughter's anecdote, as she found it odd that Céleste (4) was given sweets from a teacher at school. A bit later, her son Lucas (8) talked about what he ate at the school canteen as well:

**Lucas:** At school, we had two sausages [...]. Céleste only had one, you know, but Enzo and I, we had two. Right, Enzo (6)?

**Céleste:** Yeah, I had two tied together ! And the third was cut up

[...]

**Angélique:** So two sausages : because there were some of you missing, you had extra?

**Lucas:** No

**Angélique:** [to Pasca, the father, surprised] two per person, per kid ?

*Pascal shrugs without speaking*

**Lucas:** No, Mum, that's not it [he continues but Céleste is speaking at the same time]

*Dinner 1*

**Lucas:** A l'école, on a eu deux saucisses [...]. Céleste elle en a eu qu'un d'accord, mais Enzo et moi on en a eu deux, hein Enzo (6)

**Céleste:** Ouais, moi j'en ai eu deux attachés! et la troisième, elle était coupée

[...]

**Angélique:** Donc: deux saucisses, parce que y'avait des absents, vous aviez du rab?

**Lucas:** Non

**Angélique:** [étonnée, à Pascal] Deux par personnes, par gamin ?

*Pascal fait signe de la tête qu'il ne sait pas pourquoi, sans répondre*

**Lucas:** Non maman, c'est pas ça [il continue mais Céleste parle en même temps]

*Dîner 1*

Angélique continued interrogating Lucas, as she tried to find out more about the anecdote and why her children had double servings of meat but Pascal did not take part in this conversation.

The children from this study were used to this mechanism of parents asking them about their lunch menu, and they sometimes spontaneously told their parents about what they ate, including younger children. For the third dinner at the Franquet household (up. mid. class), the menu was spaghetti

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<sup>99</sup> Murielle m'explique que la cache-cache, c'était l'exercice de mise en sécurité [exercice intrusion [attaque terroriste]]

carbonara. Jules (12) commented on what he had eaten at lunch, noting the redundancy of pasta in his daytime menu:

**Jules:** At lunch, guess what I had ? Pasta Bolognese

**Nathalie:** The thing is at school, we don't know the menus, so erm ... like it's a surprise.

*Dinner 3*

**Jules:** A midi, devinez ce que j'ai mangé? Des pâtes à la bolognaise

**Nathalie:** Le problème, c'est qu'au collège, on a pas les menus, donc euh... c'est surprise en fait

*Dîner 3*

Nathalie's reaction showed she was concerned about feeding their children something different than what they had at lunchtime, but she did not have the means to know that in advance, which was an issue since she prepared her own menus one week in advance.

Fathers were rarely witnessed asking children about what they ate at lunch, except in the reconstituted households, such as at the Rizzo and at the Lebrun families (int. mid. class). During the sixth dinner with the Lebrun family (int. mid. class), Pierre, the father, asked his children about their lunch, and who did not finish their sandwich, precisely because Pierre had helped them prepare their lunches (the school canteen was on strike).

Making sure children's health was sustained outside the mealtime was also a means, for parents, to be attentive to any signs of bullying at school. As children from Lyon and most of them from Adelaide were taught to narrate their school day or extracurricular activities during dinnertimes, this constituted a privileged moment for parents to look out for signs that their child might be experiencing difficulties outside the home. When asked about her mealtime experiences of when she was a child, Céline Ferret (up. class) mentioned they always ate altogether – except when her father was late from work – and that mealtimes were occasions for family issues to be discussed:

**Céline :** We needed to fight to get a word in, you know, like it was ... [laughter], well there was a lot of discussion, everybody wanted to talk about his or her day, school, work, ... the random stuff, whatever happened. So, yeah, it was a moment when we talked a lot to our parents about our everyday problems. So I want to maintain this kind of exchange moment. And it's even the opportunity to talk about issues, like, I mean, bullying at school, you know?

**Céline :** Fallait s'battre pour placer un mot, enfin tu vois c'était... [rire] y'avait beaucoup de discussion quoi, chacun voulait raconter sa journée d'école, de boulot, le machin, trucs qui s'étaient passés. Donc ouais c'était un moment où on s'exprimait beaucoup auprès de nos parents sur les problèmes du quotidien. Donc moi j'veux maintenir ce temps d'échange là et c'est même l'occasion d'aborder des sujets, j'sais pas, genre le harcèlement à l'école, enfin, tu vois ?

At the first dinner at the André household (low. mid. class), Lucas is telling his mother about a bullying situation at school. She took this opportunity to enquire a bit more to make sure there was not more to the story, that might concern Lucas:

**Angélique :** Antoine, he's not always really nice, is he?

**Lucas** : Yeah he is  
*And he continues to talk about his class mate Antoine who was bullied by another boy*  
*Dinner 1*

**Angélique** : Antoine, il n'est pas toujours super cool, si ?  
**Lucas** : Si  
*And he continues to talk about his class mate Antoine who was bullied by another boy*  
*Dîner 1*

While Sophie Obecanov (int. mid. class) was setting the table, for the fifth dinner, Elisa (6) commented she finally remembered what her friend at school had told her. When Sophie asked to know more, Elisa did not dare to repeat it, as it is a "foul word". Sophie, who was caught up in her own action (trying to find where she has put the tablecloth) directed Elisa to tell her father about it, who indeed then interrogated her further. Elisa whispered to her father was she was called by a classmate. The later took a serious tone, and the whole attention of both parents turned toward this topics. Elisa then described in details in which context she had been insulted at school. Nicolay made sure he understood the situation correctly:

**Viktor**: So, to summarise, Rhiana, she...  
**Elisa** : No, not Rhinan, Mae !  
**Viktor** : Mae she told you...  
**Sophie** : ... where do you want to go, Elisa?  
**Viktor**: Wait, don't interrupt me. If you always interrupt, we're not going to get through this  
**Sophie**: Yeah  
**Viktor**: Put [the cutlery] somewhere or put it away. It's important to understand the situation. Because, Elisa, what you're saying... it's not that it's dramatic, but us, we need to react, with Mum, so you need to be sure about what you tell us. So stop moving around, look at me and listen to me...  
**Elisa** : ... I ...  
**Viktor** :... don't interrupt me, let me finish  
*Dinner 5*

**Viktor**: Alors, si je dois résumer, Rhiana, elle t'as...  
**Elisa** : Non, pas Rhinan, Mae !  
**Viktor** : Mae elle t'as dit..  
**Sophie** : ... tu veux te mettre où Elisa ?  
**Viktor**: Attends, me coupe pas la parole, si vous vous coupez tous la parole, on va pas s'en sortir.  
**Sophie**: Ouai  
**Viktor**: Tu les mets quelque part ou tu les mets après [les couverts]. c'est important de comprendre la situation. Parce que... Elisa, ce que tu dis... c'est pas qu'c'est grave mais il faut que nous, on réagisse avec Maman, donc...faut qu'tu sois sure de ce que tu nous racontes, donc arrête de tourner en rond, tu me regardes et tu m'écoutes....  
**Elisa** : ... je...  
**Viktor** :... ne me coupe pas la parole, laisse-moi finir.  
*Dîner 5*

Viktor summarised what he understood, and asked more details to Elisa, very precise details about what had happened when and why. He tried to understand if this was an isolated event or not. Finally, he concluded by forbidding Elisa to play with the girl who insulted her. He also told her he would be the one accompanying her to school the next morning, to speak to her teacher.



While this anecdote happened right before the mealtime, it still occurred at a moment where all three of them were gathered and about to sit down, and represented the kind of events parents were looking out for when they asked children about their day during meals.

Another way for parents to make sure their children were developing in a healthy manner outside of their household was to ask them about the knowledge they were acquiring, whether it was directly related to school work or not. This happened particularly at the André household (low. mid. class) and at the Bourdon household (up. class) and it was also often mothers who inquired about this. Angélique André was concerned about the way her son performed in class:

*Lucas is telling his mother another anecdote about school, about the presentation of a reading sheet:*

**Angélique:** Oh, you did the reading sheet on the book, there ?

**Lucas:** Yeah

**Angélique:** And so ?

**Lucas:** Hum, I went. The teacher asked me if I enjoyed it. I told her yes and she told me why and I told her I don't know.

**Angélique:** Okay. You couldn't say : because the drawings were nice, because I liked the story, because it was funny, because it was sad, because, I don't know, there was suspense?

**Céleste:** ... or because, because...

**Lucas:** Hum, I don't know why [and he looks at the camera]

*Dinner 3*

*Lucas raconte à sa mère une autre anecdote de l'école, à propos de la présentation d'une fiche de lecture :*

**Angélique:** Ah c'est les livres sur lequel vous avez fait la fiche de lecture là?

**Lucas:** Ouais

**Angélique:** Et alors?

**Lucas:** Ben j'y suis allé

**Lucas:** La maitresse m'a demandé si ça m'avait plus, ben j'lui ai dit oui et elle m'a dit pourquoi et j'lui ben je sais pas

**Angélique:** D'accord. tu pouvais dire: parce que les dessins sont jolis, parce que j'ai bien aimé l'histoire, parce que c'était drôle, parce que c'était triste, parce que... je sais pas moi, parce que y'avait du suspens...?

**Céleste:** ... ou parce que, ou parce que...

**Lucas:** Ben je sais pas pourquoi [il regarde la caméra]

*Dîner 3*

At the Bourdon household (up. class), the children were recurrently interrogated about their performances at school, about the knowledge they were acquiring, which their parents followed very closely. There was an occasion when both Lucie (6) and Marius (8) recited their poems they had to learn for school (dinner 4). Marius was then congratulated, with his parents saying 'well done' (mother), 'well done Marius' (father), 'well you don't take two week to learn your poems, right?' (mother), 'yeah, you learn them quickly' (father). Lucie then felt like reciting her own poem and began to do so without being asked. Her mother corrected her at times, and then concluded that she would need to work on it more. At the fifth dinner at their place, Marius spontaneously talked about the progress he had made in writing, which led his parents to praise him in details, as they had also noticed his progress. Of the five dinners observed at the Bourdon household (up. class), each single one of

them contained this type of intergenerational interactions, with parents checking on children's learning process and parents congratulating them for it, if they were pleased with it. At times, they also reprimanded them, although in a light tone, if they had not obtained good enough grades. Lucie and Marius were also regularly questioned about their general knowledge throughout the mealtime conversations, such as being asked to explain what a certain word meant.

Parents tried to get children to engage in conversations by asking them to share what they had eaten at school, by asking them to talk about their day and by interrogating them about their schoolwork and their general knowledge. This way, parents were moving into the individual lives of their children yielding control over their lives, making sure they were in good health and in a state of wellbeing, but also creating a sense of family cohesion.

More generally, mealtime conversations were considered soothing in and of themselves, as they provided opportunities to address any concerns children had, or that parents had about their children:

**Benoit Bourdon:** And I think that for them, we feel that in the evening, when we spend time together eating, telling stories, etc., when they go to bed, they're less worried. Really. [They're] less worried about the lockdown [...]. Marius asks questions. Lucie doesn't ask questions but often, in the evening, she starts crying, around 6-7PM. She is tired and the smallest annoyance, it's a crying spell. And so we notice that, yes, by eating together all four of us, quietly talking, it's really, like, more zen.

**Benoit Bourdon:** Et puis eux, je pense que, on sent que le soir, quand on passe du temps ensemble, à manger, à raconter des histoires, etc., quand ils vont se coucher, ils sont moins inquiets. Vraiment [... Ils sont] Moins inquiets du confinement [...]. Marius pose des questions. Lucie pose pas de questions mais, souvent le soir elle se met à pleurer, vers 18h, 19h, elle est fatiguée et la moindre contrariété, c'est la crise de larmes. Et du coup on s'aperçoit que oui, en mangeant ensemble tous les quatre en échangeant tranquillement, c'est vachement plus zen quoi.

### **3.3. *Creating a common world and defining its boundaries***

Mealtimes also had to do with creating and sustaining a collective family memory. In a context where family members spent most of their days apart, in different jobs, in different school classes, at different extracurricular activities, recreating common memories was a way for parents to produce the family as a group: it enabled the collective to regain some territory over the individual. It also differentiated families from other ones.

For Halbwachs, memory is a social construction built in the present, according to the social frameworks of the different groups the individual belongs to. He also argued that for a social institution to sustain itself, such as the family, there needs to be a common perspective. But this common perspective may be achieved by creating a memory as well as building projects together or just sharing time and emotions. This 'is why society tends to dismiss from its memory anything that could separate individuals, keep them away from one another and, at each epoch, it redesigns its memories in order

to align them with the various conditions of its balance<sup>100</sup> (Halbwachs 1925, 391). Collective recalling of memories can even produce memories in individuals that have not directly lived them, in the past.

Narrating collective memories was a way to sustain the family unity at the table. It happened in a manner that was supposed to lead to a consensual narrative, where all agreed on the individual roles and a collective experience of it. Across many families (Bourdon, Imbert, Comescu: up class; Obecanov: int. mid. class; Franquet: up. mid. class; Lebrun: int. mid. class; Rizzo: int. mid. class) children and parents recalled events that they lived together, thus performing the family again, in front of a guest. This happened indeed because they were being observed but it was still a testament of the way family mealtimes served to sustain the family as a collective. This type of discussion was often triggered by parents, with them asking their children to narrate a particular story (therefore getting them to practice narration skills) or it was initiated by children, who were triggered to talk about it by some connection of thoughts during the mealtime. Common experiences and anecdotes that were related were family vacations and weekends, lockdown anecdotes and food experiences. Whether it was the parents or the children who brought up the topic to the table, parents from upper and some parents from intermediary class played a central role in the way the conversation unfolded, by asking children to describe specific details or explaining how they felt at the time. At the second dinner at the Bourdon household (up. class), Marie-Cécile and Benoit asked their children about their experience of the lockdown:

*Marie-Cécile asks the children to tell me about how the lockdown went for them.*

**Marie-Cécile:** Was it good ? Was it not good?

**Fairley:** Was it long? Was it fun?

**Marius:** Long

**Benoit:** Long?

**Marius:** And not fun

**Marie-Cécile:** Not fun?

**Benoit:** You didn't find it fun?

**Marius:** Yeah

**Marie-Cécile:** You were miserable? Marius, have you been miserable?

**Marius:** Yeah [weariness]

**Benoit:** Is that so?

**Marie-Cécile:** All the time? [reproachful]

**Marius:** No, not all the time

*Dinner 2*

*Marie-Cécile demandent aux enfants de me raconter comment s'est passé le confinement*

**Marie-Cécile :** C'était bien? C'était pas bien?

**Fairley:** C'était long? c'était drôle?

**Marius:** Long

**Benoit:** Long ?

**Marius:** Pas drôle

**Marie-Cécile:** Pas drôle?

**Benoit:** T'as trouvé ça pas drôle?

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<sup>100</sup> Personal translation

**Marius:** Ouai  
**Marie-Cécile:** T'as été malheureux? Marius, est-ce que tu as été malheureux?  
**Marius:** [voix un peu basse, lassée] Oui  
**Benoit:** C'est vrai?  
**Marie-Cécile:** [reproche] Tout le temps?  
**Marius:** Non, pas tout le temps quand même  
*Dîner 2*

Here, Marie-Cécile proceeded to a form of modification of Marius's spontaneous recalling of the lockdown. It is expected that family members can experience some hardships in the context of family life, especially when it was intensified in the context of a complete lockdown of the population, but overall, family life must remain a positive experience, which is why Marie-Cécile pushed Marius to nuance his memory. Once he has done so, she continued by recollecting:

**Marie-Cécile:** Yes, it's true. There were time when it was not fun. There were time when they had a lump in their throat, and they did not know why  
**Fairley:** oh...  
**Marie-Cécile:** Right?  
**Benoit:** Yeah. In the evenings, it was at times a bit...  
*Dinner 2*

**Marie-Cécile:** Oui, c'est vrai. y'a eu des moments où c'était pas drôle. Y'avait des moments où ils avaient la gorge qui se serrait, et ils savaient pas pourquoi  
**Fairley:** Oh...  
**Marie-Cécile:** Hein?  
**Benoit:** Ouais, le soir c'était parfois un peu...  
*Dîner 2*

Marie-Cécile acknowledged the difficulties children experienced, all while minimising them: 'there were times when it wasn't fun'. Then she continued by reconnecting these difficulties with the way they successfully overcame them :

**Marie-Cécile:** So what else did we do during the lockdown? What did type of ritual did we establish? During the most difficult phase of the lockdown, we had a pillow fight every evening.  
*Marie-Cécile recalls an anecdote that happened during this ritual: a comforter was thrown out the window. All of them recall memories about this:*  
**Marie-Cécile:** At the lowest point, there, when we were all a bit unwell, especially when we couldn't see the end of it, the pillow fight was good  
**Benoit:** It was not bad. It happened approximately after a month.  
*They continue talking about what happened during these pillow fights. They finished the ten minutes of fight by a minute and a half of relaxation. They did that just before eating.*  
**Benoit:** Really to let steam off and after to calm down before going to the table  
*Dinner 2*

**Marie-Cécile:** Alors qu'est-ce qu'on a fait d'autre pendant le confinement? qu'est-ce qu'on a institué comme rituel? La phase la plus difficile du confinement, on faisait une bataille de coussins tous les soirs.  
*Marie-Cécile rappelle une anecdote qui s'est passé pendant une bataille de coussin: le doudou qui est passé par la fenêtre. Tout le monde se rappelle des souvenirs là-dessus.*  
**Marie-Cécile:** Au creux du creux, là, quand on allait tous pas très bien, quand on n'en voyait pas le bout surtout, la bataille de coussins c'était bien.  
**Benoit:** C'était pas mal. Ca s'est passé environ au bout d'un mois.

*Ils continuent à parler de ce qui se passaient pendant la bataille de coussins. Ils finissaient les dix minutes de bataille par une minute trente de relaxation. Ils faisaient ça juste avant de manger*

**Benoit:** Pour se défouler vraiment et après pour se calmer avant de passer à table.

*Dîner 2*

The construction of a family was influenced by rules, that dictated what a family must be (Hochschild 1983b), in particular feeling rules of being happy together, which the lockdown experience could question ('There were time when they had a lump in their throat, and they did not know why). In the case of the second dinner at the Bourdon household (up. class), the mobilisation of individual memories was resolutely influenced by the present context and by normative expectation about family life: the family was being observed and so, for Marie-Cécile, it appeared important to provide an image of their family as a group that could successfully overcome hardships, thanks to family cohesion.

The creation of family unity through mealtime conversations also happened by determining and discussing future collective projects the family members could carry out together. At the Comescu household (up. class), during the lockdown, watching culinary TV programs during the mealtimes and planning together the menus for the next day was a way of creating family cohesion through common projects at home, for lack of being able to carry out activities together outside of home. These type of discussion usually revolved around logistics of individual activities that affected family life. It was also about planning weekend activities to be done together, as a family. At the Davies (low. mid. class) in Adelaide, the children took part in this narration of future collective activities as they asked their parents about their activities of the next day:

**Sally Davies:** Usually they're asking questions about what we're doing tomorrow. Always, so: where are we going tomorrow? What are we doing tomorrow? What day is it tomorrow? What's the weather going to be? Always very concerned about what the weather's going to be. So usually that's sort of around that time there.

Family mealtimes also served as an anchoring site to determine and plan activities happening outside the household, whether these were individual or collective ones.

Just as some conversation topics were encouraged, about past and future activities, as a way of sustaining a common world for the family, other topics were forbidden, and this was particularly the case for video games at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class, Lyon):

**Pierre:** When the children are there, it's rather centred around the children. But at times, we can have a talk the two of us. Oh, yeah, there is one rule: they are not allowed to talk about video games at the table. With that, we're adamant.

**Fairley:** Why?

**Pierre:** Because us, we're not interested, because it's imagination, it's not real life and yes, I love video games but, like, for me, the mealtime, it's an exchange moment, about the day, about stories, about actual things.

**Fairley:** So things that happened?

**Pierre:** Yes. Or about the futures, or about jokes. I rather they tell a story, they tell jokes or things they've experienced here and there. Were they to be in their own world, for me, there would not be any interaction, if they're in their world and us in ours. This rule is very strict.

**Fairley:** And it works ?

**Pierre:** Yes, yes. There is no issue about this

**Pierre :** Quand les enfants sont là, c'est plutôt centré autour des enfants. Mais des fois on peut avoir des discussions à deux. Ah si, il y a une règle : ils n'ont pas le droit de parler de jeux vidéo à table. Ça, on est intransigeant

**Fairley :** Pourquoi ?

**Pierre :** Parce que nous ça nous intéresse pas, que c'est de l'imaginaire, que ce n'est pas de la vie réelle et que oui, moi j'adore les jeux vidéos mais bon, pour moi le temps du repas c'est un moment d'échange, sur la journée, sur des histoires, sur des choses concrètes

**Fairley :** Des choses qui se sont passés du coup ?

**Pierre :** Oui. Ou sur du futur, ou sur des blagues... Je préfère qu'ils racontent une histoire, qu'ils racontent des blagues ou des trucs qu'ils ont vécu à droite à gauche. Ils seraient dans leur monde à eux, pour moi il y a pas d'interaction s'ils sont dans leur monde et nous le nôtre donc. Cette règle elle est très stricte

**Fairley :** Et ça fonctionne ?

**Pierre :** Oui oui il n'y a aucun souci là-dessus

As Christophe argued, the creation of a common world at the table was a relational process (“Were they to be in their own world, for me, there would not be any interaction, if they're in their world and us in ours”). This needed to be based on some common grounds, so that all the family members could feel included in the topic. This was why some parents, such as at the Lebrun (int. mid. class) and the Bourdon (up. class) households from Lyon, excluded conversations about children's games at the table as parents did not usually take part in them. But this exclusion was also linked to the health objective of mealtime conversations described earlier: parents did not feel that children's games needed to be checked on as did their other activities outside the household. So although the creation of a common world through mealtime conversation was centered around the children's world, it was especially delimited and regulated by what interested parents in their children's lives:

**Laëtitia:** The meal, indeed, we talk a lot because it's the moment when we're altogether and when it's important. And when we talk about everything, honestly. No, yeah, we forbid video games. So there is no authorised discussion... let's say everything is authorised. But, however, video games, that's forbidden. Because it took up too much space, they talked only about that. They talked about their games and, you know, not about themselves. So we banished videos games. And that way, they're obliged to find other topics of conversation and so, well, we really talk about everything, about this and that.

**Laëtitia:** Le repas, effectivement, on parle beaucoup, parce que c'est le moment où on est tous réunis et où c'est important, et où on parle de tout en fait. Non, si, on a interdit les jeux vidéos. En fait y'a pas de discussion autorisée..., on va dire tout est autorisé. Mais par contre, les jeux vidéo, c'est interdit. Parce que ça prenait trop de place, ils parlaient que de ça. Ils parlaient de leurs jeux et plus d'eux en fait. Donc on a banni les jeux vidéo. Et comme ça, ben ils sont obligés de trouver d'autres sujets de conversation et du coup, ben on parle vraiment de tout et de rien.

This conversational ban appeared as a way to protect the existence of a family collective memory based on lived experience outside the home to protect the time dedicate to how children experienced their day and felt about it. Such was also the case the Borudon family:

**Marie-Cécile Bourdon** : ‘Right now, we’re talking to each other, so let us talk’. So, yeah, the pokemon, the thing, the evolution, the stuff, thingy.... Like, with the children, pokemons is THE thing. ‘So it’s good that you are talking to us, we’re listening, right’. But from time to time, we tell them: ‘Now, the pokemons...’ [fed up. Laughter].

**Marie-Cécile Bourdon** : ‘ Là, on se parle, donc euh, laissez-nous nous parler ’. ‘ Oui, alors les pokemon machin, l'évolution, truc, bidule chose’, voilà. En fait, les enfants, les pokemon c'est LE truc. ‘Donc c'est bien que vous nous racontiez, on vous écoute hein’ mais de temps en temps en leur dit ‘ là, les pokemon ’ [rire] !

Marie-Cécile acknowledged that family mealtimes were an appropriate moment for children to learn to tell their parents about their own experiences, but it needed to be their lived experiences outside the household rather than experiences relating to their games or their imagination.

In the lower middle class families of this study, children tended to choose the conversation topics. In Lyon, the Pascal André’s (low. mid. class) mention of their children’s mealtime conversation indicated the latter could talk about what they felt like and, in particular, their games:

**Pascal André** : They have a lot of imagination, so if you enjoy the Pyjamasques, well there you go [laughter].

**Pascal André** : Ils ont beaucoup d'imagination, donc si vous aimez les Pyjamasques vous allez être servie [rire].

#### **4. Hierarchies and tensions in the creation of a family unity**

The creation of the family unity through mealtime conversations unfolded according to multiple hierarchies and tensions, relating to gender and generational relationships and the coordination of individual singularities and the collective. Both the content and the regulation of conversations were worked by these frictions, with parents triggering and regulating conversations as well as children who dodged the topics and eluded these regulations. The regulations of mealtime conversation also happened according to a balance between the attention to each child and the equality of conversation space between children.

##### **4.1. Generational and gendered hierarchies in the creation of the family unity**

###### **4.1.1. Triggers and tricks to get children to engage in conversations**

During family mealtimes, children were expected to contribute to interactional discourses (Ochs and Shohet 2006b), and particularly to be able to talk about their daytime: what they did, what happened to them but also how they felt about their daytime experience (Blum-Kulka and Snow 2002). In that sense, there was a generational divide here, as children were expected to contribute more to the conversations than parents did. The parents, who were regulating the conversations, did not talk as

much as children about their day and their feelings. Nathalie Franquet (up. mid. Class) summarised well the double imperative children were faced with in mealtime interactions:

**Nathalie:** But overall, it does begin with: we ask them to tell us about their day. Usually, they have rather nothing to say. And if nothing happened in their day, then we ask them how, themselves, they experienced their day.

**Nathalie:** Très généralement ça commence quand même par : on leur demande de nous raconter leur journée, généralement ils ont plutôt rien à dire, et si il s'est rien passé dans la journée on commence généralement par leur demander eux comment ils ont passé leur journée.

**Benoit Bourdon:** During the mealtime, they'll get everything out of their system. All the important things that happened: school, the good things, less good, etc. And so after, we have a bit more time, during that after time, to talk about things of a bit more substance. Or read stories, or interact individually with them.

**Benoit :** Le temps du repas, ils vont cracher tout ce qu'ils ont à cracher. Toutes les choses importantes qui se sont passées, l'école, les trucs bien, moins bien, etc., etc. Et puis après, du coup, on a un peu plus de temps, sur le temps d'après, pour parler de choses un peu plus de fond. Ou lire des histoires. Ou aller interagir individuellement avec eux.

Some children resisted engaging in mealtime conversations in that manner. Parents then resorted to conversational triggers and tricks to get their children to take part in table talk. For some, it implied asking open-ended questions, such as getting them to talk about one positive and one negative experience of the day, thus encouraging them to talk about their feelings. Vanessa Bennet (up. mid. class) from Adelaide extensively described the efforts she put into getting to know more about her son's daytime experience:

**Vanessa:** Quite often we have a discussion around the table. Not all the time but sometimes it'll be: 'tell me one good thing and one bad thing about the day'. So at least then we kind of get some information from Henry (7) about something good that might've happened at school or, you know, something that might not have been so good. And then that way, Henry will be like: Mum, what was the best thing that happened in your day? You know, so kind of a bit of an engaging discussion.

The Bennet's youngest child, Charlie was 3 years-old and was not expected to take part as much in conversations. The creation of family unity through conversations was also based on the parents' management of their children's age and their related abilities. Only a few parents (Vanessa Bennet, along with the Imbert) mentioned the reverse conversation process: getting children to ask parents about their daytime experience. This was a way for parents to socialise children to talking about oneself, through demonstration, but it was also a means of creating family cohesion through an equal share of the conversation space and mirroring questions. Usually though, it was mostly children who were expected to talk about their day in detail:

**Vanessa Bennet:** Sometimes it's us engaging with them or sometimes, as I say, it's the 'tell us a good thing and a bad thing about your day' [...]. So it's kind of like the opportunity where..., because boys being boys, like, you know: Henry walking the dog, I'm like before I went out to them and I'm like, how's your day been? 'Good' [Chuckles]. That's sometimes the extent of what you get. So unless you're engaging in a conversation with him and that's why asking him, you know, 'what was a good thing about your day?': it's not a closed question, he can start to tell us something.



Vanessa's way of getting her son to engage in mealtime discussion implied long-term efforts throughout the week, in order to keep track of the small and big events that happened to him or people around him:

**Vanessa:** He went to before school care this morning so we might ask him about that. Or, you know, if we knew that one of his friends was away sick last week, we'll ask him if, was 'such-and-such back at school today?' We know he's doing a rehearsal for a play that they're doing for school at the moment so we kind of engage with him about that. We might say to Charlie 'what did you do at Granny's today?' Or 'did you go outside at childcare?' So it's kind of like a catch-up time.

That way, she was able to position herself into her son's life, by remobilising elements that he had already related. Vanessa's efforts to sustain mealtime conversations contrast from that of Glen Chapman, from Adelaide as well (int. mid. class):

**Glen:** I mean, the TV would always be on and the kids may have an iPad there [...]. There's a thing, so it's ABC Kids. It's like an app with all kids' shows and stuff like that. So, they'll be watching a kids' show on there. We can normally draw a bit out of them, of, you know, 'What did you do at school?', 'How was your day?'. I mean, they'll sort of talk to us for 30 seconds, for a minute, and so we'll get a little bit out of them, and then they'll go back to eating and sort of watch their show.

Glen depicted their mealtime conversations based on general questions, which may have triggered less response and sustained the conversation for a very short period only. Nevertheless, Glen also mentioned later on during the interview that they were able to grasp their children's attention for longer than previously suggested:

**Glen:** We'll sort of sit down and TV's normally on, but, you know, with a kid's show on or they might have an iPad sitting there. But we can usually draw a fair bit of conversation out of them as well and when it's something that it might trigger with them and it's something they actually want to talk about, they'll turn away from their screen, and they'll sort of forget about that, actually engage in conversation.

Glen's discourse suggests that his children had significant control over the type of conversations that they took part in, with them only engaging with the topics they were interested in. This difference in Glen's discourse may be due to the use of the interview method, which Lareau described as an inappropriate research method to investigate fathers' role in family private life (Lareau 2000a). Glen remained quite vague, still, about mealtime conversations and he may have been underrepresenting his role in them, or summarising as a parental behaviours efforts that were actually led more by his wife.

Taking part in this collective storytelling of their day implied children would either spontaneously relate their daytime experience, or they would do so after the parents mobilised conversational techniques to get them to engage. However, the parents did not always succeed in this and children sometimes kept their parents at a distance. They did so by claiming two different 'territories of the self', such as formulated by Goffman (Goffman 1971). These territories, or preserves, were both situational and egocentric (as opposed to geographical territory). Children resorted to their 'conversational preserve',

which was ‘the right of an individual to exert some control over who can summon him into talk and when he can be summoned’ (Goffman 1971, 40). They tried to control when and who asked them to talk about their personal life. They also claimed their ‘information preserve’, which Goffman defined as the ‘set of facts about himself to which an individual expects to control access while in the presence of others’ (Goffman 1971, 38). In other words, children could also seek to control with what information they would engage in conversations, keeping to privacy what they had experienced and how they felt about it. The parents of this study sought to move onto the territories of their children, but the later could resist this exchange, especially with older children or with children who were drawn into watching the TV show that were on. In Lyon, this was rarely observed, but some exceptions were to be noted. At the Franquet household (up. mid. class), in particular, one of the sons, Marco who was 10 years old (in his second year of junior high school), was seen resisting talking about his day and his feelings:

**Nathalie:** [talking to Marco, 10] So how was Frisbee? The Frisbee..., I mean the ultimate?

**Lucas :** [at the same time] Oh yes, right, the ultimate?

*Silence*

**Marco :** Hmm, it’s the same thing.

*Dinner 3*

**Nathalie:** [s’adresse à Marco] Du coup, le frisbee, c’était bien?

**Lucas :** Ah oui, c’est vrai, l’ultimate.. ?

**Nathalie:** [en même temps] Enfin le frisbee..., l’ultimate ?

*Silence*

**Marco :** Bo c’est la même chose.

*Dîner 3*

Marco tried to dodge talking about himself by moving the conversation onto a topic that did not concern his personal experience. Both parents kept, however, contesting his conversation preserve:

**Nathalie:** You’re doing games? Or what are you doing now? Only techniques ?

**Marco :** Games

*Silence*

**Nathalie :** You seem thrilled ! [ironical]

**Lucas :** Still, it nice, ultimate, right?

**Marco :** Well yes

**Nathalie :** ‘Games, only game’ [imitating her son’s voice]. It’s ‘youhou’, right?

**Lucas :** Is most of the class more at ease with a Frisbee or a rugby ball?

**Marco :** [low voice] Don’t know

*Silence*

**Nathalie :** Even with the Frisbee, they’re not comfortable?

*Silence*

**Marco :** Maybe with a Frisbee

*Then Jules (12) begins to talk about another topic, engaging with his parents.*

*Dinner 3*

**Nathalie :** Vous faites des matchs, ou vous faites quoi-là ? Que d’la technique ?

**Marco :** Des matchs

*Silence*

**Nathalie :** [ironique] T’as l’air ravi !

**Lucas :** Ben pourtant, c’est sympa l’ultimate ?

**Marco** : Ben oui

**Nathalie** : ‘ Des matchs, que des matchs ’ [elle imite la voix de son fils]. C’est ‘whou !’, hein ?

**Lucas** : Et est-ce que la moyenne de ta classe est plus à l’aise avec un frisbee ou un ballon de rugby ?

**Marco** : [voix basse] J’sais pas

*Silence*

**Nathalie** : Même le Frisbee, ils sont pas à l’aise

*Silence*

**Marco** : Peut-être avec un Frisbee.

*Ensuite Jules (12) prend la parole, sur un autre sujet, et en discute avec ses parents.*

Dîner 3

Nathalie tried to initiate the conversation with Marco and then both parents insisted to get him to talk about his Frisbee game and also about the way he felt about it. Despite their efforts, Marco resisted engaging in the conversation on their terms. He only indicated the type of activity he did and shared an information that was external to him (the different ways to name Frisbee). In another family in Lyon, at the Nimaga household, Ana, the mother, explained the mealtime conversation tended to be more child oriented, or at least oriented so that they remained accessible to children. On the contrary, to the Franquet parents, she did not necessarily seek to get them to talk about their day:

**Ana**: No, we talk with them, yeah. It depends on the day, the time, on everybody. There’s a day they will not talk a lot, I mean, we don’t force them.

**Ana** : Non, on parle avec eux, ouais. Ça dépend du jour, du moment, de chacun. Y’a un jour ils vont pas beaucoup parler, ‘fin on les force pas.

The observations showed that both the Nimaga daughters did not necessarily take part much in the mealtime conversations: they remained mainly silent, other than food-oriented discussions. There conversational and information preserve may have been associated to the fact Ana is their stepmother.

The differences between these two cases may point to what Goffman described as the ‘socially determined variability’ and ‘group-cultural differences’ of the territories of the self (Goffman 1971, 40). Our purpose here is not to generalise about class differences, as our group of participants were constituted of small numbers but at the Franquet family, who were positioned in the upper middle class, exercising information and conversational reserved during mealtime was less tolerated than at the Nimaga household, who were of intermediary middle class position. Nathalie reacted to Marco preserving his territories by teasing him (‘you seem thrilled’) and then mocking him (‘Games, only games’ [imitating her son’s voice]. It’s ‘youhou’, right?), which also signalled she was offended by his refusal to let them know about his day. On the contrary, Ana acknowledged that it was fine for her stepdaughters to not take part in mealtime conversations. Goffman argued that, ‘in general, the higher the rank, the greater the size of all territories of the self and the greater the control across the boundaries’ (Goffman 1971, 40). This also applied to generational rank, as parents spontaneously exerted their conversational preserves without being challenged by children. The way some children from intermediary and upper middle class families claimed their information and conversational

preserves illustrated the kind of resistance they developed to parental authority. In these cases, parents needed to find a form of common ground in terms of conversation, to which children opened up to. Children's conversational preserve seemed to be smaller for young children in upper middle classes. At the Bourdon household (up. class), the only time a child was witnessed mobilising information preserve was due to my presence: Marie-Cécile had asked Lucie if she could tell me what she had succeed to do during lockdown, and which her parents were proud of. Lucie refused as she wanted to keep the anecdote in the private sphere of the family. At the Imbert household (up. class), this was also only witnessed once. At the first dinner, Rose refused to take part in the conversation: after complaining several times to her parents that she was not given enough space to talk (probably because the parents were talking quite a lot to me), she was finally given the floor to speak. She then refused, saying she had forgot what she wanted to say. It appeared here that Rose was mobilising her conversational preserve as a way to protest against having insufficient space to talk.

Children were expected to make their informational and conversational territories of their self accessible to their parents' inquiry. In return, however, parents did not always open up their own territories. Marco (10) Franquet (up. mid. class), from Lyon, summarised the ambivalence of his parents' expectations in terms of mealtime conversations:

**Jules:** Often, when they are talking just the two of them, we're not allowed to talk, even if we're talking between us [...], because they find we speak too loudly and that we can't hear each other [...]. It depends on the situation. Often, if it's something about work, you know some adult thing, we can't talk [...]. It depends on the situation. But after, normal topics, we can hear all of that. When they're talking about their friends for example, that we don't know.

**Jules :** Souvent quand ils parlent que tous les deux, on n'a pas le droit de parler, même si c'est on parle que entre nous [...], parce qu'ils trouvent qu'on parle fort, et que du coup, on peut pas beaucoup parler [...]. Ca dépend de la situation. Souvent, si c'est quelque chose de travail, de grands en gros, on doit pas trop entendre parler. Mais après des sujets normaux, on peut tout entendre. Quand ils parlent de leurs amis, par exemple, que on connaît pas.

#### 4.1.2. Regulations of conversations

##### 4.1.2.1. *Impact of daytime on the conversations*

While family mealtimes were not so much a space for parents to talk about their own feelings from their day, the regulation of conversations, the tricks and triggers they mobilised varied according to their daytime experience: if it happened to be difficult, it could impede them from being fully available for mealtime conversations with their children. In Lyon, this was the case for Stéphane Imbert (up. class): 'we can feel it in the sense that there is less discussion. It is a little bit, maybe a little bit less joyful'. At the Comescu household in Lyon (up. class), both parents sometimes felt their heavy workloads prevented them from being fully present for conversing with their children during week dinnertimes. Irina Comescu (up. class), who was a University Professor, gave most of her classes

between January and March so that she could focus on doing research the rest of the year. During this period, she felt particularly tired in the evenings:

**Irina:** We have quick meals, we don't stay long at the table [...]. For that matter, I don't really feel like..., I listen to the kids, sometimes I pay attention, other times I don't [laughter]. But when I'm tired, like, I cut everything short. The days when, like I'm more calm, I also feel like talking. And when we have time to talk, it can last for longer, they talk about stuff, so do I.

**Irina :** On mange du vite fait, on traîne pas à table [...]. Pour le coup j'ai pas forcément envie de..., j'écoute les enfants, des fois je suis attentive, des fois non [rire]. Mais quand je suis fatiguée, voilà, j'écourte le tout. Les jours où, voilà, où j'suis plus cool, j'ai envie de parler aussi. Et quand on a le temps de parler, ça peut durer plus longtemps, eux ils racontent des choses, moi aussi je raconte.

Her description of the way conversations occurred when she was more relaxed in the evening (thanks to an easier workday) corresponded to the normative representation of mealtimes as an exchange moment that all the intermediary and upper middle-class parents mobilised. Laurent Comescu (up. class), her husband, also felt his work experience could invade their family dinnertime and keep him from connecting with his children. Yet, he put effort into disconnecting from work before getting home, in the metro ride back from work:

**Laurent:** We make that effort, because we realised that, sometimes, we weren't [available] and we try to be, to really listen, exchange with the kids [...]. No, and it's a reaction, when you see that you're still think about work, you know, you feel it.

**Laurent :** C'est un effort qu'on fait, parce qu'on s'est rendu compte que des fois on l'était pas [disponible] et que, et que on essaie de l'être pour écouter vraiment, échanger avec les enfants [...] Non, et puis c'est une réaction, quand vous voyez que vous pensez encore au taf, vous le sentez quoi, hein.

Being tired from the day impacted the conversation tone and the availability parents had for conversation with their children. On the contrary, some activities done during the day, such as relaxation, could help keep a relaxed tone during family mealtimes. At the fifth dinner at the Obecanov household (int. mid. class), Sophie seemed tired from the whole day spent with her daughter and her irritation showed in her tone and in the way she talked, characterising several times Elisa's behaviour as annoying. She even reminds Elisa (6) that she had not behaved properly the whole day long. Sophie's annoyance was also noticeable during the mealtime by the way she was sitting: she was a bit more hunched over the table than usual. During this mealtime, Sophie resorted to blackmailing techniques to get their daughter to calm down (no dessert and no TW shows).

#### **4.2. Tensions between individual singularities and the collective**

Mealtime conversations were also worked by tensions created by the aim of paying attention and providing space for individual singularities to be voiced and the need to create a sense of collectiveness.

#### 4.2.1. Attention to individualities and equality between children at the table

This was particular the case when parents tried to pay attention to each child, individually, while being aware of an equal distribution of conversation space between children (Singly 1996).

##### 4.2.1.1. Mothers protecting children's conversation turn and feelings

Contrary to the fathers from this study, the mothers rarely kept the conversation for themselves if they were being interrupted, nor did they make sure the father preserved it, as the latter did for the mothers. They more commonly accepted to be interrupted by other family members, picking up where they had left after being momentarily interrupted. This recalled gender differences in women socialisation: women were socialised in a manner to become available for others (Gojard 2010). De Singly argued: 'the work of care for women tend to occupy, at the household, all her time. It corresponds to the availability for the family' (1996, 277). As such, they more easily than father let themselves be interrupted by children in their daily tasks. Women constructed themselves, in practices and in representations as available for other to ensure the wellbeing of each and everybody and of the whole family (O. Schwartz 2012b; Singly 1996). When children interrupted one another, the mothers made sure conversation turns were respected. During the fourth dinner at the Imbert household (up.class), Magali was explaining the changes they had made in terms of food consumption. Rose, her youngest daughter (5) was unhappy about something and voiced her discontent, therefore disrupting her mother's conversation turn. Stéphane then reprimanded his daughter, commanding her to wait. Nevertheless, Magali still took into account Rose's discontent:

**Magali:** ... What is the matter, Rose?

*Rose tells her what she wants [inaudible]*

**Magali:** Okay, well sit down properly

*Dinner 2*

**Magali:** ... qu'est-ce qu'il y a Rose?

*Rose lui explique ce qu'elle veut [inaudible]*

**Magali:** D'accord, ben assieds-toi comme il faut

*Dîner 2*

At a dinnertime in another household in Lyon, Sophie Obecanov was talking about her work when her daughter Elisa (6) interrupted her:

**Elisa:** Mum, why do we want...?

*Sophie stops talking, giving her a disapproving look*

**Elisa:** Go ahead

*Dinner 4*

Although Sophie disapproved of being interrupted, she signaled her discontent non-verbally, through a disapproving look but in a way than appeared less authoritative. She also smoothly picked up her thread of conversation, after the momentary interruption. Elsewhere in Lyon at one point during the

fifth dinner at the Imbert household, Magali asked Louise (8) what she wished to do the upcoming weekend. Rose (5) tried to intervene in the conversation but Magali comments: 'I am talking with Louise'. Here, she reprimanded the interruption not so much to protect her own conversation space but to make sure she paid proper attention to what Louise was saying, and preserving her eldest daughter's conversation turn. The only time that a mother was witnessed taking away the conversation turn from the father was in the case of a conversation game, at the second dinner at the Imbert household (up. class). Magali was asking everybody around the table to talk about their experience of the lockdown, finding both positive and negative memories. Louise, the eldest daughter began her turn as such: 'well for me, the lockdown, I like it, but I am not at the point either where I love it. I like it means I find it is nice...', and she continued explaining what she enjoyed and what she missed. Magali asked her to explain more in detail some aspects of her discourse, but then Stéphane, the father, began to explain his experience before Louise got to finish:

**Stéphane:** For me...

**Magali:** Louise, have you finished?

**Louise:** Hum, no, I haven't finished. Hum, well, also, I'm a bit sad because I won't be able to do my Communion [and she explains because of COVID-19]

*Silence*

**Magali:** And so you, Stéphane?

**Stéphane:** For me, hum, the first fortnight was really hard [and he goes on explaining why the lockdown was mostly a difficult experience for him]

*Dinner 2*

**Stéphane:** Pour moi...

**Magali:** Louise, est-ce que tu as fini?

**Louise:** Euh non, j'ai pas fini. Eh ben, aussi, j'suis un peu triste parce que je vais pas pouvoir faire la première communion [and she explains because of Covid].

*Silence*

**Magali:** Et toi Stéphane, alors?

**Stéphane:** pour moi? euh, la première quinzaine a été très dure [and he goes on explaining why the lockdown was mostly a difficult experience for him]

*Dîner 2*

The mothers were indeed often the ones regulating conversation turns in between children, creating a sense of fairness in the conversation space. During the fourth dinner at the Bourdon household (up. class), Lucie was explaining to her parents that she had changed seats at school because she could not see what was written on the board properly. Marius tried to interrupt her, without success as Marie-Cécile intervened:

**Marie-Cécile:** Marius, let your sister finish speaking

*The discussion between Lucie and her parents about school continues*

*Dinner 4*

**Marie-Cécile:** Marius tu laisses ta sœur finir de parler

*La discussion continue entre Lucie et ses parents à propos de l'école*

*Dîner 4*

At the André household (low. mid. class), Angélique, the mother, was usually the one preserving the children's conversation turn, trying to make sure the one who was already engaged in a discussion was not interrupted by others. During the third dinner, Céleste (4) was talking to her mother about her school day. Enzo (6) tried to intervene, but Angélique touched his arm, saying: 'hush'. At the Imbert household, Rose sometimes had difficulty to intervene in conversations, compared to her sister who imposed herself more easily in table talk:

**Rose (5):** I'd like to talk a bit  
*We're still talking with Stéphane*  
**Louise (8):** ... I don't know if you can see, but I've got a new hairdo  
**Rose:** ... [at the same time as me] but they never let me talk  
*I keep talking to Stéphane and Magali*  
**Rose:** ...because you talk too much  
**Magali:** Go on, tell her what you want to say  
**Rose:** I forgot...  
**Louise:** ... I don't know if you saw, but I've got a new hairdo (showing me her hair)  
*Dinner 3, video conf.*

**Rose (5) :** J'aimerais parler un peu.  
 On continue de parler avec Stéphane.  
**Louise (8) :** ... j'sais pas si tu vois, mais jme suis fait une nouvelle coiffure  
**Rose :** ... (en même temps que moi) mais moi on m'laisse jamais parler  
 je continue de parler avec Stéphane et Magali  
**Rose :** ...parce que vous parlez trop  
**Magali :** Allez, vas-y, dis-lui ce que tu veux lui dire  
**Rose :** J'ai oublié...  
**Louise :** ... j'sais pas si t'as vu, mais jme suis fait une nouvelle coiffure (en me montrant ses cheveux)  
*Dîner 3, video conf.*

Although Rose was the one voicing her discontent of not having enough space to talk, it was Magali who finally reached out to her. Her father mocked her reaction when she could not remember what she wanted to say (perhaps because she then felt pressured to talk) while Magali was more understanding and encouraged her to speak up later on, if she ever recalled what she wanted to say.

When a mother preserved her own conversation turn, asking a child not to interrupt her, it was to protect, in return, the conversation turn of another child, as it occurred during a mealtime at the André household (low. mid. class):

**Angélique:** The teacher got you to do some reading exercises, Céleste (4)?  
**Lucas (8):** But they can't read  
**Angélique:** Let me talk with your sister  
**Céleste:** [to her brother] Yes we can !  
**Angélique:** [to Lucas] Can I ask my question ? [to Céleste] So, she gets you to do some reading exercises?  
*And Céleste then answers her*  
*Dinner 2, family produced video*

**Angélique:** La maîtresse elle vous a fait faire des exercices de lecture, Céleste (6)?  
**Lucas (8):** Mais, ils savent pas lire  
**Angélique:** Laisse-moi parler à ta soeur  
**Céleste:** [à son frère] Si!



**Angélique:** [à Lucas] Je peux poser ma question? [à Céleste] Alors, elle vous a fait faire des exercices de lecture  
*Elle lui répond*  
Dîner 2, family produced video

At the Ferret household in Lyon (up. class), Céline explained that she tried to distribute intergenerational conversation turns through the use of a symbolic talking stick. This relational technique is particularly mobilised within certain institutional and social contexts, such as schools and childcare leisure centres and recommended, in particular, by psychologists, to which middle class parents are receptive. She acknowledged that this relational technique was unsuccessful, but her attempt to manage mealtime conversation in a playful manner showed how she was concerned about her daughter's feeling and her being included in mealtime conversation:

**Céline:** Sometimes, she sulks a bit because she also wants to express herself [laughter]. But it goes..., you know, we listen to each other. So no, honestly, it's okay. Sometimes we laugh with the talking stick, by taking, you know, a spoon, something like that: [imitating a child's voice]: 'wait, I have the stick, it's my turn to speak...'. Yeah, well, generally, it does not work, the talking stick.

**Céline :** Parfois elle fait un peu la tête parce qu'elle aussi elle a envie de s'exprimer [rire]. Mais ça se passe... voilà on s'écoute ça peut être, voilà. Non ça va, franchement. Parfois on rigole avec le bâton de parole en prenant... tu vois, une cuillère un truc comme ça. [Imite une voix d'enfant] ' attend j'ai le bâton de parole c'est à moi de parler... '. En général ça marche pas le bâton de parole.

#### 4.2.2. Claiming conjugal conversational territories

There also existed intergenerational tensions, where parents as individuals, tried to have some space while keeping in mind the more or less implicit agreement that family mealtimes were child centered.

##### 4.2.2.1. *Parents include their children in their conversational territories*

At the Franquet (up. mid. class) and the Comescu (up. class) households, the parents did take up some of the conversational space to share adult matters with one another. Nathalie Franquet did so while making sure her children also felt included in the conversation, if they wished to:

**Nathalie:** Sometimes, it's Lucas or I, we've spent a rather difficult day at work, or even good for that matter, so we either talk to each other, as adults. But generally, we still try to include the kids into the conversation, even if it's about our workday.

**Nathalie :** Parfois c'est Lucas ou moi, on a passé un journée moyenne au boulot, ou bonne hein d'ailleurs, mais soit on se parle entre adultes. Mais généralement on essaie quand même d'inclure les enfants à la conversation même si c'est par rapport à nos journées de boulot.

Similar interactions happened with the Comescu family (up. class) when Irina and Laurent talked about their work. During the third dinner, Irina was telling me about her work as an Associate Professor in Mathematics and Hugo (10) easily integrated the conversation:

**Hugo:** Mum, this morning, you did alpha-beta-magma?

**Laurent :** 'alpha-beta' what ??!

**Irina :** Gama ! Hugo !

**Lea (7)** : It's gama !

*The discussion goes on for a while about the different Greek letters that Hugo and Lea know about.*

**Hugo**: Dad, this afternoon, you made some slides

*All laugh*

**Laurent**: Dad's work, it's great. You do 'formula beta sigma' and I make slides. You know I don't do only that in life

**Fairley**: What is there on his slides?

**Hugo**: [laughter] I don't know, I hear him say that

**Laurent**: He came this morning into my office

**Fairley**: To watch ?

**Laurent**: Ah yes, yes. He listens. Once he told me : Dad, you're a bit authoritative !

**Hugo**: That was my sister

**Laurent**: And then, another time it was 'Dad, you swear'

**Hugo**: Ah, that was me

*Dinner 3*

*Lors d'un dîner chez les Comescu, Irina m'explique qu'elle doit travailler à nouveau après le repas. Hugo intervient pour demander à sa mère, qui est Maître de conférence en finances :*

**Hugo** : Maman, ce matin t'as fait du alpha-beta-magma ?

**Laurent** : ' alpha-beta quoi ??!'

**Irina** : Gama ! Hugo

**Lea** : C'est gama !

*La discussion continue un instant sur les différentes lettres grecques que Hugo et Lea connaissent*

**Hugo**: Papa, cette après-midi, t'as fait des slides

*Les parents et les enfants rigolent*

**Laurent**: Le boulot papa c'est génial. Toi tu fais des 'formule beta sigma?' et moi je fais des slides. Je fais pas que ça dans ma vie quand même.

**Fairley**: Qu'est-ce qu'il y a sur les slides?

**Hugo**: [en rigolant] Mais je sais pas moi, je l'entends dire ça

**Laurent**: Il est venu ce matin dans mon bureau

**Fairley**: Pour regarder?

**Laurent**: Ah oui oui oui, il écoute. une fois il m'a dit, papa, t'es un peu autoritaire

*Je rigole*

**Hugo**: C'était ma sœur ça

**Laurent**: Et après, une fois c'était, papa, tu dis des gros mots

**Hugo**: Ah, ça c'est moi

*Dîner 3*

Irina initiated the conversation about her work, but the children managed to engage in it according to their knowledge and rationale, shortly turning the conversation about mathematics into a guessing game. Then, when Hugo mentioned his father's work, Laurent let him talk about it in a manner that was accessible to Hugo, meaning commenting on the severe tone and fowl words that he noticed, as opposed to what Laurent's slides may be about. At the Imbert household, Louise's questioning about her father's work was appreciated, but her little sister did not feel that she was integrated into the conversation, and tried to propose a new topic:

**Louise (8)**: But, so Dad, how do you know if it works

**Stéphane**: What do you mean?

**Louise**: Well, for instance, if you make a product...

**Stéphane**: Yes?

**Louise**: And, hum, how do you know that it's a drug against this or that?

**Stéphane**: Because, the molecule is already known. We already know that this molecule is efficient against such illness

**Magali** : ... because, Dad doesn't work on new products...

**Louise** : Hmm

**Stéphane** : So we simply try to transform the product so that it be ...

**Louise**... better

**Stéphane** : ... better

**Louise** : ... For example, you can transform the banana ones into strawberry ones ?

**Stéphane** : Ha ! No, no. No, but we try, for example [...]

*And he continues explaining technical aspects of his work to Louise. Then Rose tries to take part in the conversation, probably triggered by Louise comment on flavours of medicine for children:*

**Rose** (5): I like the sirup for drugs, I love it ! I would like to always have it!

*But Stéphane does not react to Rose's comment and maintains the conversation to an adult level, while continuing to include Louise in the discussion.*

*Dinner 1*

**Louise**: Mais alors, Papa, comment tu sais du coup que ça marche ?

**Stéphane** : C'est-à-dire ?

**Louise** : Ben, si par exemple, tu fabriques un produit...

**Stéphane** : Oui...

**Louise** : Et, euh, comment tu peux savoir que c'est un médicament contre machin ?

**Stéphane** : Parce qu'en fait, la molécule, elle est connue déjà. On sait déjà que y'a déjà des personnes qui ont fait des études sur cette molécule et qui savent que cette molécule est efficace contre telle maladie...

**Magali** : ... parce que Papa, ils travaillent pas sur les nouveaux produits...

**Louise** : Hmm

**Stéphane** : Donc nous, on va simplement essayer de transformer le produit pour faire en sorte qu'il soit...

**Louise**... meilleur

**Stéphane** : ... meilleur

**Louise** : ... par exemple, tu peux transformer ceux qui sont à la banane en à la fraise ?

**Stéphane** : Ha ! Non. Non.... Non, mais par exemple on essaie... [...]

Stéphane continued explaining the technical aspects of his work to Louise. Then Rose tries to take part in the conversation, probably triggered by Louise's comment on flavours of medicine for children:

**Rose**: J'aime bien le sirop pour le médicament, j'adore! J'aimerais bien l'avoir toujours...

*Dîner 1*

Stéphane did not react to Rose's comment and maintained the conversation to an adult level, while continuing to include Louise in the discussion.

As with the Imbert (up. class), Louise was allowed to take part in her parents' conversation about their world (professional work), but this time the father maintained the conversation level to an adult one, therefore seeking to transmit knowledge to his eldest daughter but, as the consequence, excluding Rose from a conversation which was not entirely accessible to her age, despite her relevant engagement in it.

#### 4.2.2.2. *Parents try to claim their own conversational preserve*

While family mealtime conversation were highly developed around children's experiences, understanding and interests, parents still tried to have conversations in between themselves, in a manner that was sometimes not accessible to their children. However, they often had difficulties to

do so, especially because children interrupted or sought to be a part of their conversation. In this case, parents were claiming their own conversational preserve, which Goffman also defined as ‘the right of a set of individuals once engaged in talk to have their circle protected from entrance and overhearing by others’ (Goffman 1971, 40). The children were of course listening to their parent’s conversation, but parents claimed their territory by not explaining further some details to make their conversation accessible to the children’s younger age or providing them with the necessary context information. Parents claimed their conversational preserve by withholding information or even speech, and reinforced its boundaries, which children were expected to respect. They did so by refrained efforts to make the discussion comprehensible to children, and they also protected their conversation turn. When parents tried to do so – at the Obecanov (int. mid. class), Franquet (up. mid. class), and Ferret (up. class) households – they were asking children to remain simply overhear the conversation, as a ratified participant of the conversational space but who is expected to remain a listener (Goffman 1981):

**Sophie:** It’s true she talks a lot. So now, we saw each before at the park, so, like, we told each other a few things. But it’s true that when we did not see each other at all, we also want to interact, just us. With Elisa (6) in the middle, well, like, we need to take turns, make her understand that she shouldn’t interrupt us, so it’s a bit...

**Viktor:** Generally, it’s better and better

**Sophie:** Yeah, she understands now

**Viktor:** It’s true she manages to integrate a conversation more naturally. What you saw now [*she did not interrupt her parents during the mealtime, which may have been due to the fact this was the first dinnertime observed, and because it is a video conference dinnertime, which disrupted the usual conversations practices*], it’s not bad, to be honest, because a while ago, it was... In fact, I think that at school, as they are about thirty, you know, so that they can hear each other, they are forced to shout louder than one another [...]. And I find that, more and more, she manages to integrate a conversation, with her natural way of doing it, right: you know she can jump from one topic to another... Early on, I saw, she was trying to figure out at what time she was allowed to say what she wanted to say.

**Sophie:** She listens to everything

**Viktor:** [to Elisa] I explained that you’re progressing, that you’re growing up, that you manage to express yourself in a conversation in a normal way. So this means that I’m complimenting you, so don’t go and be foolish now

*Everybody laughs*

**Elisa:** Them too, they also talk a lot, you know

*Everybody laughs*

Dinner 1

**Sophie:** C’est vrai qu’elle parle beaucoup. Alors là, on s’est vu un moment tous les deux au parc avant donc voilà, on s’est dit un peu quelques trucs, mais c’est vrai que quand on s’est pas vu du tout, on veut aussi interagir nous, avec Elisa (6) au milieu, bon, voilà, faut un peu faire des tours de rôles, lui faire comprendre qu’il faut pas qu’elle nous coupe la parole, donc c’est un peu...

**Viktor:** Globalement, ça va de plus en plus

**Sophie:** Ouai, elle comprend maintenant

**Viktor:** C’est vrai qu’elle arrive à s’inscrire dans une conversation beaucoup plus naturellement. là, ce que vous avez vu [*elle n’a pas interrompu ses parents durant le repas, peut-être parce que c’était le premier repas que j’observais, et que cela se passait en video-conférence, ce qui dérangeait les manières habituelles d’avoir des conversations*], c’est pas mal quand même, parce qu’il y a un certain temps, c’était... en fait je pense qu’à l’école, comme ils sont une

trentaine, si vous voulez, pour qu'ils s'entendent, ils sont obligés de, chacun crier plus fort que l'autre [...]. Et je trouve que, de plus en plus, elle arrive à s'inscrire dans une conversation, avec son naturel hein, elle peut sauter du coq à l'âne mais elle arrive quand même à... là tout à l'heure, j'ai vu, elle était en train d'essayer de comprendre à quel moment elle avait le droit de dire ce qu'elle voulait dire

**Sophie:** Elle écoute tout

**Viktor:** [à Elisa] J'ai expliqué que tu progresses, que tu grandis, que tu arrives à t'exprimer dans une conversation normalement. Donc ça veut dire que je te fais des compliments, donc ne fais pas n'importe quoi maintenant

*Tout le monde rigole*

**Elisa:** Eux aussi, ils parlent beaucoup hein

*Tout le monde rigole*

*Dîner 1*

**Lucas:** They will tend to interrupt us, or ask us questions although we're talking about another topic, or to take an interest in a thing that does not concern them. So yes, yes, we can tell them 'stop', or 'wait a minute'.

**Lucas :** Ouais parce qu'ils vont avoir tendance à nous interrompre ou à nous poser des questions alors qu'on parle d'un autre sujet ou à s'intéresser à un truc qui les concerne pas, donc oui oui on peut leur dire 'stop' ou 'on attend un moment'.

Interestingly, contrary to his wife's more inclusive approach to their conjugal mealtime conversations, Lucas Franquet argues they did claim their conversational preserve. The way Céline Ferret (up. class) describes her and Jérôme's conjugal discussion illustrates how Noémie (7) was expected to be a simple bystander of her parents' interactions:

**Céline Ferret:** Sometimes, we are forced to tell her to keep quiet because we are talking, Jérôme and I. She will start to say something: we look at her and tell her: 'well, wait, first we finish talking together and after we listen to you, but now, you wait'.

**Céline Ferret :** Parfois on est obligés delui dire de s'taire voilà parce que on discute Jérôme et moi. Elle va s'mettre à dire un truc, on la regarde on lui dit 'bah attends, on finit d'abord de parler tous les deux, après on t'écoute mais là attends'.

However, this rule was constantly challenged by children of all ages, who wished to be part of any conversation happening at the table. In Lyon, Marie-Cécile Bourdon's (up. class) way of describing the distribution of intergenerational conversation turns at the table was similar. The Bourdon had begun to have daily family meals during the first lockdown in France, in the spring of 2020 and she explained how conjugal conversation was first difficult during the mealtimes:

**Marie-Cécile:** So we try to have a discussion but we have kids that interrupt us a lot.

**Marie-Cécile :** Donc on essaye d'avoir des conversations mais on a des enfants qui nous interrompent beaucoup.

At first, Marie-Cécile did not enjoy these meals so much, especially because she was annoyed by the conversations being so child-centered:

**Marie-Cécile:** It goes well [at the table], but it's more in terms of exchange, you know. So fortunately, I still have a bit of professional conversations going on [by video conference]... But it's more in terms of adult conversations, let's say, that it's missing.

*Interview done during a lockdown*

**Marie-Cécile:** Non, ça se passe bien [à table], mais c'est plus en terme d'échange, quoi. Alors heureusement que j'ai encore un peu des conversations professionnelles... [en visio]. Mais c'est plus en terme de conversations d'adulte on va dire que ça manque.  
*Interview done during the lockdown*

**Marie-Cécile :** So for me, there was a moment when I was so fed up, really, because I'm fed up of kids conversations, so I was just fed up. And actually, now... pff, now we tell them.

**Benoit:** Yes

*Dinner 2 (observation in the kitchen, without the children)*

**Marie-Cécile :** Ben moi, y'a un moment où ça m'a pesé, vraiment, parce que je n'en peux plus des conversations de gamins, voilà, je n'en pouvais plus. Et en fait, maintenant....pff, maintenant on leur dit.

**Benoit:** oui

*Dîner 2 (observation in the kitchen, without the children)*

And then in other families, parents would not necessarily try to have conjugal discussion time; they reserved this for later on in the evening, when the children had gone to bed:

**Vanessa Bennet** (up. mid. class, Adelaide): So it does typically be more focused around the children than us because I guess we, you know, we can catch up once they go to bed type of thing.

**Laurent Comescu** (up. class, Lyon): With Irina, it's more afterwards, when we have a bit of time for ourselves, when the children are in bed, to talk together. Rather than during the mealtime, because it's more a moment we dedicate, or at least I do, to the kids.

**Laurent Comescu** (up. Class, Lyon) : Avec Irina, c'est plutôt après, quand on prend un temps à nous, quand les enfants sont couchés, à discuter tous les deux. Plus que pendant le repas, puisque c'est plutôt un temps qu'on consacre, plus moi en tout cas, aux enfants.

At the Obecanov household, the parents tended to finish their mealtime, with the desert, in front of the television, so they would have more space to talk as adults, with Elisa (6) being busy watching the program:

**Viktor:** And generally speaking, we stay at the table from start to finish, that is if, more and more often... For example, if there were ice cream, we could eat in front of the TV to finish Nagui, which allowed us, so to speak, to have a bit of a chat with Emily.

**Viktor :** Et en règle générale, on reste à table de A à Z, si ce n'est que ben, de plus en plus souvent... Par exemple, si y'avait de la glace, on pouvait manger devant la télé pour finir Nagui, ça permet entre guillemet de discuter un p'tit peu avec Sophie.

#### 4.2.2.3. *Parents have mealtime conversations, after the children have left*

In several families, parents took the time to talk in between themselves at the very end of the mealtime, when the children had left the table. As I have analysed in Chapter 5, the dessert often constituted a moment when the mealtime ritual crumbled, with more individualised choices and portions been served and more flexibly allowed in the movement of the commensals. As such, the dessert was often not so much a family shared course but a conjugal and more individualised aspect of commensality. The André parents (low. mid. class) felt they did not have any conjugal space at all during the meals, so they would remain longer than the children at the table, while taking their dessert. This offered them a more relaxing and intimate space to interact, unless they were interrupted by

children again, which happened as they could come back at the table. At the André household from Lyon (up. mid. class, dinner 2, family produced video), this time was observed as a moment that allowed greater complicity to arise in between Angélique and Pascal: both of them appeared more relaxed, making jokes about their children, or gently teasing one another. They also seemed to be more attentive to one another: she expected him to peel her apple for her and he expected her to get out the chocolate for him. Pascal, the father was also more talkative at this time of the meal than when the children were there, although Angélique still talked more than him. They also remained in silence and seemed to be enjoying the quietness, as opposed to the agitation of the mealtime. This was also a moment when they related to one another anecdotes about their daytime. There were other occasions when the parents, such as of the Obecanov family would stay longer at the table, after the mealtime, but when interrogated about it, they would acknowledge that it was because I was there, as a guest and this was not their usual doing.

## 5. 'Hush, let Mum finish speaking'<sup>101</sup>: gendered mealtime interactions

### 5.1. *Gendered differences in the valorisation of mealtime conversations*

Although the valorisation of commensal conversations appeared across intermediary and upper middle classes from both cities, differences existed in the discourses between some fathers and mothers. In Lyon, at the Franquet family (up. mid. class), Lucas's description of mealtime discussions contrasted with that of his wife's, Marie, who explained she tried to get their children to talk about their different activities and their feelings. While she emphasised it to be important to talk as a family during the mealtime, he was much more succinct in his description of table talk:

**Lucas:** At the table... well, let's say we chat, you know. So [the kids], they talk a lot, so hum..., we chat exchange a lot.

**Lucas:** A table... bah disons qu'on discute, voilà. Après [les enfants] ils sont..., ils parlent beaucoup, heu... donc on discute beaucoup.

Issa Nimaga (int. mid. class), from Lyon, felt mealtime conversations were the best moment to develop family communication but also suggested he would not mind having the TV on while eating:

**Issa :** Yes, we exchange. We talk about this and that. Especially me, they try to tease me a bit... We talk about a lot of things. I think it's the moment when there is really a lot of exchanges, because then, there isn't..., I'm not on my phone. Lila (5) is not there to watch anything, or her brother and sister in the bedroom.

**Fairley:** There are no screens at the table?

**Issa:** Oh no, no, no, no, no. That is impossible.

**Fairley:** Even you adults ?

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<sup>101</sup> Benoit Bourdon, father, upper class

**Issa** : Even us. Because, as we say, 'the guinea hen follows who is in front'. So those are things, even if somebody calls, honestly, I don't answer. Never mind, you know, that will be for later. Because then they will pick up bad habits. Or if I watch TV when they are eating, Ana is not happy. Or Lila (5) tells me: "Dad, turn off the TV, we're going to eat". Myself, I would like to quickly prepare the meal so that we can eat and watch the [news programs], because I like that.

**Issa** : Oui, on discute. On discute de tout, de rien. Surtout moi, ils essayent de me chamailler un peu mais... On discute de plein de choses. Je pense que c'est le moment où y'a vraiment beaucoup d'échanges, parce que là y'a pas de... moi je suis pas sur mon téléphone, Lila (5) est pas là pour regarder un truc... ou son frère et sa sœur qui sont dans la chambre

**Fairley** : Y'a pas d'écrans à table ?

**Issa** : Ah non non non non non, ça c'est impossible.

**Fairley** : Même vous, les adultes ?

**Issa** : Même nous. Parce que, comme on dit, la pintade elle suit celui qui est devant. Donc ça c'est des choses, même si on m'appelle, franchement je réponds pas, je laisse tomber, ce sera plus tard, quoi. Parce qu'après ils vont prendre de mauvaises habitudes. Ou si je regarde la télé pendant qu'ils mangent, Ana elle n'est pas contente. Ou Lila (5) elle me dit ' Papa éteins la télé, on va manger '. Moi j'aimerais bien qu'on fasse vite à manger et qu'on mange pour regarder Quotidien, parce que j'aime bien.

For Laurent Comescu (up. class), from Lyon, dinnertimes' conditions needed to allow for family conversations to happen but he also wishes to have the TV on, feeling torn between the importance of family talk and his desire to watch a program. Concerns about the decline of family meals are usually associated with a critic of watching the television while eating together, presenting it as contrary to the moral fundamental of commensality. Some qualitative in depth studies of small group of families have shown that the integration of technological devices during mealtimes could serve as a medium to develop family togetherness by stimulating conversation (see Ferdous et al. 2016 for households in Australia) and favoring convivial atmospheres (see Phull 2019 for families in Spain). In France Olivier Masclat (2018) has revealed how the recurring presence of the television on during mealtimes in working-class backgrounds favoured family communication: 'the television continues to deliver to parents and children a shared distraction, facilitating verbal and non-verbal communication, through the demonstration of emotions, annoyance and laughter' (2018). The television was viewed as 'company' more than as a distraction that required constant attention. Masclat indicated, moreover, that the viewing of the television as a cultural practice in working class backgrounds was connected to the difficulty of spend time together in other cultural practices outside the households, contrary to middle and upper classes families.

It seems that, at the Comescu household (up. class), while both parents valued mealtime conversations, Irina, the mother, was the one making sure that both parents were involved in the exchanges with their children. When Laurent's children were younger, she found his attention was not sufficiently directed towards his family at dinnertimes:

**Laurent**: So at one point, I experienced burnout, a few year ago. So you notice, after a while. But also because there were some remarks from Irina. The kids were a bit small [...]. But also because we pay more attention to this, during week meals.



**Laurent** : Ben, parce que, à un moment donné j'ai fait un burn out, il y a quelques années, donc on s'en rend compte, à force. Mais aussi, parce que, parce que y'a eu des réflexions de Irina. Les enfants étaient un peu p'tits [...]. Mais c'est plus le cas, on fait attention à ça sur les repas des semaines.

In Adelaide, Amy Chapman (int. mid class) talked about arguments she had with her husband about the space conversations took up during mealtimes:

**Fairley**: Do you have any devices at the table, like TV on, the iPad, a phone?

**Amy**: Probably more yes than no. I'm not trying to throw Glen under the bus, but he is very much wants the television on and I can't stand the noise, and so we actually have arguments. I think, being a teacher, I have noise around me all day, all day. So for me, when I get home, I don't need that noise. I just want to spend the time with my family, just calmly talking to them, and then having that in the background can be quite challenging. So I, there are times when I crack it, and I'm like: "right, that's it! No-one's having anything!".

As with Irina Comescu (up. class) in Lyon, Amy seemed to be guaranteeing that mealtime conversations happened, at least when she considered there were upcoming events that required family coordination:

**Amy**: Unless, you know, there's something that's really important happening as well, that I'd be like: "Right, everything off. This is happening on the weekend. We need to talk about what's happening". So it might just, you know, that kind of family circle time, you know, having a bit of a meeting about things. So then it would be devices off, so yep.

In doing so, Amy positioned herself as the safe keeper of family communication and of the smooth unfolding of family events. Elsewhere in Adelaide, Luke Brown's (up. mid. class) description of the importance of family members getting together to eat did not reveal a special space granted to conversations, contrary to how his wife, Alison, described mealtimes as a good opportunity to have family discussions:

**Luke**: Getting us all together at the same, same place and same time is, is a positive thing depending on what's happened in the day [...]. It is good to just get everybody together and just get to eat together.

For Luke, the importance was placed on being together and eating together and not necessarily, additionally, conversing together.

Still in Adelaide, Craig Bennet's (up. mid. class) way of describing table talk also greatly contrasted with his wife Vanessa's discourse about conversational strategies. She developed on how she tried to get her children to take part in discussion, how she mobilised conversation techniques to trigger their interest. She was aware that, without these efforts, her children would not tell them much about their day. She also regretted that conversations were not as central during mealtimes as she would like them to be, in particular because she dedicated some time during dinners to prepare her food provisioning, but she still felt it *should* be that way. Craig, on the contrary, summarised mealtime conversation as (chit chat', minimising the efforts deployed by his wife:

**Craig:** Vanessa, really, most of the time, if she gets a chance, she's reading the food catalogues [laughter]. Reading it to see what's on special and figuring out what we're having for dinners. Yeah, generally it's just the bit of chit chat here and there, just ask the kids what they did for the day and that sort of stuff. We did used to sit down when Henry was first born and could start talking but we'd just ask what was your best thing about today and what was your worst thing about today. So we used to do that, but we don't do that as much these days so it's just asking the kids how they are and if they've had a good day and whatnot.

Craig did mention some of the conversational techniques they used to resort to but the differences in the discourse between the spouses seemed to translate contrasted expectations about the space conversation should occupy during mealtimes: as with many other dimensions of eating and feeding, Vanessa, as a mother, was more concerned with normative practices than her husband was.

The contrasts in the valorisation of mealtime conversations between mothers and father seemed to be more pronounced in households in Adelaide than in Lyon. Even if talking as a family appeared more important for the mothers than for the fathers of this study, the interviews with families from Adelaide revealed that parents struggled to get children to engage in conversations throughout the whole mealtime. And the contrary to fathers in Lyon who still talked about the importance of verbal communication during meals, although they did not participate as much in it as mothers – especially in lower middle classes –, fathers in Adelaide did not convey this normative discourse; they acknowledged more easily that children often resisted engaging in lengthy conversation with their parents. Glen Chapman (int. mid. class) from Adelaide described the different mealtime activities going on in his home: they often had the news on the TV, Amy, his wife might be reading the news or her emails on her phone, their children might have their own tablet on watching a show. In between these activities, they tried to fit in some conversations:

**Glen:** We can normally draw a bit out of them, of, you know, "What did you do at school?", "How was your day?" I mean, they'll sort of talk to us for 30 seconds, for a minute, and so we'll get a little bit out of them, and then they'll go back to eating and sort of watch their show and me and Amy normally sort of talk about our day [...]. We can usually draw a fair bit of conversation out of them as well and when it's something that it might trigger with them and it's something they actually want to talk about they'll turn away from their screen, and they'll sort of forget about that, actually engage in conversation.

The vocabulary he used – "get a bit out of them", "draw a fair bit out of them" – illustrated his children's resistance to mealtime conversations, mainly because they were more interested in watching their shows. Amy also acknowledged that conversations was not always her priority during the meals: at time she enjoyed that her kids were calmly occupied with watching TV – and then she tried to ignore the noise emanating from the screen. She also felt she needed to be on her own phone, taking care of personal elements:

**Amy:** So I, I guess it depends as well ... .. sometimes that can be a good thing, that it's like, right, they're all just settled, just block out the noise. Whereas other times that can be the most annoying thing. So it all, I don't know, it just depends, um, on the day, on, yeah, on what I value at the time.

Yet, although there were few occasions, family were also altogether in the house at the same at other occasions (at bedtime or when waking up, for example), which posed the questions of what mealtime conversations allow to sustain in terms of family relationships.

## **5.2. *Fathers distribute conversations turns and keep it for themselves***

Family mealtimes revealed gendered roles, differentiating mothers' and fathers' relationship to children and their place within the family. When it came to conversations turns, fathers demonstrated their paternal authority through the distribution or preservation of talk. Mothers tended to produce a sense of inclusion and cohesion through the distribution of conversation, and particularly by being more tolerant with children's interruption of conversation turns.

There existed a paradox of parental authority during mealtimes. The imperative of producing a convivial atmosphere that families tried to reach may have suggested that parental authority was softened at mealtimes, in particular with the imperative of maintaining a "light" atmosphere and favouring the performance of humour. Yet, when looking closely at fathers' role in mealtime interactions their authority was boosted through the management of table talk. If children interrupted a family member's conversation turn, which occurred recurrently throughout all families, fathers tended to either temporarily keep the conversation for themselves if they were the ones being interrupted, or make sure mothers preserved it.

Some fathers adopted a dominant hierarchical position by playing a central role in the distribution of conversation turn, asking children, for example, to let their mother finish speaking. At a lunch at the Bourdon household (up. class), Marie-Cécile was speaking about her brother, about how he did not work much for his French lessons when he was in school. After a while, she turned to me to explain a bit of the family context, and both their children tried to interrupt her, asking questions, as they were greatly interested by the topic. Benoit, the father, then intervened in the following way: 'hush, hush, let Mum speak' (lunch 5). At the Imbert household (up. class), another upper middle class household in Lyon, similar interactions took place. Magali, the mother, was explaining how they had reduced by half their consumption of meat since the first lockdown. Rose and Louise began fighting over something (unknown) after which Stéphane intervened, thus also interrupting Magali: 'Rose, Rose, we heard you, wait thirty seconds, please' (dinner 2, family produced video). These interactions show that, through the use of their moderating role, they were reinstating paternal authority, but they were also taking the risk of disturbing a convivial atmosphere. In another household in Lyon, at the Bourdon household (up. class), Marie-Cécile was explaining why her father, who was a doctor, decided to retire. This reminds Marius of an accident that happened to her sister and he tried several times to talk about

it. His father first hushes him, while Marie-Cécile continues to speak, but Marius keeps trying to intervene:

**Marie-Cécile:** Marius, we finish speaking, you can do it after

**Benoit:** After, you'll be able to tell Lucie's story

*Marie-Cécile continues to talk about her father*

*Dinner 2*

**Marie-Cécile:** Marius, on finit de parler, tu pourras l'faire après

**Benoit:** après, tu pourras raconter l'histoire d'Lucie

*Marie-Cécile continues to talk about her father*

*Dîner 2*

While Marie-Cécile preserved her own conversation turn, her intervention was still framed by Benoit reminding his son to let his mother speak. When interrupted, fathers tended to claim the conversation turn for themselves and do so by speaking up about their position in the conversational space. During a dinner at the Lebrun (int. mid. class) household from Lyon, Pierre asked me how was my weekend. His youngest son, Nolan, answered instead, to which the father replied: 'Hey, oh, we are speaking, I asked a question, I would like to listen to the answer' (dinner 2). Viktor Obecanov (int. mid. class) reacted in a similar manner when, after asking me about my holidays, his daughter Elisa (6) interrupted as she suddenly recalled her own vacation and wanted to speak about it. Laurent asked her to be patient: 'Hush, hey, stop, let us finish. The things you did, you can tell them later' (dinner 5). This happened several times during this dinner. At the fifth visit, Viktor Obecanov was talking about an anecdote he heard off, about a child being bullied at school. Elisa interrupted him to tell me she was going to be on TV, at her school. The father let her speak then continued his story, until she interrupted him again. He then reacted:

**Viktor:** I am the one talking now. You changed subjects.

*He continues to talk about the anecdote and then explain that he was also "bothered", like Elisa, when he was at school.*

**Elisa:** Mum ? Mum ?

**Viktor:** Elisa! Hush !

*He continues to talk about bullying at school.*

*Dinner 5*

**Viktor:** C'est moi qui parle-là. Tu as changé de sujet.

*Et il continue à raconter l'anecdote. Viktor explique que lui aussi, comme Elisa, il était embêté lorsqu'il était à l'école.*

**Elisa:** maman? maman?

**Viktor:** Elisa! Chut!

*Il continue à parler du harcèlement à l'école.*

*Dîner 5*

Viktor was also witnessed securing his own conversation space when interrupted by his wife, Sophie: this happened in the case of a conversation about bullying at school, and Viktor justified his refusal of being interrupted by the importance of this conversation for Elisa's wellbeing.

## 6. Conclusion

There were many family stakes at play around mealtime conversations. These related to a variety of issues such as children's health, their wellbeing and their educational development (including teaching them and learning how to take part in conversations), the demonstration of parental love, sustaining family cohesion. Family mealtimes were also occasions to reproduce unequal relationships, between mothers and father, but also between parents and children. The way mealtimes unfolded reinforced fathers as the custodian of parental authority and mothers as the guardian of egalitarian relationships between siblings and of family cohesion. Mothers, more often than fathers were witnessed asking children about their daytime and particularly about their homework and the food they ate. The fathers who cooked demonstrate their skills and affection through their cooking and asked to be recognised for it during the mealtime (Benoit, Pierre, Guillaume, Issa, Lucas), whereas mothers who cooked did not ask for forms of recognition of their efforts and skills. Overall, the unfolding of mealtime conversations responded to three imperatives. Getting children to narrate themselves and their daytime activities was a way to make sure their lifestyle away from home was 'healthy' in the global meaning of the term: parents, and often mothers, made sure they were doing well in school, checked what they had eaten at the canteen, looked out for potential bullying. Getting children to take part in mealtime conversations was also an everyday practice of socialising them into the rules of talking and listening in society. Finally, mealtime conversations participated in creating a collective memory and conscience of the family, or a "family spirit<sup>102</sup>" (Attias-Donfut, Lapierre, and Segalen 2002) by recalling past activities, and by sharing individual experiences, as well as the planning family projects and the 'resignification' of individual experiences, through their recognition, validation and by putting them into perspective with the 'family spirit.

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<sup>102</sup> Defined as 'a way of being with each other while remaining oneself, which is accompanied by the celebration of individualism and the promotion of autonomy, feature of the contemporary world, all while sustaining continuity bonds' (Attias-Donfut, Lapierre, and Segalen 2002, 9)



# Chapter 8. Mealtime conviviality, a maternal responsibility

## 1. Introduction

At the third dinner at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class) from Lyon, the menu was crepes. They had this kind of meal from time to time and it usually created the conditions for a rather pleasant and relaxed mealtime. The crepes were cooked directly on the table, on a machine that made small individual ones (*Figure 47 Crepes at the Lebrun household, third dinner*). Everyone could choose from a variety of ingredients set out for garnishing (savoury then sweet) and the eldest children were allowed to make them themselves.



*Figure 47 Crepes at the Lebrun household, third dinner*

The atmosphere was very pleasant, relaxed and cheerful and everybody seemed happy to be together at the table. Some kind comments were heard, here and there, between parents and children and the latter also demonstrated their excitement about the food and the drinks for dinner. For the occasion, the parents were also serving apple cider and fizzy apple juice and the eldest children were authorised

to taste some alcohol, which they were pretty thrilled about, and all the more as they got to pop the cork (Figure 48 Children getting excited over the exceptional drinks. Third dinner):



Figure 48 Children getting excited over the exceptional drinks. Third dinner at the Lebrun household

**Laëtitia:** Nolan, you wanted to taste the rosé cider, right?

**Nolan (9):** Ah no, not the rosé cider, the normal one

**Laëtitia:** Okay. You can have a small quantity

**Nolan:** The rosé cider, I already tasted it

**Laëtitia:** Okay

**Nathan (11):** Me too, me too

**Laëtitia:** Pierre, can you serve a small glass to Nolan? And Nathan, I promised him a small glass. Nathan, it's alcohol, how many times do I need to remind you that? It's alcohol. Usually, you should not get any, okay? [kind but firm tone]

[...]

**Chloë (8):** Dad, can I have some more alcohol?

**Pierre:** [raising his voice] No! Oh, hey, that's enough now!

[...]

**Lena (10):** Mum, each time I ask her for some, she serves me a bit of alcohol

[...]

**Nathan:** Oh, some Champomy! I did not have any. You all had two glasses [complaining]

**Pierre:** Oh, enough. Have you seen what you have already had there? [accusingly]

**Nathan:** I only had one glass

**Pierre:** Yeah

**Laëtitia:** And yeah

**Pierre:** The others have had cider. Had you preferred a large glass of champomy, you would have had a large glass of champomy

**Chloë:** I had one of champomy... hum of cider

**Laëtitia:** And I had one glass of cider and I don't complain, you know. For the moment, I drink my glass of cider



[...]

**Lena:** Dad? Dad? I want more of this!

**Pierre:** Lena, stop it, oh! [crossed, raised his tone again]! Now you're getting on my nerves! Here, go put this over there and you all stop it! I'm fed up!

**Léo (6):** You finished it [blameful]

**Lena:** Well there was no more

**Nolan:** Well you ended up having three glasses [blameful]

**Léo:** Four glasses!

**Nolan:** Mum, Léo had four glasses [unhappy, blameful]

**Pierre:** [loud huff, and angry] This is the last time!!

*Silence*

**Pierre:** [Still angry] What are you counting here? Drops that were in the glasses?

*Silence*

**Laëtitia:** [firm but calm] Next time, we will do an evening without crepes, without cider, without champomy

**Pierre:** Right

**Laëtitia:** We are treating you, you know, it's nice

**Léo:** Hmm

**Lucien:** On top of it, it as for the adults

**Pierre:** [Still angry] And you compare everything! Everything!

**Laëtitia:** Yeah, that's right, it was for adults, initially

**Lucien:** I should have bought more

**Laëtitia:** No, no, it's perfect

**Pierre:** [Still angry] Who, what, "I had more than you", more than the other". That's enough! We've had enough!

**Laëtitia:** [Calm]: The idea was sharing something, and never mind if one had a drop more, or a crepe more...

**Pierre:** [Still angry] ... but we want to share something, and you ruin everything

**Laëtitia** [same calm tone]: What is nice is that everybody has what please him or her

*Silence*

**Laëtitia:** So look, there is one left... [which is one that does not look enticing, made with the few drops of batter that were left] If anybody wants a crepe, it's now or never [laughter]

*The discussion continues on the crepes, but Pierre's tone now remains serious, which contrasts with his jolly tone of the beginning of the mealtime.*

*Dinner 3*

**Laëtitia (mère) :** Nolan, tu voulais goûter le cidre rosé., non ?

**Nolan (9) :** Ah non, pas le cidre rosé, le cidre normal

**Laëtitia :** D'accord. Tu peux en avoir un fond de verre.

**Nolan :** Le cidre rosé, je l'ai déjà goûté.

**Laëtitia :** D'accord.

**Nathan (11) :** Moi aussi.

**Laëtitia:** Pierre (père), tu peux servir un fond de verre de cidre à Nolan ... et Nathan ? Je lui ai promis un fond de verre. [ferme mais douce] Nathan, c'est de l'alcool ! Je dois te le rappeler combien de fois ? C'est de l'alcool. Normalement, tu ne dois pas en avoir, ok ?

[...]

**Chloë (8) :** Papa, je pourrais ravoir de l'alcool ?

**Pierre:** [ferme] Non ! Oh, eh, c'est bon là !

[...]

**Lena (10):** Maman à chaque fois que je lui en demande, elle me met un petit peu de l'alcool.

[...]

**Nathan:** Oh, du Champomy, j'en ai pas eu, vous, vous en avez tous eu deux verres !

**Pierre:** ...oh, ça va, t'as vu ce que t'as eu, déjà ? [reproche]

**Nathan:** J'ai eu un verre.

**Pierre:** Ouais.

**Laëtitia:** Et alors ?

**Pierre:** Les autres ils ont eu du Champomy, toi, t'as eu autre chose.

**Laëtitia:** Ben ouais, t'as eu du cidre. Si tu préférerais un grand verre de Champomy, t'aurais eu un grand verre de Champomy.

**Chloë:** J'en ai eu un de Champomy, euh, de cidre.

**Laëtitia:** Et moi j'ai eu un verre de cidre, et je me plains pas hein ! Pour l'instant, je bois mon verre de cidre.

[...]

**Lena:** Papa ? Papa ? J'en reveux de ça.

**Pierre:** [énervé!] Lena, arrête, oh ! Mais vous me saoulez là ! Tiens, tu vas poser ça à côté et vous arrêtez ! J'en ai marre !

**Léo (6) :** [reproche] Tu l'as fini.

**Lena:** [défense] Ben, y'en avais plus.

**Nolan:** [reproche] Ben, t'en a pris trois verres au final.

**Léo:** Quatre verres.

**Nolan:** [mécontent] Maman, Léo, il en a pris quatre verres !

**Pierre:** [il souffle fort, encore plus énervé] C'est la dernière fois !!

*Silence des enfants*

**Pierre:** [énervé] Vous voulez compter quoi là ? Les gouttes qu'y avaient dans le verre ?

*Silence*

**Laëtitia:** [calme] La prochaine fois, on fera une soirée crêpes sans cidre, Champomy.

**Pierre:** Voilà.

**Laëtitia:** On vous fait plaisir, c'est quand même cool.

**Léo:** Hmm.

**Lucien (21, neveu de Pierre):** En plus, c'était pour les adultes.

**Pierre:** [toujours énervé] Et vous comparez quoi ? Tout ! ...

**Laëtitia:** ... oui, c'est vrai, que c'était pour les adultes, à la base...

*Lucien commente qu'il aurait dû en prendre plus*

**Laëtitia:** Non, mais c'est parfait...

**Pierre:** [encore énervé] ... ' qui ', ' quoi ', ' moi, j'ai eu ', ' plus que toi ', ' plus que l'autre '. C'est bon ! Y'en a marre !!

**Laëtitia:** [calme] L'idée, c'est qu'on partage un truc, et peu importe si y'en a un qui en a eu une goutte de plus, ou une crêpe de plus...

**Pierre:** ... [encore énervé] par contre, on veut partager un truc, et vous gâcher tout !

**Laëtitia:** ... [toujours même ton calme] ce qui est sympa c'est que tout le monde ait ce qui lui fasse plaisir.

*Silence*

**Laëtitia:** Donc regardez, il reste... (*inaudible*), si quelqu'un veut une crêpe, c'est le moment ou jamais. [rire]

*Elle détend l'atmosphère avec cette phrase. La discussion continue sur les crêpes. Pierre n'a plus le même ton, il est devenu sérieux.*

Dîner 3

Family mealtimes were, in reality, commonly made of these burdensome moments, even when seemingly ideal circumstances were created for conviviality to flourish. Overall, varying emotions, sometimes of extreme intensity, circulated around the table at mealtimes. During this entire mealtime, happiness, love, fun, excitement, but also discontent, conflict and anger were experienced and demonstrated. The emotions quickly shifted from one to another and got out of control when not managed. Pierre and Laëtitia also reacted differently in the face of mealtime interferences. As the children began nagging at each other, complaining to their parents about unequal servings of apple cider or apple juice, they were steering away from the initial imperative being happy together, which Laëtitia reminded them about. Pierre easily got cross with his daughters and stepsons, who were moaning, asking to be served more. His discontent – which may have been triggered by his daughter

saying it was better at her mom's home – was noticeable in the words he used but most of all in his angry tone. Laëtitia reacted in a quieter, more pedagogical manner, by commenting on her own proper manners and by reminding the children of the 'feeling rules' that should direct their behaviour, understood as the emotional norms that dictate how one should feel in a particular circumstance (Hochschild 1983b). Finally, the arguments ended with her performing a touch of 'emotion work' (Hochschild 1983b), by working on her own emotional state to induce the proper emotions in others and ultimately a convivial atmosphere. She did so by calling back everybody's attention to the food and particularly to the crepes, which constituted, in this case, the fun activity of the mealtime. Her tone was light and she laughed while doing so. Pierre did not return to being as joyful as he was at the beginning of the mealtime: he remained serious and irritated for a while.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how mealtimes unfolded in the context of a relational family (Singly 1996; 2017) and around the making of the family through conversations. Here, I continue investigating mealtimes through conversations, but also through an emotional prism. I identify the different dimensions of convivial family mealtimes and seek to deliver a fine grained, grounded perspective on the circumstances in which conviviality unfolded or was hindered.

As with the other central dimension of commensality that I analysed in the previous chapters, mealtime conviviality was meant to sustain certain principle of contemporary family life: family meals had to unfold in a manner to strengthen family cohesion, allow space for the recognition and expression of individual singularities, all while fostering the demonstration of family affection. The combination of creating family cohesion and giving space for individualities meant that a certain equality or equity had to be reached in the space given to each family member. I also analyse how conviviality upheld commensality, and more generally strengthened family cohesion and fostered individual differences.

This chapter is mainly based on observational materials and, as such, our focus on the French families is much stronger. However, I did compare the results from the interviews of the parents from Lyon and Adelaide and there were some significant differences in terms of reference and discussion of mealtime conviviality that will be discussed below.

## **2. The management of discontent and conflict at the table**

The behaviours of a number of children – and sometimes that of parents – did not meet expected emotional conventions during mealtimes. These appeared as lapses in the unfolding of the meal and revealed, through parent's reactions to these interferences, the 'feeling rules' (Hochschild 1983b) that underlaid commensality and the associated emotion work. These disruptions happened at each

mealtime and throughout all families, even in the families who lived most according to normative expectations (upper and upper middle-class households). Parents' sanctions of children's *mis-feelings* led to clashes, revealing what these feeling rules effectively implied. For Hochschild "emotion work becomes an object of awareness most often, perhaps, when the individual's feelings do not fit the situation, that is, when the latter does not account for or legitimate feelings in the situation." (1979, 563). Various feeling rules applied during mealtimes, requiring suppressive emotion work. These rules were built in order to avoid isolating behaviours and antagonising conduct, which were detrimental to the appropriate performance of conviviality. Parents' reaction to children's 'misfeeling' and misconduct would either prompt the return of an agreeable atmosphere or, on the contrary weaken the possibility of reaching a convivial climate.

### **2.1. Isolating behaviours**

At times, during family meals, some children occasionally acted in a manner that set them aside from the rest of the family, thus weakening the commensal unity (for example: Rose and Louise Imbert, Nolan Lebrun). The most common form of this was complaining and sulking. At the Imbert household (up. class), Rose got into a bad mood four times throughout the meals. It was sometimes because she felt she did not have enough space in the conversation (dinner 3, video conf.) or she was served an unequal share of food (dinner 3, video conf.) or else because she – and her sister Louise – would have liked a larger portion than what they received (dinner 5). During the dessert of the fifth dinner, Stéphane asked his daughters what they would have liked to have: they both wanted a homemade yogurt but there was not enough for everybody:

**Stéphane:** [to Rose] You share it  
**Rose:** Oh [disappointed]  
**Fairley:** We can ....  
**Stéphane:** .. no, that's okay, we will share  
**Rose:** [sulking] I don't want half  
**Stéphane:** Magali, is there another yogurt left, or no?  
**Magali:** [speaking from the kitchen] Hum, no  
**Stéphane:** Ok, so you share it. Oh, stop sulking  
**Rose:** [Inaudible]  
**Magali:** Rose, you share it with your sister  
**Louise:** No, I don't want any [sulking]  
**Stéphane:** [hooting]  
*Silence*  
**Louise:** I would like some cheese  
**Stéphane:** Hop. Pass the camembert please, Rose  
**Louise:** [happy again] Oh yeah, I would like some Calendos  
*Dinner 5*

**Stéphane:** [à Rose] Tu fais moitié moitié  
**Rose:** Oh!! [déçue]  
**Fairley:** On va p...  
**Stéphane:** ...non, mais c'est bon, on partage

**Rose:** [boude] Je veux pas la moitié...

**Stéphane:** Magali, il reste un yaourt ou bien?

**Magali:** [de la cuisine] Euh non

**Stéphane:** Ok. tu fais moitié moitié. Oh arrête de faire la tête

**Rose:** [inaudible]

**Magali :** Rose, tu fais moitié avec ta sœur

**Louise:** Non, j'en veux pas [boude]

**Stéphane:** [siffle]

*Silence*

**Louise:** J'veux bien du fromage

**Stéphane:** Hop. fait passer le camembert ste plait Rose

**Louise:** [contente à nouveau] Ah ouai, je veux bien du Calendos

*Dîner 5*

Paradoxically, the reasons of Rose and Louise's sulking were based on them feeling excluded from the family unity, represented for the girls in the equal share of food – which they perceived as an unequal distribution of affection (Singly 2005). By complaining, they were disregarding a 'feeling rule' (Hochschild 1983b) as a form of contention. My presence was breaking up this equality, as I was served an entire portion and the girls had to share half a portion. In this case, it was Louise rather than the parents who produced efforts to repair the atmosphere: Stéphane condemned the girls' conduct by correcting them but Louise managed to quickly shift to a convincing happy mood, deciding that she would be content to have cheese instead of yogurt.

At the Lebrun household (int. mid. class), for the seventh dinner that took place outside on the patio, there were a few wasps flying around and the whole mealtime discussion and atmosphere temporarily revolved around this and how to avoid being stung by them. Nolan appeared to be particularly afraid of them and demonstrated his annoyance for longer than his stepfather would have liked him to. As he remained the only one being concerned about the wasps, he also shifted to a more somber mood, pouting. There was something exciting about fighting wasps together, but doing it alone suddenly made it annoying:

*Nolan starts shouting because he is afraid to get stung by the wasp. Laëtitia and Pierre tell him "hush", at the same time*

**Pierre** [Angry whisper] Stop shouting! It's of no use

*Nolan starts sulking*

**Pierre:** Oh she is not going to attack you!

**Nolan:** [moaning] Yes she is

**Pierre:** [angry, loud] Stop it, Nolan!

*Dinner 7*

Nolan se met à crier car il a peur de se faire piquer par la guêpe. Laëtitia et Pierre lui disent : 'chut', en même temps.

**Pierre** : [fort mais à voix un peu basse] Arrête de crier ! Ça ne sert à rien.

Nolan se met à bouder.

**Pierre** : Mais elle va pas t'attaquer toi !

**Nolan** : [boude] Mais si !

**Pierre** : A-rr-ête Nolan ! [énervé]

*Dîner 7*

While Laëtitia then tried to reassure Nolan, Pierre simply suggested that he leave the table and go eat inside. Nolan brought his plate to a small table a couple of meters away from where they were eating, to which Pierre reacted:

**Pierre:** You know it does not change a thing to go there

**Nolan:** Ah, she is following me!

**Pierre:** [mocking] Yes, she is following you, yes!

**Laëtitia:** [joyful] It's because you are handsome and she likes you!

*Then Pierre acknowledges, in a calm manner, that the wasps are indeed annoying this evening  
Dinner 7*

**Pierre :** Ça change absolument rien de te mettre là par contre

**Nolan :** Han, elle me suit !

**Pierre :** Oui, elle te suit oui [moqueur]

**Laëtitia :** C'est parce que t'es beau et qu'elle t'aime [joyeux]

*Finalement, Pierre avoue de manière calme que, en effet, les guêpes sont pénibles ce soir.  
Dîner 7*

Parental reactions to children's disregard of feeling rules also happened in gendered manners. Pierre got annoyed and mocked Nolan: he contained his annoyance by keeping his voice quite low, but the tone and his comments betrayed his reprimanding authority and his position as the safe keeper of a pleasant mealtime mood which, paradoxically, jeopardised an otherwise agreeable moment. Laëtitia, on the contrary, produced emotion work incorporating the appropriate 'feeling rules' (Hochschild 1983b) of content, love and fun: she tried to shift Nolan's attitude by being joyful, resorting to a humorous, cajoling comment. Overall, Laëtitia's behaviour reinforced convivial commensality while Pierre's weakened the commensal unity, first by adopting an authoritative and blaming tone with Nolan, then by suggesting he leave the table and, finally, by laughing at him.

## **2.2. Antagonising demeanours**

Antagonising behaviours between children at mealtime was firmly reprimanded by parents, especially in intermediary and upper middle-class households. It still happened and took the form of criticism, physical conflict, arguments and getting cross. Criticism between siblings was witnessed in some families (Imbert, Bourdon, Comescu [up. class]; Nimaga [int. mid. class] and André (low. mid. class) families]. At the Imbert, Bourdon and Comescu households (up. class), parents chided children if they were heard criticizing each other at the table. At the end of the first dinner at the Imbert household, we were playing where everybody told the most important emotion felt during the day and then wrote it down. Rose chose pride:

**Magali:** So Rose, why did you choose pride?

**Rose:** Because I was proud to be 5 and to behave like a 5 year-old little girl  
[...]

**Magali:** Okay. So write it down, Rose

**Louise:** [blameful] I don't think so, with the tantrum you displayed for us at the table [accusingly]

**Stéphane:** [quietly] Louise

**Magali:** [severe] Louise!

**Stéphane:** We are not asking for your opinion

**Louise:** [moaning] Oh... [Pulling herself together and adopting a pedagogical tone] We just want to know the emotions we have, we just explain why and that is it  
[...]

**Magali:** It's Rose who knows best, you know, what she feels, it's not you

*Dinner 1*

**Magali:** Alors Rose, pourquoi t'as choisi fierté?

**Rose:** Parce que j'étais fière d'avoir 5 ans, de me tenir comme une p'tite de 5 ans!

[...]

**Magali:** D'accord. Alors, tu écris Rose

**Louise:** Je trouve pas moi avec le caprice que tu nous as fait à table [reproche]

**Stéphane:** Louise [doucement]

**Magali:** Louise [sévère]

**Stéphane:** On demande pas ton avis.

**Louise:** Oh [boude, puis se reprend].... On veut juste savoir les émotions qu'on a, on explique pourquoi et c'est tout [pédagogue]

[...]

**Magali:** C'est Rose qui sait, c'est pas toi hein, ce qu'elle ressent

*Dîner 1*

As usual, when she lapsed in expected mealtime behaviour, Louise quickly shifted back, working on her own emotions by suppressing her frustration and becoming joyful, as she appeared eager to please her parents but also because she had integrated commensal norms and their related feeling rules as being the proper rules to follow. Here, it was the mother who adopted the most severe parental attitude, positioning herself as the safe keeper of equal treatment and conversation space (see. Chapter 6). Antagonising behavior was reprimanded by Irina Comescu (up. class) as well:

*Hugo criticises Lea in a whisper [inaudible]*

**Irina:** Hey, that's enough!

*Silence*

*Dinner 3*

*Hugo dis quelque chose, une critique envers Lea mais inaudible*

**Irina:** Oh, c'est bon !

*Silence*

*Dîner 3*

Children at the André household (low. mid. class) also regularly criticised each other but, here, the parents did not intervene as much in their interactions. For example, the three children could argue about conversation space, with one child complaining that the other interrupted him or her. Pascal interfered but rather to calm the intensity of the negative emotion (Lucas' frustration and annoyance) than to monitor the argument, which continued:

*Lucas starts to tell his mother about his lunch at the school canteen:*

**Céleste:** Hey, hey [trying to fit into the conversation]

*All the children talking at the same time*

**Lucas:** But I was already talking to Mum. No, Céleste-euh, I was already talking to Mum! Céleste only had one [sausage] right, but Enzo and I, we had two, right Gaspar?

**Céleste:** Yeah, I had two tied together. And the third was cut

**Lucas:** Wait Céleste, I was talking right now [angry]

**Pascal:** Hush

**Lucas:** Say you're sorry

*But she keeps on talking about her lunch, and Lucas does not manage to get back into the conversation, despite his several attempts and complaints against Céleste*

*Dinner 1*

*Lucas se met à raconter à sa mère ce qu'il a mangé à la cantine de l'école à midi :*

**Céleste:** Eh, eh ! [elle signale son intervention dans la conversation]

*Tous les enfants parlent en même temps*

**Lucas:** Mais en fait, je parlais déjà à Maman. Non, Céleste-euh, je parlais déjà à Maman! Céleste elle en a eu qu'un d'accord, mais Enzo et moi on en a eu deux. Hein Enzo ?

**Céleste:** Ouai, moi j'en ai eu deux attachés! Et la troisième, elle était coupée

**Lucas:** Attends Céleste, je parlais là!!! [énervé]

**Pascal :** Chut

**Lucas:** Tu dis pardon-euh!

*Céleste continue de parler et Lucas n'arrive pas à reprendre sa place dans la conversation, malgré plusieurs essais et ses reproches à Céleste*

*Dîner 1*

One of the most important commensal feeling rules was avoiding intense arguments. If this could not be followed, then family commensality itself fell apart. Eating together was actually eating without arguing. Magali Imbert recalled her childhood experience of family mealtimes: as a family of four, with her sister, her mother and her father, they used to always eat together, except for breakfast:

**Magali:** But breakfast was not at the table, it was everyone in his or her own bed, with a meal tray that my mother brought us every morning. So we did not have breakfast together. But it was because, well, you know, the teenage years, it was complicated with my father. We often argued at the table and so my mother wanted that, at least for breakfast, we could eat quietly without fighting [laughter].

**Magali :** Par contre le p'tit dej' c'était pas à table, c'était chacun dans son lit sur un plateau repas que ma mère nous amenait, tous les matins. Donc, on mangeait pas le p'tit dej' ensemble. Mais c'est parce que, bon, voilà, l'adolescence c'était compliqué avec mon père. En fait on s'engueulait beaucoup à table et du coup ma mère voulait qu'au moins, au petit dej', on puisse manger tranquilles sans s'engueuler [rire].

Here, it was Magali's mother who was trying to avoid arguments during mealtimes, and in this case, as they could not be avoided, she no longer saw the purpose of eating together, at least for breakfast. Put otherwise, eating together implied eating happily together, otherwise it was not worth it and commensality dissolved. At the Bourdon household as well (up. class), this rule of avoiding arguments at mealtime appeared. It was witnessed once during the mealtime and both parents immediately corrected their children's tone. Marie-Cécile was asking them about their summer camp and about the sleeping arrangements:

**Marie-Cécile:** But you were many girls, right?

**Lucie:** No

**Marius:** Five girls and the ...

**Lucie:** ... oh! Not five! Wait, I'm trying to count...

**Marius:** ... oh, well the boys, we were

**Lucie:** ... four girls, with me

**Marius:** So that makes five! [annoyed]

**Lucie:** [firm, crossed] No! Four with me! Counting me, that is four!

**Benoit:** Hush



**Céleste:** Hush  
**Benoit:** Let's calm down and eat  
*Dinner 3*

**Marie-Cécile:** Mais vous étiez pas beaucoup de filles, c'est ça, hein?  
**Lucie:** Non  
**Marius:** Cinq filles et les ...  
**Lucie:** ... oh! Pas cinq! Attends, j'essaie de compter...  
**Marius:** ... Oh, ben les grands garçons, on était...  
**Lucie:** ... Quatre filles avec moi  
**Marius:** Donc, ça fait cinq [agacé]  
**Lucie:** Non! [affirmée, énervée] quatre, avec moi! Si on compte moi, y'en a quatre  
**Benoit:** Shht  
**Marie-Cécile:** Shht  
**Benoit:** On se calme... et on mange  
*Dîner 3*

Both parents' reaction to this disturbance was done in a manner that respected mealtime feeling rules: the way they said 'shht' and 'we calm down and eat', with the less reprimanding 'we' appeared as a soothing, considerate reprimand. The Bourdon parents (up. class) also talked of occasions when they made efforts to avoid having to produce emotion work directly before and after mealtimes (Le Bihan and Mallon 2017): they anticipated that their emotional management would have failed and led to arguments, which would have spoiled the mealtime in itself:

**Fairley:** So the kids set the table?  
**Marie-Cécile:** Hum... with me [laughter]  
[...]  
**Benoit:** Yes [laughter], it's a bit of a fight. We try... There are times ...[optimistic]  
**Marie-Cécile:** Yeah, yeah, overall, it goes well. But when we don't want to fight to impose that they really do it... Well, we would need to sit down at the table without it being set. But, well, we have accumulated some potentially explosive situations during the past two months and a half...  
*Dinner 2*

**Fairley:** Donc les enfants ont mis la table?  
**Marie-Cécile:** Euh... avec moi [rire]  
[...]  
**Benoit:** Oui [rire], oui. c'est un peu la bagarre, on essaie... Ah, y'a des moments ... [optimiste]  
**Marie-Cécile:** Si, si si, globalement, ça va. Après, quand on a pas envie de se fâcher pour imposer qu'ils le fassent vraiment... Ben, il faudrait qu'on passe à table avec le couvert pas mis, mais bon, on a accumulé des situations potentiellement explosives pendant deux mois et demi...  
*Dîner 2*

Both parents were torn between how they would like their children to behave (setting the table without arguments), the fact that they did not always follow their parents' expectations ("c'est un peu la bagarre" / "it's a bit of a battle"), and the way they circumnavigated arguments with their children by setting the table themselves. Finally, the tension brought upon family relationships by the lockdown months justified Marie-Cécile's reason for "doing it themselves". This happened also after the mealtime, and more generally throughout the day:

**Marie-Cécile:** Hey, kids, fold your napkins please

*They come back to the table*

**Marie-Cécile:** Right. And after, go play, but elsewhere than around the table

**Benoit:** Yes

**Marius:** But I want to play in the lounge room

**Marie-Cécile:** Well, you can play in the lounge room, but you play there, so that you don't throw anything our way, that's it

**Marius:** Can you give it to me, Lucie, please [they want to play with the same toy]

[...]

**Benoit:** Lucie, please

**Marius:** The one who catches it can pull it

[...]

**Benoit:** You do it...

**Marie-Cécile:** No, you each get your own turn

**Benoit:** You take turns, I don't want it to be a subject of argument

*They go play in the lounge room*

**Benoit:** They are getting on each other's nerves since this morning

*Dinner 5*

**Marie-Cécile:** Eh, les enfants, vous pliez vos serviettes s'il vous plait

*Ils reviennent à table*

**Marie-Cécile :** Voilà. Et puis après, vous allez jouer, mais ailleurs qu'autour de la table

**Benoit:** Oui

**Marius:** Moi j'ai envie de jouer dans le salon, en fait

**Marie-Cécile:** Ben, tu peux jouer dans le salon, mais tu joues là, que tu nous envoie pas un truc à travers la figure, c'est tout

**Marius:** Tu peux me le donner Lucie s'il te plait [ils veulent le même jouet]

[...]

**Benoit:** Lucie s'il te plait

**Marius:** C'est celui qui l'attrape qui a le droit de tirer

[...]

**Benoit:** Vous le faites...

**Marie-Cécile:** Non, chacun votre tour

**Benoit:** Chacun votre tour, je veux pas que ce soit un sujet de fâcherie

*Ils partent ailleurs, dans le salon*

**Benoit:** Ils se cherchent depuis ce matin

*Dîner 5*

Céline also talked about mealtime arguments. In fact, the rule was not that disagreements and arguments could not happen, it was that they should not happen in a manner that got out of control, or was too intense emotionally, such as an argument ending in crying:

**Céline:** First of all, it does not end in tears [laughter]! Because that can also happen. No, but it can happen, since we talk at the table, it can happen that we argue also and that... you know. But it's usually related to the conversation topics.

**Céline :** Déjà ça se finit pas en pleurs [rire] ! Parce que ça peut arriver, non mais, ça peut arriver que, vu qu'on discute à table, ça peut arriver qu'on s'prenne la tête aussi et qu'on... voilà. Mais ça c'est plutôt lié aux sujets de discussions.

Negative emotions then had to be controlled in their occurrences but also in their intensity. Just as parents tried to avoid arguments from happening, the rule was also to avoid getting cross. In reality, this was regularly transgressed by parents, and especially fathers. At the Obecanov household in Lyon, during the fifth dinner, Viktor managed, on the contrary, to keep his emotions under control while reprimanding his daughter. Viktor's tone was very relaxed, and matched his words. But his need to

stress that he was remaining calm suggested this may have been quite exceptional. In reality, Sophie was the one who felt annoyed by Elisa; Viktor did not reprimand his daughter until Sophie told him she was fed up with her behaviour and that it had been going on for the whole day.

### **2.3. Gendered management of mealtime interferences**

The occurrences of discontent and conflict at the table were managed differently between the mothers and the fathers of the participating households, with the first demonstrating patience and consideration and the latter being more authoritative and severe. This echoed a stronger and more detailed presence of conviviality in the mothers' discourses about family mealtimes.

#### **2.3.1. Maternal emotion work and paternal transgressions**

The mothers from this study tended to react to lapses in children's mealtime behaviour by producing reparation emotion work, which was closely knit with the demonstration of maternal affection. The fathers reprimanded more easily their children as they found themselves legitimate enough to elude the rule, which meant compromising the pleasant atmosphere.

At the Imbert household (up. class), during the first dinner, the youngest daughter (5 years old) was served a smaller portion of quenelle than the rest of us, which she highly disapproved of:

*Magali serves the quenelles. As there is not enough for everybody, she cuts one in half, for Rose and her*

**Rose:** I also want a whole one

**Magali:** Well, we are doing half-half

**Rose:** No, a whole one. What is it?

**Louise:** A quenelle!

**Stéphane:** A quenelle and some broccoli

**Rose:** Ah

**Magali:** Come on, you are going to have half, it's a lot

**Rose:** No, a whole one. I wanted a whole one [she starts crying]. No!

**Magali:** When you will have finished this, you will have more

**Rose:** [to Louise, cross] You had half and not me

**Louise:** Am I not older?

**Stéphane:** [serious] Pull up your sleeves and put your napkin on

**Rose:** But I need to eat more!

**Stéphane:** [loud, cross] Rose!

**Magali:** [affectionate] Do you want me to help you cut your quenelle?

**Rose:** [sulking] I don't want to have a quenelle and a half

**Magali:** Half a quenelle

**Stéphane:** [threatening] Do you want to have none?

**Rose:** I want a whole one

*Rose continues sulking more*

**Stéphane:** [serving water, threatening] Well it would be a pity if you did not finish the meal with us

**Magali:** [joyfull] Bon appétit!

**Fairley:** Bon appétit !

**Stéphane :** Welcome!

**Fairley :** Thanks!

**Rose :** [cross] You cut it and I did not want you to cut it

**Magali:** Well cut it  
**Rose:** I don't want you to cut it  
**Magali:** Yeah, okay  
**Rose:** You did not even ask me  
**Magali:** [serious] Stop trying to be smart  
**Rose:** Well, I won't eat  
**Magali:** Well don't eat

*Dinner 1*

*Magali sert les quenelles, et puisqu'il n'y en a pas assez pour tout le monde, elle en coupe une en deux, pour Rose et elle*

**Rose:** Moi aussi j'en veux une entière

**Magali:** Ben on fait moitié moitié

**Rose:** Non, entière. C'est quoi?

**Louise:** Une quenelle!

**Stéphane:** Une quenelle et brocoli

**Rose:** Ah

**Magali:** Allez, tu va prendre la moitié, ça fait beaucoup

**Rose:** Non, une entière. Je voulais une entière [elle se met à pleurer]. Non!

**Magali:** Quand t'auras fini ça, t'en auras d'autre

**Rose:** [à Louise] Toi t'en a eu deux et pas moi! [fâchée]

**Louise:** Je suis pas plus grande?

**Stéphane:** Remonte tes manches et mets ta serviette [sérieux]

**Rose:** Moi j'ai besoin plus de manger

**Stéphane:** Rose! [fort, fâché]

Silence

**Stéphane:** Assieds-toi comme il faut, tu remontes tes manches, tu mets ta serviette

**Magali:** Tu veux que je t'aide à couper ta quenelle [tendresse]

[...]

**Rose:** J'ai pas envie d'avoir une quenelle et demi [toujours fâchée]

**Magali:** Une demi quenelle

**Stéphane:** Tu veux en avoir aucune?

**Rose:** Je veux en avoir une entière

Elle continue de râler

**Stéphane:** [en servant de l'eau] : Ben dis donc, ça serait dommage hein, que tu finisses pas le repas avec nous

**Magali:** Bon appétit ! [enjouée]

**Fairley:** Bon appétit!

**Stéphane:** Bienvenue

**Fairley:** Merci !

**Rose:** Toi tu me l'a coupée et moi je voulais pas [fâchée]

**Magali:** Ben coupe

**Rose:** J'ai pas envie que tu coupes moi

**Magali:** Ah ouai

**Rose:** Tu m'avais même pas posé de question

**Magali:** Arrête de faire ton intéressante [sérieuse]

**Rose:** Eh ben j'en mangerai pas

**Magali:** Eh ben ne mange pas

*Dîner 1*

The Imbert family (up. class) prepared most of the food they ate during the week on the weekend. Had I not been there, Rose would have been served an entire quenelle.

Magali's reaction showed how a light and jolly mealtime atmosphere was more important than the equal sharing of food. She first tried to cover up Rose's discontent with an enthusiastic "bon appétit",

and by resorting to diversion techniques: “tu veux que je t'aide à couper ta quenelle (plus douce)” / “do you want me to help you cut your quenelle (gentler)”. She ended up getting slightly cross as well, but only after she adopted a considerate tone, trying to convince Rose that being served a half portion was acceptable. As Hochschild noted, ‘failed acts of [emotion] management still indicate what ideal formulations guide the effort, and on that account are no less interesting than emotion management that works. The very notion of an attempt suggests an active stance vis-a-vis feeling’ (1979, 561). Stéphane’s first reaction to Rose sulking is interesting as it revealed the hierarchy in the various mealtime rules. He blamed Rose for not following the rule by getting cross, creating tension in the interaction, but it was Magali who ended up trying to re-establish the proper emotional climate. As Rose had already broken up the convivial atmosphere (in fact this transgression was provoked by the unequal sharing of food, because of my presence, which she was too young to understand and accept), Stéphane allowed himself to mobilise table manners to reprimand her: “sit down properly, push up your sleeves and put your napkin on”. This showed how a strict recall of traditional table manners was perceived as detrimental to a convivial atmosphere, but it could be consequently used as a tool to reprimand improper commensal behaviour. A similar incident happened at the third dinner at the Imbert household (up. class). Rose felt left out of the conversations and expressed several times her discontent. When she was finally given space to talk, she refused to do so and continued to sulk. Stéphane mocked her reaction while Magali remained patient and affectionate, thus defusing the tension:

**Stéphane:** Well, come on, you can try. Miss Pouty!

**Magali:** It will come back, sweaty, and if it doesn’t, that means it was not important

*Silence*

*Dinner 3, video conf.*

**Stéphane:** Bo, tu peux essayer quand même. Boudeuse !

**Magali:** Ca reviendra ma puce, et si ça revient pas, c'est que c'était pas important

*Silence*

*Dîner 3, video conf.*

Elsewhere in Lyon, at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class), there was also a quite clear difference between Laëtitia and Pierre in terms of incorporation of mealtime feeling rules. Pierre tended to get cross quite easily and corrected the children for their lapses in expected emotional behaviour, while Laëtitia also proved to be more patient and considerate, by adopting a pedagogical tone and sometimes cajoling the children.

At the Comescu household, there was also a marked distinction in the reaction of the mother and the daughter versus that of the father when conviviality was breached:

**Laurent:** Sometimes, they watch TV [after the mealtime]. At the moment, they are being crooks, they are punished, but otherwise they...

**Fairley:** ... why?

*The children chuckle*

**Irina:** They watch a bit of TV until 7:45

**Laurent:** And then they go read. [serious] But what are you punished?

*The children laugh*

**Laurent:** [serious and authoritative] No need to kick under the table, we see you

*Silence*

**Laurent:** You answer?

**Irina:** Because they are being good [laughter]

**Laurent:** They have been too good, so we have punished them [irony, bitter laughter]

[...]

**Laurent:** So why are you punished?

**Lea:** Because we have been too good [smile]

**Laurent:** [to me, serious] No, they are always at each other's throat, but kind of too much, they have gone too far

**Irina:** [more serious than before] To the point of fighting

**Laurent:** To the point of insult ..., yeah, really too far, to the point of threat and fighting

*Silence*

**Laurent:** We did not even do our family board game this weekend, it was a national drama. [to Hugo] laugh all you want, but it is true

**Lea:** It's been three weeks, you know

**Hugo:** No, no, no, sorry but, pardon, objection, Thursday, we did a board game in the bedroom

**Laurent** [serious]: When have you been punished, "objection"? Saturday. Since Saturday, have you played with me?

**Hugo:** No

**Lea:** [joyful] Dad, I am ready to beat you at the capitals games!

*The discussion becomes a bit more joyful, around this game*

**Laurent:** To spice all of it up, we said that if they beat me, if they beat us, we would ease the punishment

**Irina:** meaning we were allowed half an hour of game

**Laurent:** But since then, they argued again during that half hour of game

*Irina laughs*

[...]

**Irina:** Lea beat us...

**Laurent:** ... but Lea always beats us on everything, you know, on the countries of Europe, the cities of France

*Irina talks at the same time, but Laurent speaks louder*

**Laurent:** So now, I challenged her to beat me on the capitals of Europe, this weekend

**Irina:** Not, but she beats us flat. But if we both have 100%, she beats me in speed

**Lea:** Yeah, I had 36 second and she had 42...

**Irina:** [at the same time] ... well, I need to think

*Dinner 2*

**Laurent:** Des fois ils regardent la télé [après le repas]. Là, ils font les escrocs, là ils sont punis, mais sinon ils...

**Fairley:** Pourquoi?

*Les enfants gloussent*

**Irina:** Ils regardent un peu la télé jusqu'à 8h moins quart

**Laurent:** Et après ils vont lire. [sérieux] Mais pourquoi vous êtes punis ?

*Les enfants rigolent*

**Laurent:** [sérieux et autoritaire] Pas besoin de besoin de mettre des coups de pieds sur la table, on vous voit

*Silence*

**Laurent:** Vous répondez?

**Irina:** Parce qu'ils sont sages [rire]

**Laurent:** Ils sont trop sages, donc on les a punis [ironie, rire amer]

[...]

**Laurent:** Alors, pourquoi est-ce que vous êtes punis?

**Lea:** Parce qu'on est trop sages [sourire]

**Laurent:** [à moi, sérieux] Non, ils se chamaillent un peu comme chien et chat, mais un peu trop là, ils ont dépassés les bornes

**Irina:** [un peu plus sérieuse qu'avant] Mais jusqu'à se battre

**Laurent:** Jusqu'à s'in..., ouai, des bornes très fortes, jusqu'à menaces et se battre

*Silence*

**Laurent:** On a même pas fait le jeu de société familial ce weekend end, c'était le drame national. [à Hugo] tu rigoles, mais c'est vrai

**Lea:** Ca fait, trois semaines hein

**Hugo:** Si, si si, désolée mais, excuse, euh, objection, jeudi on a fait un jeu de société dans la chambre

**Laurent:** [sérieux] Vous avez été puni quand, 'objection'? Samedi. Depuis samedi, t'as joué avec moi?

**Hugo:** Non

**Lea:** [joyeuse] Papa, je suis prêt à te battre aux capitales !

*La discussion devient un peu plus légère sur le jeu des capitales*

**Laurent:** Pour pimenter tout ça, on a dit que s'ils me battaient, s'ils nous battaient, on allégeait un peu la punition

**Irina:** C'est-à-dire qu'on avait droit à une demi-heure de jeu ensemble

**Laurent:** Mais depuis, ils se sont encore re-chamaillés sur leur demi-heure de jeu

*Irina rigole*

[...]

**Irina:** Lea elle nous a battu...

**Laurent:** ... mais Lea nous bat sur tout hein, sur les pays d'Europe, sur les villes en France

*Irina parle en même temps mais Laurent parle plus fort*

**Laurent:** Alors maintenant, je lui ai donné le défi de me battre sur les capitales d'Europe, ce weekend

**Irina:** Mais non, elle nous explose. Mais mais si elle fait... parce qu'on a fait toutes les deux 100%, elle m'a battu en temps, elle est d'une rapidité

**Lea:** Ouai, moi j'avais 36 secondes et elle, elle en avait 42 ...

**Irina:** ... non, mais moi faut que je réfléchisse

*Dîner 2*

Laurent mentioned they were punished but in a humorous manner, calling them “crooks”. In this case, I was the one breaching the convivial atmosphere, when asking for what reason the children were punished. However, Viktor and Irina reacted differently to these lapses. Irina adopted a humorous tone (“because they are being good [laughter]), while Laurent insisted at first that the children explain why they are being punished. The latter are quite reluctant to talk about it, which was probably accentuated by my presence. However, Irina did not seem to want the discussion to become too serious either, as she laughed when Laurent mentioned they were punished twice. Hugo tried to throw some humour into the discussion by saying, “objection”, but his attitude remained quite defensive. Finally, it was Lea who performed reparation emotion work by saying, in a cheerful manner: “[joyful] Dad, I am ready to beat you at the capitals games!”.

### 3. The maternal praise of conviviality

The mothers’ discourses about the feeling rules that underlid family commensality revealed a complete integration of conviviality to the notion of eating together, as if the latter inevitably produced a convivial atmosphere. The fathers talked about the importance of having a good time at the table,

but their mention of conviviality was overall quite succinct. In Lyon, Céline Ferret described commensality as “naturally” convivial and opposed the pleasure of eating together to eating alone:

**Céline Ferret:** Yeah, for me, it's really an enjoyable moment and a moment when we gather. And you know, we always did that. There are a lot of parents who get their children to eat before they eat themselves because, hum, it's true that, then, they will be just the two of them, which I also understand. But then, she is a single child, I don't see myself getting her to eat alone. Maybe if they were three of them, we would do that, but now, I would find it a bit sad. In my family, naturally, the meals have always been a very joyful moment, very lively. And I feel like passing this on as well.

**Céline Ferret:** Ouais, pour moi, c'est vraiment un moment agréable et un moment où on s'retrouve. Et puis on a toujours fait ça. Tu vois y'a beaucoup de parents qui font manger leurs enfants avant de manger parce que, bah c'est vrai qu'ils se retrouvent à deux aussi, ce que j'comprends aussi. Mais, voilà, elle est toute seule, je me verrais pas la faire manger toute seule, tu vois ? Peut-être qu'ils seraient trois, on ferait peut-être ça, mais là j'trouverais ça un peu triste. Naturellement, dans ma famille, les repas ça a toujours été un moment très joyeux et très animé. Et j'ai envie de transmettre ça aussi.

Sophie Obecanov and Nathalie Franquet also closely associated being together with a shared positive experience:

**Sophie Obecanov:** But we try to make sure that we have a good time [...]. The most important is that we be together around a table, that we are able to be together.

**Sophie:** Mais on essaie toujours de faire en sorte que ce soit des bons moments [...]. L'essentiel c'est qu'on soit ensemble autour de la table, qu'on puisse être tous ensemble.

**Nathalie:** It is a rather agreeable moment, yeah, I mean for sharing. It has always been and it remains that way. It's very rare for it not to go well. It occasionally happens but it's really marginal that it goes badly. So, no, no, it's a moment that is important for all of us.

**Nathalie :** C'est quand même plutôt un moment agréable, ouais de partage quoi. Ça toujours été ça et ça reste ça. C'est très rare que ça se passe mal, ça a pu arriver mais c'est vraiment à la marge quand ça s'passe mal. Donc nan nan, c'est un moment qui est important pour tout le monde.

**Laëtitia:** And we have fun. Yeah, it's really a convivial moment. Yes, yes, it's really nice, it's really friendly. And now, since we eat outside, it's even more the case [...]. And we also have less time pressure. I mean, the kids work at home, I am on home office. Well Pierre has now gone back to work. And so I find we take our time more [...]. We really take our time, and we appreciate it, to take that time with them. So yeah, it's really a moment of sharing that is really convivial.

**Laëtitia :** Et puis on s'marre. Ouai, c'est vraiment un moment convivial. Oui, oui, c'est vraiment sympa, c'est un moment agréable. Et puis là, depuis qu'on est dehors, ça l'est encore plus [...]. Et puis on a moins la pression sur les horaires. 'fin les enfants travaillent à la maison, moi j'suis en télétravail... Bon, là Pierre a repris le boulot. Et du coup, j'trouve qu'on prend plus le temps [...]. On prend vraiment le temps, et on apprécie en fait de prendre ce moment avec eux. Ouai, c'est vraiment un moment de partage hyper convivial.

For Laëtitia and also for Sophie, being together and more specifically sharing was the basis for conviviality to happen. She also recognized that having enough time was beneficial for producing convivial meals.

Even if the mothers described the emotional atmosphere they would have liked to experience at mealtimes, they rarely explicitly talked about mealtime feeling rules that underlay the production of



convivial atmospheres. The observations made during the fieldwork were key to identifying and analysing the way conviviality unfolded according to a set of feeling rules, or emotional conventions.

Pierre Lebrun was the only father who explicitly mentioned a particular feeling rule, as he talked about the importance of avoiding being grumpy, or sulking once again:

**Pierre:** In terms of posture, we will remind them when there is one being pigheaded. No, that is not allowed at the table. So the one who is sulking just leaves. That type of behaviour, which is not part of the mealtime, which is more of an interference that arrives in the mealtime.

**Pierre :** En termes de tenue, on va les reprendre quand il y en a un qui fait sa tête de cochon, voilà. Non ce n'est pas permis à table donc celui qui fait la tête il s'en va voilà. Ce type de comportement qui fait pas partie du repas en fait, qui est plutôt une interférence qui vient dans le moment du repas.

Interestingly, Pierre's response to children pouting at the table was to exclude them, rather than trying to produce the emotional effort to get them to shift their mood.

When comparing interviews of parents from Lyon to those from parents in Adelaide, there was a difference: in Adelaide, there was no mention of mealtimes as needing to be convivial in the pleasant and fun aspect of the term, though there the importance of being together and communicating was explicitly. When pressed about their experience of mealtimes, and the mood, the answers revolved more around the occurrences when mealtimes did not go well:

**Vanessa:** Towards the end of the week – because Henry goes to childcare Wednesdays and Thursdays and because we're in the city, we've got to commute to the city and there's more travel – sometimes he might be tired as well, he hasn't had a sleep at day-care during the day. So I guess, you know, those types of things sort of contribute to the mood I guess. And then if he doesn't want to eat his vegetables and he's tired and, you know, you feel like you've got a battle on your hands. But typically it's not too bad and it's only sometimes when they're like "I don't want to eat", it's more so that they're just being grumpy, got attitude rather than the fact that they actually don't like it 'cause like, they like it, so.

When I asked Alison Brown (up. mid. class) from Adelaide how she felt about their family meals, she also answered by the negative, pointing out what was difficult for her. She first described them as being a necessity due to the lack of time they had as a family to be altogether during the day:

**Alison:** I think depending on my day [laughter]. So yeah, I do look forward to it. I guess the thing that I feel like I'm constantly reinforcing different things like sitting properly at the table, and you know not moving, sitting on sideways and stuff like that. But you know, that's part of being a parent. I think that's your role just to correct [laughter], so when they get to an adult, I'll just have my voice in the back of their head.

Overall, it appeared that the families from Lyon ate together more commonly than did the families from Adelaide. I have discussed in Chapter 4 the circumstances when families in Adelaide did not eat together (which occurred when there was too much time stress and conflicting activities). Perhaps, not being able to eat together was a form of *emotion work avoidance*. This hypothesis would need to be tested with materials from more families, however there was some indication coming from the Australian households of this study that managing family mealtimes was simply too exhausting,

emotionally as with Adam Ed confesses: “It’s just, it’s easier to get them fed first than trying to do both” (interview).

#### **4. The work of being happy together at the table**

##### **4.1. Pleasant and affectionate mealtimes**

The previous section has shown how, when lapses in emotional conventions happened during mealtimes, parent – and most often mothers – and children (as the emotion work of parents invites children produce emotion management also) produced reparation emotion work in order to balance the mealtime to a pleasant and more loving atmosphere. These efforts were revealed by the clashes that happened. A lot of the time, though, the family members managed to perform an agreeable, benevolent mealtime climate without apparent tensions, although this did not mean that a pleasant atmosphere spontaneously happened. My first impression of most mealtimes I took part in was that they went well, and that the overall mood was pleasant. Some of the ethnographic notes written right after the visits testify to this:

Dinner 2 – Lebrun: *The mood within the family and during the mealtime is very relaxed*

Dîner 2 – Lebrun : L’ambiance au sein de la famille et lors du repas est très détendue

Dinner 3 – Lebrun: *The mealtime happens in a very relaxed manner*

Dîner 3 – Lebrun : Le repas se passe de manière très détendu

If some of the meals were not particularly fun events, they still unfolded quite smoothly.

Dinner 6 – Lebrun: *The mealtime is rather quiet*

Dîner 6 Lebrun: *Le repas est plutôt calme*

Dinner 2 – Comescu (up. class): *The mealtime happens quietly; there are short moments of silence, but that does not seem to be awkward for them*

Dîner 2 – Comescu (up. class): Le repas se passe calmement ; il y a de courts moments de silence, mais qui ne semblent pas être gênants pour eux

Dinner 3 – Comescu: *The parents often make jokes, and we laugh a lot. Otherwise, the mealtime is rather quiet*

Dîner 3 – Comescu : Les parents font souvent des blagues et on rigole beaucoup. Le repas est autrement plutôt calme

Dinner 4 – Obecanov: *The mealtime happens quietly*

Dîner 4 Obecanov : Le repas se passe calmement

Affection was expected to be demonstrated through kind comments, but also through the sharing of food, by serving equal portions (or giving up one’s own portion to please somebody else), by showing appreciation for the food served:

**Laëtitia:** Nolan, do you want some goat cheese?  
**Nolan:** [inaudible]  
**Laëtitia:** Here, look, I'm giving you a slice. Can you cut me another slice, please, for me?  
**Nolan:** Okay  
**Laëtitia:** So, because I gave you mine  
 [...]  
**Nolan:** You are really sweat, Mum  
 [...]  
**Nolan:** I even gave you a large slice  
**Laëtitia:** Great, thank you  
*Nolan laughs. Pierre is standing, making the crepes*  
**Léo** [to Pierre]: Sat down, sit down, sit down  
**Pierre:** "Sit down". I am working now, my little man, I am making the crepes  
*Dinner 3*

**Laëtitia:** Nolan, tu veux du fromage de chèvre?  
**Nolan:** [inaudible]  
**Laëtitia:** Tiens, ben regarde, je te mets une tranche. Tu pourras me couper une autre tranche, s'il te plait pour moi?  
**Nolan :** Ok  
**Laëtitia:** Parce que du coup, je t'ai donné ma tranche  
 [...]  
**Nolan:** T'es vraiment gentille Maman  
 [...]  
**Nolan:** Je t'ai même fait une grosse part  
**Laëtitia:** Trop bien, je te remercie  
*Nolan rigole. Pierre est debout, en train de faire les crepes*  
**Léo:** Assois toi, assis toi, assis toi  
**Pierre:** 'Assis toi'. Je travaille là, mon grand, je suis en train de te faire tes crêpes  
*Dîner 3*

In a few households, some younger children occasionally got up to demonstrate and require physical affection from their parents:

*Céleste (4) opens her arms to give her father a hug, who leans over to receive it*  
 Dinner 2, family produced video

*Céleste (4) ouvre les bras pour faire un câlin à son père, qui se penche vers elle pour le recevoir.*  
 Dîner 3, family produced video

This type of demonstration was not always viewed as appropriate commensal behaviour:

**Stéphane:** Rose tends to want to have hugs every thirty seconds, to get up, it's annoying. And on top of that, it's really hard to, and also she knows it. It's so hard to tell her: no, you are not getting up. It's hard to refuse your daughter a hug. And that is why she plays with it, and it's annoying.

**Stéphane :** Rose, elle a tendance à vouloir faire des câlins toutes les trente secondes, à se lever, c'est chiant. Et en plus c'est vachement dur, et en plus elle le sait maintenant. C'est que c'est extrêmement dur de lui dire : non, tu te lèves pas de table, mais je vais te faire un câlin. C'est dur de refuser un câlin à sa fille. Et c'est pour ça qu'elle en joue beaucoup, et c'est un peu chiant.

Stéphane considered that Rose knew that such display of affection was not an appropriate behavior but she seemingly tested the resistance of the rule on the basis that this rule went against the circulation of family affection. Rose tried indeed to obtain hugs from her parents several times

throughout the visits. Her father always refused them, reminding her, after the dessert, that it was then a more appropriate time for such display of affection:

*Rose tries to interrupt her father several times; he is talking with me and does not pay attention to her:*

**Magali:** Dad, can I say something?

**Stéphane:** Yeah?

**Rose:** Can I give you a hug?

**Stéphane:** [serious] No

**Rose:** *Why?*

**Stéphane:** Because we are at the table

*Stéphane continues to speak to me. Later, at the end of the mealtime:*

**Stéphane:** If you have finished Rose, you can put away your napkin and go brush your teeth, wash your hands

**Rose:** [inaudible]

**Stéphane:** Yes, after you can have a hug, after having brushed your teeth, after having cleared the table. Same for you, Louise.

*Dinner 5*

*Rose essaie d'interrompre son père à plusieurs reprises, qui est en train de parler avec moi, avant qu'il ne lui accorde finalement de l'attention :*

**Magali:** Papa, je veux te dire quelque chose (petite voix)

**Stéphane:** Ouai?

**Rose:** Je peux te faire un câlin?

**Stéphane:** Non [sérieux]

**Rose:** Pourquoi?

**Stéphane:** Parce qu'on est à table

*Stéphane continue à me parler tandis que Rose se montre déçue. Plus tard, à la fin du repas :*

**Stéphane:** Si t'as fini Rose tu peux ranger ta serviette et aller te laver les mains, les dents.

**Rose:** [inaudible]

**Stéphane:** Oui, après tu peux faire des câlins, après avoir laver les dents, après avoir débarrasser la table. Pareil pour toi Louise.

*Dîner 5*

It also happened at the Obecanov (int. mid. class) and Lebrun (int. mid. class) households that a child got up to hug or kiss their father, but it was only accepted briefly and was usually followed by the father asking the child to return to her or his seat, or accepted in silence, without particular encouragement or demonstrative return of affection. The demonstration of family affection during commensality was expected to be interactional or based in the sharing of food only, rather than physical affection. Socialisation to table manners forbids, for public commensality, the demonstration of affections and as such, my presence could have increased the low recognition and the difficulty of some fathers to engage with their children through hugging.

## 5. The meaning of having fun at the table

One of the most noticeable ways that conviviality was successfully performed was through collective humorous interactions. As Laëtitia emphasised, a central mealtime feeling rule at their home was to have fun: 'And, well, we have a blast. That's it, it's really a blast. Yeah, it's really a fun moment' ("Et puis on s'marre. Voilà, on s'marre. Ouai, c'est vraiment un moment convivial" (dinner 1)). For Chloë

Lebrun (8, int. mid. class), having fun at the table constituted the major lure for eating together as a family:

**Fairley:** And meals?

**Chloë:** ... Very good!

**Fairley:** You really like meals?

**Chloë:** Yeah

**Fairley:** Why do you like meals?

**Chloë:** hum... because we eat... and also because, well, we tell lots of jokes!

**Fairley :** Et les repas...

**Chloë :** ... très bien !

**Fairley :** C'est très bien les repas ?

**Chloë :** Ouais

**Fairley :** Pourquoi c'est bien les repas ?

**Chloë :** Ben, parce qu'on mange... Et parce qu'aussi, en fait, on fait plein de blagues

Humour took up indeed a great space within table interactions and I follow Goffman in “treating fun seriously” (1961, 16). Here in particular, I looked at the unfolding and the meaning of humour and laughing on the level of the family members, looking at the generational, gender and social logics that underpin them (Flandrin 2021). When analysing humour, there is a risk to make sense of something that was not intended to be taken seriously. The caution needs to be on attributing the author with a false discourse. However, humour can be analysed as for what it is represented to be. Fun interactions are also often an expression of tensions and reveal gendered hierarchies and more generally family dynamics.

Humorous social interaction took place at most of the mealtimes observed at the Bourdon (up. class), Comescu (up. class), Franquet (up. mid. class), Lebrun and Nimaga (int. mid. class) households, and occasionally at the Imbert household (up. class). There was a great amount of teasing, mocking, self-mocking, irony and sarcasm happening. While these interactions successfully created a fun atmosphere – everybody laughed, albeit a bit forcibly in the case of excessive teasing – they were nonetheless based on the mobilisation of some of the most serious dimensions of family meals, therefore sustaining some central commensal norms: the necessary food work, the imperative of eating healthy food and socialising children to it, table manners and more general difficulties of parenting.

The previous chapters have supported the notion that children took up a pivotal position in family mealtimes. The analysis of humorous interactions revealed that, in this commensal dimension, fathers occupied a central role. The humorous exchanges seemed to be taking a greater part in paternal than maternal parental practices (Lahire et al. 2019; Lareau 2000a).

The socialisation to and through humour was also an integral part of private mealtimes and a central cultural capital that parents wanted children to acquire through and for the specific context of eating together.

### 5.1. *Conjugal mocking interactions*

Conjugal teasing was a particularly noticeable aspect of mealtime at the Comescu household. It happened throughout all dinners, but the third one was replete with occasions when family members laughed at each other, to the point that parents seemed to be creating a spectacle of themselves in front of a receptive audience: the children, myself and each other included. For dessert at the third dinner, Irina baked coconut and chocolate cookies. Laurent took a guess at some of the ingredients, adopting a connoisseur attitude:

**Laurent:** Is there a touch of salt in your cookies, this time?

**Irina:** No, I forgot to add some salt

**Laurent:** Oh really?

**Irina:** Yes, usually I add some salt but here I forgot

**Lea:** [laughter] You forgot to put salt!

**Irina:** You wanted to be smart, be the guy who can taste all the aromas [laughter]

*I also laugh*

**Laurent:** [to me] Hey, that is not nice, it's also not nice to tease

**Fairley:** It's a contagious laugh

*Laurent laughs a bit*

[...]

**Laurent:** It's kind of like this every evening [as in Irina teasing Laurent]

*Irina and I laugh*

**Fairley:** Is that so, children?

**Hugo:** I don't know

**Irina:** Oh...

**Fairley:** They don't take sides

**Laurent:** He does not take sides, he is not crazy

*Dinner 3*

**Laurent:** Y'a une touche de sel dans tes gâteaux cette fois-ci?

**Irina:** Non, mais j'ai oublié de mettre le sel

**Laurent:** Ah bon?

**Irina:** Oui, d'habitude je mets du sel mais là j'ai oublié

**Lea:** [rire] T'as oublié de mettre du sel

**Irina:** Tu voulais faire l'intéressant, le mec qui sent tous les arômes [rire] !

*Je rigole aussi*

**Laurent:** [à moi] Dis donc, ça c'est pas gentil; c'est pas gentil de vous moquer non plus

**Fairley:** C'est un rire contagieux

*Laurent rigole un peu*

[...]

**Laurent:** C'est bien un peu comme ça tous les soirs

*Irina et moi rigolons*

**Fairley:** C'est vrai les enfants?

**Hugo:** Je sais pas

**Irina:** Bo...

**Fairley:** Ils prennent pas partie

**Laurent:** Il prend pas parti, il n'est pas fou

*Dîner 3*

Irina's comments pushed Laurent out of the kitchen, repositioning her as the expert. Despite this, the scene remained a funny one and sustained the commensal unity as everybody and even to some extent Laurent, was laughing around the table. Irina also made fun of him for his inconsistent dietary practices:

**Irina:** So Nico, you are hungry? [laughter]

**Laurent:** No

*Everybody laughs*

**Irina:** So Laurent he goes: "oh, I'm on a diet, because of the lockdown". He does not eat much at lunch, so he annoys me, because we have a lot of leftovers that we never finish

**Fairley:** Oh, and so, the evenings...?

**Irina:** And the ...

**Laurent:** No, no, I don't make up for it in the evening

**Irina:** Well, yes, you do

**Laurent:** This evening is exceptional

**Irina:** It's exceptional every evening

**Laurent:** No, yesterday..., yeah, yeah, question yourself, considering what I just said. No, no, last night, I was serious

**Hugo:** We ate dry sausage

**Lea:** Sausage in brioche, and cheese triangles

*Silence*

**Irina:** Tonight, you can't take it anymore, restraining yourself for the past three days [laughter]

*Dinner 3*

**Irina:** Ben Nico, t'as faim? [rire]

**Laurent:** Non

*Tout le monde rigole*

**Irina:** Mais Laurent, il fait: 'ah, moi je suis au régime, après le confinement'. Il mange peu à midi, donc il m'énerve parce qu'on a plein de restes et on les fini jamais

**Fairley:** Ah, et du coup le soir... ?

**Irina:** Et le...

**Laurent:** Non non, je me lâche pas le soir

**Irina:** Ah si, quand même

**Laurent:** C'est exceptionnel ce soir

**Irina:** C'est exceptionnel tous les soirs

**Laurent:** [sérieux] Non, hier... ouai ouai, remets-toi en question, par rapport à ce que je viens de dire, non non, hier j'étais sérieux

**Hugo:** On a mangé du saucisson ...

**Lea:** Brioché, le saucisson, des triangles au fromage

*Silence*

**Irina:** C'est ce soir, mais t'en peux plus-là, de te retenir depuis trois jours [rire]

*Dîner 3*

This time he did not catch on to Irina's humour and felt the need to defend himself despite his children's comments supporting Irina's criticism. Behind her mocking laid her annoyance of what she felt was her husband's disregard for the food work she provided for the family. It was not so much his diet that she was criticising rather than the inconsistent pattern of his eating, which upsets her cooking routine. Yet perhaps, had I not been there, Irina's criticism would not have been coated in humour.

At the Imbert household (up. class), Magali behaved similarly towards her husband Stéphane, who was not fond of the pie she had made. Her critique, disguised in teasing, was based on the time she spent cooking:

*The girls eat an apple instead of the pie: they tasted it but did not like it*

**Louise:** Desserts are not really my thing

**Magali:** You see, it is not worth doing two hours of cooking

**Fairley:** Oh, there will at least be one who is grateful [Stéphane had told me he had a sweet tooth]

**Stéphane:** Yes, yes, yes

[...]

**Magali:** He is really grateful [irony], he gave the same grade to my pie than to the agreeable dimension of eating with you by video conference. This means three and a half per hour

**Stéphane:** Well next time, you will spend more time, you will have a better grade [irony, teasing]

*Magali laughs*

*Dinner 3, video conf.*

*Les filles mangent une pomme au lieu de la tarte : elles ont goûté mais elles n'aimaient pas*

**Louise:** Moi, les desserts, c'est pas trop mon truc

**Magali:** Tu vois, ça vaut pas le coup de faire deux heures de cuisine, hein

**Fairley:** Oh, y'en aura au moins un qui est reconnaissant [Stéphane m'avait dit qu'il adorait les desserts]

**Stéphane:** Oui, oui oui

[...]

**Magali :** Il est super reconnaissant [ironique], il a donné la même note à ma tarte que le côté agréable de manger avec toi par vidéo conférence. Ça fait trois et demi par heure

**Stéphane:** Ben la prochaine fois, tu passeras plus longtemps, t'auras une meilleure note [ironie, moqueur]

*Magali rigole*

*Dîner 3, video conf.*

Emotion work was at play behind these humorous interactions. Had emotional conventions of being happy together not been at stake here, and had I not been there as an observer of commensality, the remark on food work might have been less sugarcoated. Although, in the cases presented above, the humorous interactions created a conjugal divide, with Irina and Magali laughing at their husbands, the effect was ultimately the creation of a fun atmosphere for the children who take part in the laughter (and myself). In this sense, commensality reinforced commensal emotional norms. A serious tone during mealtimes bothered the commensals and hindered the staging of light and a pleasant atmosphere (J.-C. Kaufmann 2011).

The fathers in this study also teased the mothers in relation to the food work and this resulted in positioning the later as food provisioning and cooking experts, whose skills were such that it prevented them from doing it themselves. The most relevant example of this also took place at the Comescu household, during the third dinner, where conjugal teasing was a leitmotiv. After the dessert, Irina was explaining to me her cookie recipe:

**Irina:** Usually, there is an egg yolk. I put a whole egg because I don't know what to do with a white

**Laurent:** That is why it is always different

*The parents laugh*



[...]

**Irina:** Oh, I forgot to put the bit of salt that Laurent felt but that .... [laughter]

**Laurent:** But I promise, I tasted it

*Irina laughs*

**Irina:** You put some on the side

**Hugo:** The one that did not exist

[...]

**Irina:** Usually, it is at 180 degrees, but I put it at 200

*Laurent laughs, mocking*

[...]

**Irina:** And after I put, hum...

**Laurent:** You see, she says she follows a standard recipe, etc. [mocking]

*Irina and Laurent laugh*

**Laurent :** It is always like that! "Yes, I am following a recipe"

**Lea:** But it is really simple, actually: you mix this, then you mix that and then you mix all of it together and that is it, it's done

[...]

**Irina:** Yes, I never measure [laughter]

**Laurent:** Here it comes, here it comes: precision in patisserie...

*Irina laughs*

**Laurent:** "Yes, I follow a recipe to the letter": so that okay, by means of a dipper...

[...]

**Irina:** I feel it with the consistency [...]

**Laurent:** Once, I tried to make crepes, no waffle dough, the other time, instead of her. And I tell her: no, but how do you do? How many grams, etc.? "Well no, it's by eye!"

*Irina laughs*

**Laurent:** "So you take some flour, you put some water, by eye".... It's such a recipe [sarcasm]

*Dinner 3*

**Irina:** Normalement, y'a qu'un jaune d'œuf, mais moi je mets un œuf parce que je sais pas quoi faire avec un blanc

**Laurent:** C'est pour ça que c'est à chaque fois différent

*Les parents rigolent*

[...]

**Irina:** Ah, j'ai oublié de mettre le p'tit sel que Laurent a senti mais qui... [rire]

**Laurent:** Mais je te jure, je l'ai senti

*Irina rigole*

**Irina:** T'en a mis à côté...

**Hugo:** Celui n'existe pas

[...]

**Irina:** Normalement, c'est à 180 degrés mais moi je le fais à 200

*Laurent rigole, moqueur*

[...]

**Irina:** Et après je mets, ...euh

**Laurent:** Vous voyez, elle dit qu'elle respecte une recette de base, etc. [moqueur]

*Irina et Laurent rigole*

**Laurent:** C'est tout le temps comme ça! 'Oui, je respecte la recette'

**Lea:** Mais c'est tout simple en fait : tu mélanges ça, après tu mélanges ça et après tu mélanges le tout. et voilà, c'est fait

[...]

**Irina:** Oui, je mesure jamais [rire]

**Laurent:** On y vient, on y vient : la précision dans la pâtisserie...

*Irina rigole*

**Laurent:** 'Oui, je suis la recette à la lettre' : alors ça, c'est bon, c'est à la louche...

[...]

**Irina:** Je le sens à la consistance [...]

**Laurent:** Une fois j'ai voulu faire des crêpes, non, de la pâte à gaufre, l'autre fois à sa place. Et je lui dis, non, mais comment tu fais c'est combien de grammes et tout? 'ben non c'est à l'œil!  
*Irina rigole*  
**Laurent:** 'Tu prendre de la farine, tu mets de l'eau, à l'œil'...c'est tout une recette [sarcasme]  
*Dîner 3*

Now, it was Laurent's turn to put Irina on the spot. His mocking of Irina's cooking practices, - which remained obscure for him but were to be considered as mastery for Irina – justified his disengagement from the food work. Even if he tried to cook instead of her, the absence of a proper recipe constituted an obstacle for him. At another dinner at the Comescu household, Laurent's jokes positioned Irina as the food provisioning expert, but more particularly as the expert for feeding the family healthy food:

**Lea:** We have never opened as many [chocolate] bars  
**Laurent:** Oh really, you are telling on us?  
*Irina laughs*  
**Laurent:** Mum, she is giving in, now  
*Dinner 2*

**Lea:** On n'a jamais ouvert autant de tablettes [de chocolat]  
**Laurent:** Ah ouai, tu balances?  
*Irina rigole*  
**Laurent:** Maman elle craque là.  
*Dîner 2*

Similar conjugal interactions happened at the Lebrun household (int. mid. class) from Lyon. Although it was much rarer and was intended with greater irony, the purpose was also to reposition Laëtitia as the maternal figure typically in charge of baking:

**Pierre:** [teasing] And the cake? Where is the cake?  
**Laëtitia:** [serious] Well, I did not really have time to do it this afternoon, you know  
**A child:** Cake!  
**Another child:** Tomorrow!  
**Yet another child:** Cake! Cake!  
*Dinner 2*

**Pierre:** [taquin] Et le gâteau? Il est où le gâteau, d'ailleurs?  
**Laëtitia:** [sérieuse] Ben, j'ai pas vraiment eu le temps de la faire cette aprem, en fait  
**Un enfant:** Le gâteau !  
**Un autre enfant:** Demain !  
**Encore un autre:** Le gâteau, le gâteau!  
*Dîner 2*

Here again, this form of mocking strengthened a convivial atmosphere: the one who is mocking, i.e. the father, managed to associate the children to the humorous interaction. At the second dinner at the André household (low. mid. class), Angélique and Pascal had their dessert after the children had had theirs and had left the table. They both expected each other to be served their dessert by the other: Pascal got up to wash the apple that Angélique would have:

**Angélique :** Chocolate?  
**Pascal :** Yeah

**Angélique** : Now didn't we buy a tablet of chocolate earlier on? Did we buy it, or did we not buy it, in the end?

**Pascal**: Well, you did not buy it. I asked you, but you never answered, so...

*She sighs*

**Pascal**: Or you did not listen

*Angélique is seated while Pascal is up washing her apple but he comments that she has not got out the chocolate from the fridge for him:*

**Angélique**: Oh sorry

*She gets up to get the chocolate*

**Pascal**: But otherwise, never mind [irony, smile]

**Angélique**: Which one do you want

**Pascal**: Well as usual

**Angélique**: She returns with the wrong chocolate bar:

**Pascal**: No, as usual, in the evening, is ... [smile]

**Angélique**: Well... [she sighs and returns to the fridge]

**Pascal**: Oh, you don't live here...

**Angélique**: "I don't live here", me [mocking] [...]. Well last time, you had this one, may I say

**Pascal**: No, no, I always have this one

**Angélique**: ... liar, that is not..., liar [she gives a quick look to the camera, as a witness]

**Pascal**: "It's not true ma'am" [raising a finger, also having a look at the camera]

**Angélique**: [low voice] Liar

*Dinner 2*

**Angélique**: Chocolat?

**Pascal**: Ouai

**Angélique**: On avait pas acheté une tablette de chocolat tout à l'heure, là? On l'a acheté ou on l'a pas acheté, finalement?

**Pascal**: Ben, tu l'as pas acheté. Je t'ai demandé, mais tu m'as jamais répondu, donc...

*Elle souffle*

**Pascal**: Ou tu m'as pas écouté

*Angélique est assise pendant que Pascal lave sa pomme et commente le fait qu'elle n'a pas sorti le chocolat du frigo pour lui :*

**Angélique**: Ah, pardon [elle se lève pour aller chercher le chocolat]

**Pascal**: Non, mais sinon, c'est pas grave, hein [ironie, rire]

**Angélique**: Lequel tu veux?

**Pascal**: Ben, comme d'habitude

*Elle revient avec une tablette, visiblement la mauvaise :*

**Pascal**: Non, comme d'habitude, le soir, c'est... [il sourit]

**Angélique**: Ba... [elle soupire et retourne au frigo]

**Pascal**: Ah, t'habites pas là...

**Angélique**: J'habite pas ici, moi [moqueuse]

*Pascal pose la pomme pour Angélique sur la table*

**Angélique**: Ba la dernière fois, t'as pris c'lui-là, je te signale

**Pascal**: Non non, je prends toujours celui-là...

**Angélique**: ... menteur, c'est pas..., menteur [elle se retourne un peu vers la caméra, comme témoin]

**Pascal**: 'c'est pas vrai madame' [dit-il en l'imitant et en levant le doigt, jetant un coup d'oeil à la caméra, rire]

**Angélique**: [à voix basse] menteur

*Dîner 2*

Here also, Pascal's humour is constructed upon Angélique's role as food provider, and especially as a provider who knew and anticipated what he liked. The humour performed here also seemed to be enhanced by the presence of a camera recording them, emphasising, again, that family mealtimes performed in front of an audience needed to be fun, even if it concerned more serious topics as food

providers' role. At times, mothers anticipated any criticism about their providing practices, by resorting to self-mockery:

**Pascal:** Did you tell Lucas there were no more gressin?

**Angélique:** Well never mind, we say he will have cookies

**Pascal:** Oh [doubting]

**Angélique:** [ironie]: Well yeah, it is written on the box, that it is a balanced meal

*Dinner 2*

**Pascal:** T'as dit à Lucas qu'y avait plus de gressin?

**Angélique:** Ben, c'est pas grave, il prendra des p'tits beurre, on a dit

**Pascal:** ah [dubitatif]

**Angélique:** [ironie] Mais si, c'est marqué sur la boîte, que c'est un repas équilibré!

*Dîner 2*

Parents' conjugal teasing seemed to sustain convivial commensality as the humour was performed in a way that was quite inclusive, such as either the children and or myself as an observer (in person or through the camera) felt included and were able to laugh together.

## **5.2. Intergenerational teasing**

Most of the humorous exchanges were addressed to children. Here again, the teasing was based on rather serious topics, such as commensal norms: children's socialisation to healthy food as well as children's integration of table manners. Occasionally, topics such as food work, ways of participating in mealtime conversations or general annoyance of children were mobilised. The basis for the humorous interactions addressed to children was similar between fathers and mothers, but overall, the fathers seemed to taunt their children more than mothers did, especially concerning their failed socialisation to healthy food and their disrespect of table manners.

### **5.2.1. A fun way to recall rules of healthy food**

Many of the mealtime jokes that were observed revolved around the food eaten and particularly focused on concerns about feeding or eating healthy food. At the Bourdon household (up. class), both parents lightly teased their children's dislike of certain foods, in an ironical way. This was recurring throughout the meals:

**Benoit:** [to Lucie] Young girls, you don't like potatoes and not so much green beans, right? [irony, in reality, it the contrary] Oh right, we said no more jokes, I'm sorry. I'm sorry Lucie

**Marie-Cécile :** We said no more jokes

**Marius:** That's okay, you can do some jokes, but not too many

*Dinner 2*

**Benoit:** [à Lucie] Jeune fille, tu aimes pas les pommes de terre et pas trop les haricots verts, c'est ça? [Ironique. En réalité, c'est l'inverse] Ah oui, on avait dit plus de blague, j'suis désolée. J'suis désolée Lucie

**Marie-Cécile:** On a dit plus de blague

**Marius:** C'est pas grave, vous pouvez en faire certaines, mais pas trop

*Dîner 2*

Later on during the mealtime, I asked the children what they ate at lunch, at home. They had difficulty remembering so Marie-Cécile helped them, hinting it was Lucie's favourite dish. Both children replied together "cauliflower gratin". In reality, they had had a zucchini gratin, which Lucie disliked. Lucie then added "no jokes!". Behind Benoit and Marie-Cécile's teasing lied their hope that their children would come to like a variety of vegetables, and that their dislike of certain foods was a temporary one. In many households, there was something serious in parents' jokes addressed to children, and particularly at the Bourdon household (up. class):

**Marie-Cécile:** [to me] Quite quickly [after having begun to eat altogether], they told us: "no, but stop it with your boring jokes, it's not funny" [...]. And now, we agreed on three jokes per meal

**Lucie:** No, three jokes per day

**The parents:** No!

**Marie-Cécile:** No, we said three per day was not enough!

**Benoit:** That is not possible, three jokes per day, we will never make it

**Fairley:** It's sad [laughter]

**Marie-Cécile:** If we do three jokes per day, you do half a Pokemon episode

**Lucie:** [high pitched voice]: Half!?

**Benoit:** [imitating his daughter, in a high pitched voice]: "Oh no, that is not possible Mum, that is not possible"

**Lucie:** That is not possible!

**Marie-Cécile:** Well, you see, it's exactly the same with us and jokes

*Dinner 2*

**Marie-Cécile:** [à moi] Très vite ils nous ont dit [après avoir commencé à manger tous ensemble]: ' non, mais arrêtez de faire des pauv' blagues, c'est pas drôle ' [...]. Et là, on est tombé d'accord sur trois blagues par repas

**Lucie:** Non, trois blagues par jour

**Les parents, ensemble:** Non!

**Marie-Cécile:** Non a dit: trois par jours, c'était pas assez

**Benoit:** C'est pas possible, trois blagues par jour, on va jamais y arriver

**Fairley:** C'est triste [rire]

**Marie-Cécile:** Si nous on fait trois blagues par jour, vous faites un demi épisode de Pokemon

**Lucie:** [avec une voix aigüe]: Un demi !?

**Benoit:** [qui imite sa fille]: 'Ah non, ça c'est pas possible Maman, ça c'est pas possible'

**Lucie:** C'est pas possible!

**Marie-Cécile:** Ben tu vois, c'est exactement pareil pour nous avec les blagues.

*Dîner 2*

Children's dislike of their parents jokes addressed to them indicated that many humorous interactions addressed to children were in reality disguised manners to socialised children to normative food and commensal norms (which was why children did not find them funny).

Similar interactions happened at the André household (low. mid. class) from Lyon, but in this case, Angélique's comment was more sarcastic and pointed to her resignation that her son would not eat any chicory:

**Angélique :** [sarcasm], Enzo, a bit of chicoree?

**Enzo:** Can I have more magic pasta?

*Dinner 1*

**Angélique:** [sarcasme] Enzo, une ptite endive?

**Enzo:** J'peux encore avoir des pâtes magiques?

*Dîner 1*

At the Lebrun household, Pierre made fun of his children or step children, not on the basis of their dislike of certain vegetables, like with the Bourdon (up. class) and the André (low. mid. class) families, but because of their unhealthy eating habits, such as eating too much fat or sugar. They were a few wasps flying around, on and off, at the seventh dinner at the Lebrun household; at the end of the mealtime, Nolan commented they were back, time in the meat dish. Pierre replied to ignore them, adding : “Par contre, quand le gras que t’as mangé va transpirer sur ta peau, elles vont toutes venir sur toi [rire]”. This was all the more ironical as Léo ate everything he was served, that is some grilled chicken and some vegetables. Yet still, by doing so, Pierre reminded his sons that it was best not to eat too much greasy meat. At another occasion, on the sixth dinner, Laëtitia’s children commented that they loved the food they were served at their father’s:

**Nolan :** Mum, it’s so cool at Dad! Do you know why?

**Laëtitia:** Why?

**Nolan:** Because we have, actually, a kind of yogurt, and we always have MaronSui’s, which means the dessert are MaronSui’s

**Pierre:** Oh well that great [mocking]

**Laëtitia:** Hmm, and you have coca [disapproving]

**Nathan:** Yeah, Dad only buys packs

**Laëtitia:** Yeah, I know

**Nolan:** It’s paradise at Dad’s [laughter]

**Pierre:** Yeah, right, paradise [serious, irony]

**Nathan:** Coca is nice. We shouldn’t have too much

**Laëtitia:** I was thinking, you should also go at their father [laughter]

*Dinner 6*

**Nolan:** Maman, c’est trop bien chez Papa! Tu sais pourquoi?

**Laëtitia:** Pourquoi?

**Nolan:** Parce qu’on a, en fait, une espèce de yaourt, et on prend toujours des MaronSui’s, ça veut dire que les desserts, c’est le MaronSui’s

**Pierre:** Ah, ben c’est top hein [moqueur]

**Laëtitia:** Hmm, et vous avez du coca [désapprobatrice]

**Nathan:** Ouais, Papa il achète que des packs de quinze

**Laëtitia:** Ouais, je sais

**Nolan:** C’est le paradis, chez Papa [rire]

**Pierre:** Ouais, le paradis, ouai [sérieux, ironique]

**Nathan:** C’est bon le coca. Faut pas trop en abuser

**Laëtitia:** [à moi] Je me disais, tu devrais aussi aller chez leur père [rire]

*Dîner 6*

Both parents visibly disapproved of the type of food Nolan and Nathan were served at their father’s. Yet Laëtitia and Pierre voiced their disapproval differently. Laëtitia remained more neutral in her comments while Pierre’s ironical comment was more severe creating a slight tension, which Nathan caught on. As he was often eager to please adults, he added a responsible comment about the unhealthiness of Coca-Cola. Finally, Laëtitia lightened up the mood, laughing and tightening the

commensal unity again: by positioning her family against her ex-husbands' one, she reinforced the unity of her family.

In families with children of an older age, the teasing could become a bit more sarcastic. During the third dinner, the Franquet family was having carbonara pasta and roasted tomatoes. Nathan is very picky about the tomatoes: he did not like if they were too soft:

**Nathalie:** If you do not finish your tomato, you don't have any carbonara

**Marco:** Hey, that is blackmail

**Nathalie:** Exactly, that is the only thing that works with you [annoyed, self-mocking]

*Dinner 3*

**Nathalie:** Si tu finis pas ta tomate, t'as pas de carbonara

**Marco:** Eh, c'est du chantage

**Nathalie:** Grave, y'a que comme ça que ça marche avec toi [agacée, un peu de dérision]

*Dîner 3*

Children also sometimes teased their parents on their feeding practices, although this remained quite rare

**Louise:** When Dad does not want, Mum is always there [to give the food she wants]

*Silence*

**Stéphane:** Ah hum

**Magali:** *I did not hear [irony]*

*Stéphane laughs*

**Magali:** The sound is not coming through

*They laugh*

*Dinner 3, video conf.*

**Louise:** Quand Papa veut pas, y'a toujours Maman qui est là [pour lui donner à manger ce qu'elle veut]

*Silence*

**Stéphane:** Ah humm

**Magali:** J'ai pas entendu [ironique]

**Stéphane** rigole

**Magali:** Le son passe pas bien

*Ils rigolent*

*Dîner 3*

Overall, the failure to provide or eat a healthy diet was a common and successful basis for creating humour at the table.

### 5.2.2. Mocking table manners and socialising to food work

Mealtime jokes were also a way to socialise children to proper commensal rules. As with feeling rules, fathers positioned themselves as the guardian of table manners. They sometimes did so by basing their jokes on children's lack of table manners. At the Comescu household (up. class), both Hugo (10) and Lea (7) seemed to be behaving more "properly" during the visits, presenting themselves as model commensals, which Laurent did not fail to mock:

**Hugo:** Lea, usually, we do it this way: put your napkin below [on the knees]

**Laurent:** [laughter] Hey, I can't believe it [laughter]

*The children laugh*

**Laurent:** Yeah, it is always that like, right? Usually, you help and demonstrate proper practices, is that right? Yeah, of course [irony]

*The children continue to laugh*

Dinner 2

**Hugo:** Lea, normalement on fait comme ça: mets ta serviette en dessous [sur les genoux]

**Laurent:** [Rire] Eh, non mais [rire]

*Les enfants rigolent.*

**Laurent:** Ouais, c'est tout le temps comme ça hein : c'est toi, d'habitude, qui aide et tout et qui donne des bonnes pratiques, c'est ça? Ouai, bien sûr [ironie]

*Les enfants continuent de rigoler.*

Dîner 2

**Lea:** Dad, can I have some water please?

**Laurent:** Of course Lea

**Hugo:** And me too, can you get me some water Lea, darling, please?

**Irina:** [Laughter] Stop it...

**Fairley:** I feel that this is a bit of a exaggerated...

**Irina:** Yeah

**Fairley:** Am I wrong?

**Laurent:** Hardly [sarcasm]

*Silence*

Dîner 3

**Lea:** Papa, je peux avoir de l'eau stp?

**Laurent:** Bien-sûr Lea

**Hugo:** Et à moi aussi, tu peux me servir Lea chérie stp?

**Irina:** [Rire] Arrête de...

**Fairley:** Je sens que là, c'est un p'tit peu poussé...

**Irina:** Ouai [rire]

**Fairley:** Je me trompe?

**Laurent:** A peine [sarcasme]

*Silence*

Dîner 3

By playing around with table manners, children also showed their mastery of them (and Lucie Bourdon, 6, up.mid. class, was also witness in similar performances). Parents made fun of their children for modeling behaviours that they did not usually follow as strictly during private commensality, but overall, children had well integrated the table manners, and were able to display them in front of a guest, in a quite humorous for that matter. At the Imbert household (up. class), Stéphane teased his daughters by mocking his own authority on post mealtime rules:

**Stéphane** [to Louise] Bring this [dish]. Go wash your hands, your teeth

**Louise:** Yes Dad

**Stéphane:** Go take your shower [humour], put your pyjamas on and off to bed!

**Louise:** Oh no !

**Magali:** Oh no, we are lunch time [complicity]

**Stéphane:** Oh, it's lunch time? [pretending surprise] Oh, sorry

**Fairley:** [laughter] That is waht I thought, that is surprising

**Stéphane:** It's the hour of the mandatory nap for everyone [irony]

*Lunch 4*

**Stéphane:** [à Louise] Tu amènes ça [un plat]. Tu vas le laver les mains, les dents



**Louise:** Oui, Papa  
**Stéphane:** Tu vas prendre ta douche [humour], tu te mets en pyjama et au lit!  
**Louise:** Ah non!  
**Magali:** Ah non, on est midi [complicité]  
**Stéphane:** Ah non, on est midi?! [feint le surprise] Ah, pardon...  
**Fairley:** [Rire] Je me disais, c'est étonnant quand même  
**Stéphane:** c'est l'heure de la sieste obligatoire pour tout le monde [ironie]

*Lunch 4*

Most of the time, though, the father mocked children for not following the expected mealtime behaviours. During the second dinner At the Lebrun household, Chloë created an interference by putting too much food in her mouth at once, leading her father to correct her way of eating, in a serious manner. A while later, Chloë had finally been able to chew and swallow all the meat she had put in her mouth. Pierre then shifted his tone to mockery:

**Pierre:** Next time, eat less, that will prevent you from: "Watch out! Ready? Go with the pie!"

*Everybody laughs*

**Chloë:** Ready! [she imitates eating quickly her pie]

**Pierre:** No, come on, that's enough [serious]

*Dinner 2*

**Pierre:** La prochaine fois, tu mangeras moins, ça évitera de. : 'tention! t'es prêt? top chrono pour la tarte!'

*Tout le monde rigole*

**Chloë:** Prête! [she imitates eating quickly her pie]

**Pierre:** Mais non, c'est bon [sérieux]

*Dîner 2*

Benoit also reprimanded Marius in a humorous manner about him making noise with his chair, pulling it across the floor instead of lifting it. At the end of the fifth mealtime at the Bourdon household (up. class), Marius got up, then started swinging on his chair. Benoit commanded Marius to be gentler with his chair, pedagogically explaining to him they needed to pay attention to the neighbour below. He quickly shifted the conversation to humoristic tone, speaking of Marius and Lucie as "demons, horrible, horrible monsters, those who party at night, he? (' des deux démons, des horribles grochus, ceux qui font la java le soir, hein ? '). The third dinner at the Obecanov household took the form of a picnic in a public park. For this exceptional commensal occasion, Elisa was allowed to get up as she pleases, and played around. At one point, she asked for her father's attention, showing him how she adopted a meditative position that she had learnt at school:

**Viktor:** What do you want ? You are meditating? Oh well, this suits us

**Sophie:** If only it could last longer

*Dinner 3*

**Viktor:** Qu'est-ce que tu veux? Tu médites? Ah ben, ça nous arrange tiens

**Sophie:** Si ça pouvait durer plus longtemps

*Dîner 3*

Both parents' sarcastic reaction referred to Elisa usually taking up a lot of their attention during mealtime, as she spoke a lot and tended to get up quite a bit. Laughing at children, as did Viktor usually

had the effect of debilitating the commensal unity. In this case, however, the unity of the mealtime is already weakened, spatially, as this was a picnic in the park and Elisa nibbled at some food while running around.

In Lyon, at the third dinner at the André household (low. mid. class), Pascal asked his son Enzo to eat with his fork, instead of diving his face into his plate and grabbing the ravioli directly with his mouth:

**Angélique:** Enzo, eat with your fork please

**Enzo:** But I want to hunt like a dinosaur

**Pascal:** So you are going to hunt, you are not going to eat

**Enzo:** No...

**Pascal:** Go hunt, go hunt like a dinosaur [mocking]

**Enzo:** [showing his plate] But I have already found my food

*He dives his head back into his plate*

Dinner 3, family produced video

**Angélique:** Enzo, mange avec ta fourchette ste plait

**Enzo:** Mais moi, je veux manger comme un dinosaure

**Pascal:** Donc tu vas chasser quelque chose, tu manges pas...

**Enzo:** Non

**Pascal:** Va chasser, va chasser, comme un dinosaure [moqueur]

**Enzo:** [En montrant son assiette] Mais j'ai déjà trouvé ma nourriture

*Il replonge sa tête dans son assiette*

Dîner 3, family produced video



Figure 49 Enzo André eating like a dinosaur, dinner 2, family produced video



Figure 50 Lucas André making fun of his son for eating like a dinosaur, dinner 2, family produced video

Here again, Pascal's was still quite acceptant of his son's behaviour, as with Angélique's acceptance of Enzo not eating any chicory:

**Angélique:** Who wants some chicory  
*Nobody answers*  
**Angélique:** Yeah, do as if I was not here  
**Lucas:** Not me  
**Angélique:** Oh really, oh well that is... [imitates surprise]  
*Dinner 2*

**Angélique :** Qui est-ce qui veut des endives ?  
*Personne ne répond*  
**Angélique :** Surtout, faites comme si j'étais pas là  
**Lucas :** Pas moi  
**Angélique :** Ah bon ? Ah ba ça c'est ... [elle feint la surprise]  
*Dîner 3*

The Lebruns were the only family where food work related humour happened, and the Lebrun children were also the ones who helped the most in producing family meals, especially setting and clearing the table and cleaning up. Laughing about commensal rules could be an efficient way to get children to integrate them:

*The family is talking about their new dishwasher, then their parents ask their children whose turn it is to wash the dishes by hand. Several children complain they do the dishes too much*  
**Pierre:** What we did not tell you, is that, when you were away, we did not do the dishes  
**Lucien:** We kept them for you to do  
*The adults laugh*  
*Dinner 2*

*La famille discute au sujet de leur nouveau lave-vaisselle puis les parents demande aux enfants qui doit laver la vaisselle (à la main). Plusieurs enfants se plaignent qu'ils font trop la vaisselle*  
**Pierre:** Ce qu'on vous disait pas, c'est que, quand vous étiez pas là, on faisait pas la vaisselle...  
**Lucien:** On les gardait [pour que vous les fassiez]  
*Les adultes rigolent*  
*Dîner 2*

*Laëtitia, Pierre, Nathan (11), Chloë (8) and Léo (6) are sitting around the table, waiting for the meal to be ready*

**Léo:** I am hungry

**Laëtitia:** You are hungry? And have you prepared anything?

**Léo:** No

**Laëtitia:** Oh well, we cannot eat!

**Léo:** [small voice] Yes we can

**Chloë:** Yes, I prepared

**Nathan:** Well I set the table!

**Laëtitia:** Yeah, but if you did not prepare anything to eat, that is of no use

**Léo:** Well I brough a zucchini [from the garden]

**Nathan:** So you will have to clear the table!

*Dinner 2*

*Laëtitia, Pierre, Nathan (11), Chloë (8), Léo (6) sont assis autour de la table, en attendant que le repas soit prêt*

**Léo:** J'ai faim

**Laëtitia:** T'as faim? Et t'as préparé à manger?

**Léo:** Non

**Laëtitia:** Han! On peut pas manger

**Léo:** [petite voix] Si

**Chloë:** Si, moi j'ai préparé

**Nathan:** Ben moi, j'ai mis toute la table!

**Laëtitia:** Ouai, mais si t'as pas préparé à manger, ça sert à rien

**Léo:** Eh ben moi, j'ai pris une courgette [du jardin]

**Nathan:** Donc c'est vous qui débarasserez!

*Dîner 2*

The Lebrun family had even initiated a game to get children to participate in the mealtime food work. The rule was that if anybody got up at the time of the dessert, then he or she had to get the desserts for the entire family. Initially, this was also a way of controlling table manners, as getting up led to consequences viewed negatively by some parents:

**Laëtitia:** [to Nolan] The best, look : stand up, you'll see

**All the children:** No!

*Everybody laughs*

*Dinner 2*

**Laëtitia:** [à Nolan] Le mieux..., regarde : mets-toi debout, tu vas voir

**Tous les enfants:** Non !

*Tout le monde rigole*

*Dîner 2*

This game was also the result of the reconstituted family constitution as Laëtitia had taught her children to stay seated during the whole mealtime whereas Pierre thought children getting up a bit was not detrimental to commensality. Yet, it was brought a level further, with family members trying to get one another to get up without them thinking of it so that they would have to get the desserts. This type of trick happened throughout every mealtime.

### 5.2.3. Laughing at children and weakening commensality

The humorous interactions above were mostly based on parents teasing their children, but in a rather gentle and inclusive manner, although there were differences between the paternal and maternal participation. The parents were laughing at their kids, but in a way that usually led the whole table to laugh thus strengthening family cohesion all the while socialising children to commensal norms. However, a few times across the different households, children were laughed at, in a manner that was less considerate and tended to single out the child being mocked. Angélique André, for example, mocked Lucas' input and way of integrating the conversation:

**Céleste:** You put two packets [of raviolis]?  
**Angélique:** Three, because we are six, so we put more  
**Lucas:** Oh yeah!! And the double of six is three  
**Angélique:** That is incredible [irony]  
*Dinner 1*

**Céleste:** T'en as mis deux, des paquets [de raviolis] ?  
**Angélique:** Trois, parce qu'on est six alors on a mis plus  
**Lucas:** Oh ouai!! En plus, le double de six, c'est trois  
**Angélique:** C'est fou! [ironique]  
*Dîner 1*

**Lucas:** Mum? Mum?  
**Angélique:** [She imitates her by repeating "Mum" several times, then] Yes?  
*He tells her an anecdote about school*  
*Dinner 2, family produced video*

**Lucas:** Maman? Maman?  
**Angélique:** [Elle l'imitate en répétant ' Maman ' plusieurs fois, puis] Oui?  
*Il lui raconte une anecdote de l'école*  
*Dîner 2, family produced video*

Nathalie Franquet ridiculed Jules (12) for a joke he made during the third dinner, which she considered was too childish for his age. Seeing his joke did not take, he then showed Nathalie he knew how to master humour appropriately, and by doing so turned the mocking towards her, questioning her authority:

*Nathalie is talking to me about the worm compost they want to install in their home. Jules interrupts her:*  
**Jules:** Peak a boo, peak a boo [playing with his napkin]  
**Nathalie:** Jules, three years and a half [annoyed]  
*Silence*  
**Jules:** Who inherited the character of his mum  
**Nathalie:** What did I do? [constrained laughter]  
**Jules:** It was to answer you  
**Nathalie:** Hm Hmm [disapproving]  
*Dinner 3*

*Nathalie me parle du lombricompost qu'ils veulent installer dans leur maison. Jules l'interrompt :*  
**Jules:** Caché, coucou, caché, coucou [jouant avec sa serviette]  
**Nathalie:** Jules, trois ans et demi [agacée]  
*Silence*

**Jules:** Qui a hérité du caractère de sa maman  
**Nathalie:** Qu'est-ce que ce j'ai fait [rire contraint] ?  
**Jules:** C'était pour te répondre  
**Nathalie:** Hmm hmm [désapprobation]  
*Dîner 3*

This interaction shows Nathalie reprimanding her son for improper form of humour, which does not correspond to the type of humour he is supposed to be doing for his age (so the humorous interaction failed), to which Jules responds, provocatively, that his mothers' behaviour (and perhaps humour, is childish as well.

This type of intergenerational humour – when parents mocked and isolated one of their children – may have been let on by parents' embarrassment about coming to the realisation, in front of an observer, that they had failed part of the socialisation process of children to proper commensal norms. At the Comescu household, Laurent teased his son provocatively on his use of words that he did not fully understand:

**Laurent:** What I like about the Valhrona chocolate, is that it “stays in your mouth” for a really long time  
**Hugo:** Hmm  
**Laurent:** Do you know what it means to “stay in the mouth”  
**Lea:** Well...  
**Irina:** ... it's the taste  
**Laurent:** I like it when he says yes...  
**Lea:** Well that is stays in the mouth, that you can suck on it  
**Hugo:** [low voice] No, I don't know  
**Laurent:** No? What does it mean to stay in the mouth?  
**Irina:** It's the taste that continues  
**Laurent:** ... a long time in the mouth, it remains in the mouth  
**Hugo:** That is what I was going to say  
*Dinner 2*

**Laurent:** Moi ce que j'apprécie avec le chocolat Valhrona, c'est qu'il reste en bouche super longtemps.  
**Hugo:** Hmm  
**Laurent:** Tu sais ce que ça veut dire rester en bouche?  
**Lea:** Ben...  
**Irina:** ... c'est le goût  
**Laurent:** J'aime bien quand il dit oui ...  
**Lea:** Ben qu'il reste en bouche, ben que tu peux le sucer  
**Hugo:** [A voix basse] Non, je sais pas  
**Laurent:** Non, ça veut dire quoi rester en bouche?  
**Irina:** C'est le goût qui continue  
**Laurent:** Longtemps dans la bouche. Il reste en bouche  
**Hugo:** C'est ce que j'allais dire  
*Dîner 2*

Laurent's mocking singled Hugo out, to the point where Lea felt she needed to balance out the situation, by reminding her father that he had adopted a similar attitude at a game they played together regularly. This made Irina laugh, which transformed a situation of laughing at (a single person), to laughing together:

**Laurent:** I cannot remember  
**Lea:** It was yesterday or the day before that  
**Laurent:** I would allow myself to do such a thing? [irony] ME? I would do that? [self-mockery]  
**Lea:** Yes  
**Laurent:** Are you sure?  
**Lea:** Yes  
**Laurent:** You better not lose this weekend  
*Dinner 3*

**Laurent:** Je me souviens pas  
**Lea:** C'était hier ou avant hier  
**Laurent:** Je me permettrais de faire ce genre de chose [ironique]? MOI? Moi je ferai ça?  
 [autodérision]  
**Lea:** Oui  
**Laurent:** T'es sure  
**Lea:** Oui  
**Laurent:** T'as intérêt à pas perdre ce weekend  
*Dîner 3*

Finally, Laurent caught on to this form of collective humour and turned to auto derision, which made everybody smile; the cohesion at the table was preserved.

### **5.3. Socialisation to humour through children's ages**

I have described how the performance of humour during family mealtimes was an opportunity to remind children about commensal rules. In this sense, humorous interactions could be instrumental to sustaining commensality, provided the interactions were rather inclusive and considerate: laughing about rather than laughing at, or spouses laughing at each other, with the complicity of the children. Parents also encouraged fun sociabilities during mealtimes for the sake of humour in itself and because it was a marker of conviviality and a happy family. Being able to understand and interactionally perform the different humorous genres was a cultural capital that parents wished their children acquired to be able to take part in convivial mealtimes, but also in order to perform more generally as individuals in society. The observations revealed how children were socialised to humour, which process varied according to their age and their position in the household.

A recurring way for younger children to begin to perform humour was by telling riddles they had learnt by heart. During the third dinner, right after a teasing interaction between Irina and Laurent, during which Irina laughed at Laurent, with the complicity of the children, Lea changed subjects:

**Lea** [to her mother] What is a strawberry on a horse?  
**Irina:** Well ask Fairley  
**Fairley:** [laughter]  
*Irina and the children laughs*  
**Lea:** What is a yogurt in a forest?  
**Fairley:** A black forest? No!  
**Lea:** A natural [in the meaning of plain] yogurt  
*I laugh*  
**Hugo:** And what is bread...

**Irina:** No, a baguette  
**Hugo:** What is a baguette with a compass?  
**Lea:** A lost bread [“Pain perdu”: French toast]  
*The children laugh*  
**Fairley:** Well no, he should not be lost if he has a compass  
**Laurent:** ... if he has a compass, well yes  
**Irina:** Well yes, he is lost and is using his compass to return, right?  
*The children laugh*  
 Dinner 3

**Lea:** [à sa mère] Qu'est-ce qu'une fraise à cheval?  
**Irina:** Ben demande à Fairley  
**Fairley:** [Rire] Une fraise tagada  
*Irina et les enfants rigolent*  
**Lea:** Qu'est-ce qu'un yaourt dans une forêt?  
**Fairley:** Une forêt noir? Non !  
**Lea:** Un yaourt nature  
*Je rigole*  
**Hugo:** Et qu'est-ce qu'un pain...  
**Irina:** Non, une baguette!  
**Hugo:** Qu'est-ce qu'une baguette avec une boussole?  
**Lea:** Un pain perdu  
*Les enfants rigolent*  
**Fairley:** Ben non, mais il ne doit pas être perdu s'il a une boussole...  
**Laurent:** [en même temps] ... s'il a une boussole, ben oui  
**Irina:** Ben si, il s'est perdu, et il utilise la boussole pour rentrer, hein ?  
*Les enfants rigolent*  
 Dîner 3

Riddles were also produced by Marius (8) and Lucie (6) Bourdon (up. class) Rose (5) and Louise (8) Imbert (up. class), Céleste André (4, low. mid. class), and the Lebrun children (int. mid. class). At the Imbert household, these only happened in the circumstance of extraordinary commensality, during an *apéro dinatoire* where lapses of usual table manners were authorised. At the Bourdon household, the parents played along to the point of also telling riddles to children. However, while some other forms of humour were encouraged for a long period of time, even throughout several meals, riddles were only temporarily accepted by parents, and after a few of them, the children would be asked to move on to something else. During the fifth dinner At the Lebrun household, the children began to tell quite a lot of riddles, about five of them, much to Pierre's pleasure who falsely rejoiced: 'ah, it has been a while... a jokester dinner' ("ah, ça faisait longtemps un repas blague). A few minutes later, he asked the children to stop with the riddles. In other cases, the younger children engaged in fun based on the mobilization of table objects. These types of interactions did not serve any further purpose than laughter in and of itself and the occurrences were much rarer than for the interactions that were both fun and served to strengthen a particular commensal rule. At the fifth meal at the Bourdon household (up. class), Benoit proposed cream cheese for dessert. He suggested beating it until it became creamy, like Grandma and Grandpa's. Lucie amusingly commented that he was going to fight with the cheese, to which Benoit replied: 'come at me, you cheese man! Come closer cheese man' ("approche, espèce de fromage blanc! approche espèce de fromage blanc". These types of light humorous interactions



were quite marginal to the mealtime, such as here it happened only at the time of the dessert, when the commensal unity and rules were usually weakened.

At times, younger children did not get their siblings' nor their parents' humour, which then needed to be explained. During the first dinner at the André household in Lyon (low. mid. class), Enzo (6) got up to look at a flyer hung up on the fridge. It was a note encouraging parents to bring their children to the dentist, illustrated with a dinosaur:

**Enzo:** And why is there a dinosaur there?

**Angélique:** I wanted to buy you the dinosaur that was auctioned, now, today, but I couldn't

**Enzo:** What dinosaur?

**Pascal:** The limit of the card was reached [laughter]

*The parents laugh together*

*Dinner 1*

**Enzo:** Et pourquoi là, y'a un dinosaure?

**Angélique:** Je voulais t'acheter le dinosaure qui était aux enchères, là, aujourd'hui, mais j'ai pas pu...

**Enzo:** Quel dinosaure ?

**Pascal:** Le plafond de la carte ne passait pas [rire]

*Les parents rigolent ensemble*

*Dîner 1*

The discussion went on for a while, Enzo getting upset as he thought that there was a real opportunity that his parents could buy him a dinosaur. Angélique and Pascal continued the joke, explaining to him it was too expensive. Finally, because Enzo began to whine, Angélique added: "Non, mais Enzo, c'est bon là. Ca [le flyer], c'est pour prendre rendez-vous..." / "No, Enzo forget it. That's [the flyer] just to make an appointment...". He still continued and she then got annoyed: "Oui, bon, allez, allez, shht" / "OK whatever. Shush", all while trying to distract him with the food they are eating.

At the Lebrun household, Léo also got confused because of a self-mockery comment from his older sister. Laëtitia lightly reprimands Léo for not picking up his dirty clothes and putting them in the appropriate basket:

**Chloë:** Léo, stop following on your sister

*Pierre laughs loudly, evidently satisfied of his daughter mastering this kind of humour*

**Léo:** I am not following my sister!

**Pierre:** Well yes, she does as you do [not picking up her dirty clothes]. It was self mockery

*Dinner 2*

**Chloë:** Léo, arrête de prendre exemple sur ta sœur

**Pierre:** [rire fort, satisfait que sa fille maîtrise l'ironie]

**Léo:** Je prends pas exemple sur ma sœur!

**Pierre:** Ben si, elle fait pareil que toi (*elle laisse trainer ses habits sales aussi*). C'était de l'autodérision

*Dîner 2*

At the other end of the continuum of the integration and performance of humour was the ability to be able to perform jokes collectively, with the use of irony, sarcasm, and self-mockery, and to weave the

comedy over time and perform in front of guests. The Lebrun family was particularly keen on developing such humour and to create a proper spectacle through this, across all the mealtimes. These interactions were all the more accentuated as there were many commensals around the table. My presence at the Lebrun household enhances their humorous performances, which Pierre and Laëtitia were well aware of:

**Pierre:** The objective, for Fairley, is to show all our habits, but inverted  
*I laugh*

**Laëtitia:** [smile] That is right!  
*Dinner 2*

**Pierre:** L'objectif pour Fairley, c'est de montrer toutes nos habitudes, mais à l'inverse [rire]  
*Je rigole*

**Laëtitia:** [sourire] C'est ça !  
*Dîner 2*

*The discussion continues about the wasps. Pierre just squashed one*

**Chloë:** Oh Dad, you killed it

**Pierre:** That is one less!

*At that moment, a bird flies away, the sound of the clapping wings resonating*

**Laëtitia:** Hey, she applauded you!!

**Pierre:** Thanks, thanks, thanks [laughter]

**Nathan:** The bird applauded, Pierre, the bird applauded!

**Laëtitia:** [laughter] Well yes, it was the bird who applauded [laughter]

**Pierre:** Well there is at least one that recognises my talent, that is not so bad! Well, okay, it's a pigeon [laughter]

**Nathan:** But no, Pierre, he is thinking: "that way I will be able to it afterwards"

**Pierre:** At time, I would really love to listen to your recordings [laughter]

*Dinner 7*

*La discussion continue encore sur les guêpes. Pierre vient d'en écraser une*

**Chloë:** Ah, tu l'a tué Papa !

**Pierre:** Une de moins!

*Un oiseau s'envole à ce moment-même, et on entend le bruit du battement de ses ailes*

**Laëtitia:** Eh, elle t'applaudit !!

**Pierre:** Merci, merci, merci! [rire]

**Nathan:** C'est l'oiseau qui a applaudi, Pierre, c'est l'oiseau qui a applaudi!

**Laëtitia:** [rire] Mais oui, c'est l'oiseau qui a applaudi [rire]

**Pierre:** Ah ba, eh! y'en a un qui reconnait mon talent, c'est déjà pas mal! Bon, c'est un pigeon, ok [rire]

**Nathan:** Mais non, Pierre, il s'est dit: 'comme ça, je pourrais la manger après'

**Pierre:** J'aimerais tellement réécouter tes bandes des fois [rire]

*Dîner 7*

**Laëtitia :** So now [during this mealtime], we maybe over did it, you know, because you are there. And also, it's a crepes evening...

**Pierre:** ... it's also a crepes evening

**Laëtitia:** ... no, but the fact of tell a lot of bullshit at the table, that we laugh

*Dinner 3*

**Laëtitia:** Bon là [durant ce repas], on en a peut-être un peu rajouté aussi, voilà, le fait que tu sois là, et puis voilà, et puis c'est une soirée crêpes...

**Pierre:** ... c'est une soirée crêpes aussi

**Laëtitia:** ... mais non, le fait qu'on raconte des conneries à table, qu'on rigole

*Dîner 3*

There was a recurring joke at the Lebrun household, initiated by Pierre at the third dinner and taken up by all the family members. They joked they had another kid, named Louis, whom they buried in the concrete slab, under the patio. The joke was woven and developed across several mealtimes and there was then “Luc in the wall”, “Jean in the bulkhead”, “Arthur in the freezer” (all boys!). All the family members, without exception, took part in the sarcastic comedy, and there was a lot of laughing going on. The parents commented on their children’s participation in the stories, with Laëtitia monitoring the proper number of jokes and congratulating children when they mastered the humorous performance:

*Nathan (11) starts another joke about “John trapped in the partition wall”*

**Laëtitia:** So, don’t go over the top other, after, it’s not realistic

**Lucien:** Two was okay. Three is a bit much.

**Gabriel:** No, but he was a teddy.

**Laëtitia:** You have to learn to stop. And anyhow, she is not registering anymore [irony]

*Dinner 3*

*Nathan (11) commence une autre blague sur ‘Jean qui a été enfermé dans la cloison’*

**Laëtitia:** Alors, faut pas en rajouter trop non plus, après, ça fait plus crédible

**Lucien:** Deux, c’était ok. Trois, ça fait beaucoup

**Nathan:** Non, mais lui, c’était... une peluche

**Laëtitia:** Il faut savoir s’arrêter, de toute manière elle enregistre plus [ironie]

*Dîner 3*

*Discussion about ‘Louis under the slab’: Laëtitia and the children continue the joke together*

**Laëtitia:** Well done Chloë, the third degree [laughter], I approve

*Léo continues with the joke. The other children bring the joke further: Léo talks about a child in the oven, Nolan talks about a child that commits suicide*

**Nathan:** Now do not overdo it, we are already five

**Lucien:** Always more [laughter]!

**Laëtitia:** I think that with kids, it never ends

**Pierre:** That is it

*Chloë continues the jokes, so does Laëtitia, Lucien and Nathan, Pierre. The whole table participate and jokes about the fact I am witnessing such dark humour*

*Dinner 6*

*Discussion sur ‘Louis sous la dalle’: Laëtitia et les enfants reprennent la blague ensemble*

**Laëtitia:** C’est bien Chloë, le troisième degré, c’est bon [rire], je valide

*Léo continue la blague. Les autres enfants forcent la blague encore plus loin: Léo parle d’un enfant dans le four, Nolan parle d’une personne qui se suicide*

**Nathan:** Faut pas abuser, là, on en a déjà cinq

**Lucien:** Toujours plus [rire]

**Fairley:** Mais ça s’arrête pas [rire] !

**Laëtitia:** Je crois qu’avec des enfants, ça s’arrête pas

**Pierre:** C’est ça

*Chloë continue la blague, Laëtitia renchérit, Lucien également, Nathan aussi, Laëtitia parle d’Arthur dans le congèle’, Pierre aussi: toute la table participe. Ils blaguent sur les blagues qu’ils ont faites, sur le fait que j’assiste à ces blagues.*

*Dîner 6*

## 6. The effects of prioritising conviviality over other commensal dimensions

Creating convivial mealtimes could come at a price. Not only were they managed in contrasting and sometimes contradictory manners according to the mothers or the fathers, but the creation of an atmosphere that pleased everybody was sometimes detrimental to the sharing of a healthy meal and to the proper feeding process (such as getting children to finish their plate). The Lebrun couple, for example, both talked about favouring a pleasant mealtime over getting children to finish their plate:

**Laëtitia:** It's really a moment when we are all gathered and well, you know, it has to go well!

**Pierre:** If you put too many priorities on eating, precisely...

**Laëtitia:** ... yeah, too much pressure

**Pierre:** ... yeah, too many priorities to get them to eat this or that, in the end you spoil what we are looking for, meaning to spend a good moment and have an interaction with them

*Dinner 7*

**Laëtitia:** C'est vraiment un moment où on est tous réunis, on est tous ensemble, et 'fin, faut que ça se passe bien, quoi!

**Pierre:** Si tu mets trop de priorités justement, à faire manger....

**Laëtitia:** ... ouais, trop de pression...

**Pierre:** ... oui, trop de pression, trop de priorité à faire manger telle ou telle chose, en fin de compte, tu gâches ce que nous on souhaite, c'est-à-dire passer un bon moment et une interaction avec eux

*Dîner 7*

By saying 'it has to go well', Laëtitia was explicitly referring to a feeling rule of commensality. In reality, the Lebrun children had to finish their plates, but they were feeling reluctant to do so, so the parents, and mostly Laëtitia, would encourage them to continue eating, but in a light manner, encouraging them through humorous or cajoling comments.

Behind the importance of mealtimes as an agreeable, shared moment was the idea that parents considered they did not have enough time to spend with their children daily. This time stress and the lack of time spent with children was viewed as an unhealthy parenting practice. Spending 'quality time' with children, such as during mealtimes, therefore, became another imperative of family life, a social and moral one.

Having insufficient time to dedicate to the children led to another family imperative, which was this time a moral one associated to the psychologisation of family life: creating convivial, 'quality time' moments during family meals:

**Amy:** The small time we have with the kids, it's only an hour or two before they then go off to bed...., we don't want that to be an argument, forcing food down them, just, we don't want it to be a horrible time for them. We want that to be quality time.

The production of family mealtimes often happened in a context of high time pressure, in which the entire household was caught up in many activities, from the "first shift" (Hochschild 1997) of paid work for both parents to school curricular and extracurricular activities for children. The sociologist

Hochschild characterised this as a 'time bind' (Hochschild 1997) which can even produce a form of 'third shift' (Hochschild 1997), where parents have to deal with the emotional consequences of the compressed time bind on domestic activities and children's education:

'The working parent I interview for *The Second Shift* and especially *The Time bind* were all trying to reconcile a time bind – a scarcity of time – with the powerful desire to create meaningful or fun times at home. Each person I talked to seemed to have arrived intuitively at some sort of time strategy' (Hochschild 2013, 62)

When family members came home being already tired from their professional daytime work experience or when children were also exhausted from their day, the imperative of conviviality took over other mealtime challenges, such getting children to taste new types of food:

**Amy:** So it is a bit of a challenge. I guess that's why most of the time I choose foods that I know they're gonna eat. I guess I pick my battles. Like both Glen and I pick the battles, because our days at work are exhausting. We feel like we're constantly fighting policy, fighting people, fighting, like it's not just go and do your job, go home. It's, this has happened, so then this person argues with you and then this explodes to something, and we just feel like we're constantly battling at work, that we don't want to battle at home.

[...]

It is, it's nice to, when they're sitting there eating, we're talking, that is pleasant. It's nice, it's the moment that we then have to start the argument of "eat your food. Do it now. Don't argue. Try it". It's, if that's what it becomes ... it's frustrating and um, we just at times just give up ... and go, whatever, then that's it ... that's your food, that's all you're getting. You can go to bed with nothing else ... you know, and that's when it becomes unpleasant.

[...]

It's only when we... It would only be when they're tired, when they're really tired, that we have the battle. It will be when we've served them something they absolutely don't want and that's when the arguments come, so no, it's not every meal. Most meals are quite pleasant. When we actually get to sit and eat together.

At the Obecanov household, although Sophie would like there to be a single mealtime menu, she had reluctantly accepted to give in to her husband's desire of being able to eat different food if he wanted to. Her husband, of Bulgarian origin, was quite influenced by his own mother's practices (from a lower social background) and considered that family mealtimes were more constructed out of being together rather than around the food ritual and particularly eating the same food. Sophie explained how she tried to adjust to this:

**Sophie:** It's moments we are all three of us gathered, so we try to do according to the taste of each person, because if they different preferences, well we eat different things. For me, it's more difficult, because for me, everybody eats the same things. My husband is more flexible about that, so, well, there are moments when I say, after all why not, we are all together. So there, if really there is one who wants to eat something that the others really don't want, well the most important is that we are altogether around the table, that we can be altogether, if we don't eat the same thing, it's not a big deal. At the beginning, this was more difficult for me, but his reasons were good.

**Sophie:** C'est des moments où on se retrouve tous les trois donc on essaie aussi de faire en fonction des envies de chacun, parce que si les envies sont différentes, ben on mange des choses différentes. Mais moi j'ai plus de mal avec ça, parce que pour moi, tout le monde mange la même chose. Mon mari est plus flexible là-dessus donc, ben y'a des moments où, après tout je me dis, ben pourquoi pas, on se retrouve tous ensemble. Voilà, si vraiment y'en a un qui a

envie de manger quelque chose que les autres ont pas du tout envie, ben l'essentiel c'est qu'on soit ensemble autour de la table, qu'on puisse être tous ensemble, si on mange pas la même chose, c'est pas bien grave. Au début, j'avais plus de mal et puis ses arguments ont été bons.

Sophie was actually following her husband's perspective on family mealtimes: the most important for him was to be happy around a table. However for Sophie, being happy during mealtimes seemed to be compatible with eating the same food.

Sophie's explanation for occasionally letting go of the commensal unity through food was supported by the associated commensal norm of mealtimes being a pleasant moment for all.

**Sophie:** One of the things I changed my mind about: for Viktor, it's important we gather all three of us, but for him, if we don't eat the same thing, it's not a problem. And for me, however, it's something, so: we gathered around the table, we all eat the same thing. For me it was inconceivable and I think it comes from my education [...]. And in the end, as time went by, well, it's true that some evenings when there are leftovers, well everybody eats what pleases her or him. If somebody would rather cherry tomatoes than salad [...], but the most important is that we spend a moment together.

**Fairley:** But would it be to the point where you would make two dishes?

**Sophie:** It can happen that Viktor would cook some meat, but otherwise, no, except if there are leftovers. But it's true that, in the end, his idea of it, what is important is that we be altogether, the three of us, in the end, what we eat is not important.

**Fairley:** It's really the social aspect of it...?

**Sophie:** Yeah, yeah. And about that, I gave in to it over the years. Because, in the end, it's true that I realise that, in the evening, well..., I would not do two completely different meals because it would require too much time and, you know. But indeed, if one finished the leftovers and there is not enough for the other and, well, he wants to cook himself some fish and I don't want to have any, well, there you go. The most important is that we are together all three of us and that we can talk about our day. I gave up a bit on that, over time.

*Dinner 2*

**Sophie:** L'une des choses sur lesquelles j'ai changé : pour Viktor, c'est important qu'on se retrouve tous les trois, mais pour lui, si on mange pas la même chose, c'est pas grave. Et moi, par contre, c'est quelque chose, pour moi... voilà, on se mettait à table, on mangeait tous la même chose, pour moi, c'était inconcevable et ça je pense que c'est mon éducation [...]. Et puis au final, au fur et à mesure du temps, ben c'est vrai que, voilà, les soirs où des fois y'a des restes, ben chacun prend. voilà, si y'a quelqu'un qui a plus envie de tomates cerises plutôt que de salades [...]. mais l'essentiel c'est qu'on passe le moment ensemble.

**Fairley:** mais est-ce que c'est au point où vous ferez deux plats?

**Sophie:** ça peut arriver que Viktor fasse de la viande en plus, mais sinon, non. sauf si c'est des restes. Mais c'est vrai que, au final, lui sa conception, ce qui est important c'est qu'on passe le moment tous les trois, au final, ben ce qu'on mange, c'est pas grave.

[...]

**Fairley:** c'est vraiment le côté social... ?

**Sophie:** ouais, ouais. et là-dessus, j'ai lâché au fur et à mesure des années. parce que au final, c'est vrai que je m'aperçois que le soir, bon ben... voilà. je ferai pas deux repas complètement distinct parce que ça demanderait trop de temps et voilà... mais effectivement, si y'en a un qui finit un reste, qu'y en a pas assez pour l'autre, puis que voilà, lui il a envie de se faire du poisson parce qu'il a envie et que moi j'ai pas envie d'en manger. Bon, ben, voilà. L'essentiel, c'est qu'on soit ensemble tous les trois, là, et qu'on puisse discuter de nos journées. Ça là-dessus, j'ai lâché quand même, au fur et à mesure du temps

*Dîner 2*

Viktor did not think that the family meal was made through the sharing of the same food. He considered it was more the moment spent together that was important, rather than the food that was shared and its quantity:

**Viktor:** There are time when I can allow myself not to eat exactly the same thing as Elisa (6) and Emile. And that, that upsets Sophie, she must have told you [laughter]

**Fairley:** Yes, she told me [laughter]

**Viktor:** I think that, for Sophie, it's important because it creates a cohesion. And I have the counter example: for my father, the table was [inaudible], and the family, they must all be around the table, everybody needs to eat the same thing. And I quickly learnt that it is not because you are around a table that you are a family. It is not because I will decide to eat something different that, inevitably, I am not respecting or I am excluded from the family or... So I think that for Sophie, the fact that we all eat the same thing, I think she also wants Elisa to learn to eat like we eat, which I can understand. But I am perhaps a bit more flexible with that.

**Fairley:** Is it being together at the table that counts?

**Viktor:** Well yeah, for me, it is really not the food that matters, it's mostly being happy. So being together, but we can very well just have bread and salt and a tomato, and it will do, you know.

**Viktor :** D'ailleurs, y'a des fois, je peux me permettre de ne pas exactement manger la même chose qu'Elisa (6) et Sophie. Ah ça, ça énerve Sophie, elle a dû vous le dire [rire].

**Fairley:** Oui, elle me l'a dit [rire].

**Viktor:** Je pense que pour Sophie c'est important parce que ça fait une cohésion. Et moi j'ai le contre-exemple. Pour mon père, la table c'était pour [inaudible]... et qu'en fait la famille il faut qu'ils sont tous à table. Il faut que tout le monde mange la même chose. Et moi, en fait, j'ai vite appris que c'est pas parce qu'on est autour de la table qu'on est une famille. C'est pas parce que je vais décider de manger quelque chose différemment que, forcément, je ne respecte pas..., ou je suis exclu de la famille ou... Alors que je pense que pour Sophie, le fait qu'on mange tous la même chose, je pense qu'il y a aussi le, l'envie qu'Elisa apprenne de manger comme nous on mange, ça je peux le concevoir. Moi je suis peut-être un peu plus souple là-dessus.

**Fairley:** Et est-ce que c'est le fait d'être ensemble à table qui compte?

**Viktor:** Ben pour moi ouais, c'est surtout, pas la nourriture qui compte, c'est surtout d'être heureux alors, d'être ensemble. Mais on peut avoir juste du pain et du sel et une tomate et ça ira très bien quoi.

Not only is it not that important for Viktor to eat the same food at the table, but also, the type of food eaten was not that important either: he considered a family mealtime was made mainly through the fact of being together, and most importantly being happy together and of producing a convivial atmosphere. For him, it is not the gathering that is important, but the emotional state during the gathering. As he explained, he was more greatly influenced by his mother's working-class background than his father's higher social class origin, where family mealtimes were ritualized and furnished. Yet, this type of individual eating at the table was a source of conjugal tension for Sophie, who disapproved and got annoyed by it. As Viktor notes, Sophie was attentive to the socialisation process of Elisa (6) to new tastes and ultimately a healthy diet and she considered that eating the same food and displaying the proper example was a way to get Elisa to grow into healthy eating behaviours.

In light of these comments, recent research on emotion work by Le Bihan and Mallon is enlightening. The authors conducted a qualitative investigation of family carers of relatives affected by Alzheimer's disease (Le Bihan and Mallon 2017). They focused particularly on the emotional dimension of the care

relationship. Their findings showed differentiated emotional dispositions that varied according to men, women and adult children and their pre-existing intergenerational or conjugal relationships. Emotion work was experienced either as a labour, which then enhanced the mental load of the carer or, on the contrary, it was much more congruent with the carer's habits in terms of emotional management, and in this case, it alleviated certain dimensions of the care relationship.

The strategy that Amy adopted when she or her children were exhausted was that creating a situation where she could avoid having to produce emotion work. Viktor and Stéphane were not creating a situation of avoidance of emotion work, but were simply accepting that the mealtime became tense, without them producing emotion work to repair the emotional convention lapse. The gendered differences between maternal and paternal reactions to dealing with difficult mealtimes could be explained with Hochschild's notion of the 'third shift' (Hochschild 1997). Parents had to deal with the emotional consequences of the compressed time bind on domestic activities and children's education. In the case of Amy, she already felt guilty of not being able to spend enough quality time with her children that she sacrificed any mealtime dimension that could be detrimental to a pleasant atmosphere and would ask of her too much emotional effort. She was therefore attending to her third shift by creating a situation of avoidance of additional emotion work during mealtimes. Viktor and Stéphane's discourses are in contrast with that of Amy: they also felt the weight of a difficult day, and the lack of time to be able to unwind in order to arrive at the mealtime in a proper emotional state. However, they did not bear the 'third shift', that is the emotional work of guilt that came from not having enough quality time to spend with children. They were able to accept the situation as it was, and sacrifice conviviality.

## **7. Conclusion**

A particularly central dimension of family mealtimes was the performance of conviviality. Most of the mothers spontaneously mentioned the importance of spending an agreeable, shared mealtime, contrary to fathers who hardly ever spoke about this commensal dimension. This was not to say that the fathers did not value conviviality, simply that the mothers addressed it more directly. The mothers and fathers from Lyon both produced efforts directed towards the performance and sustaining of convivial atmospheres. They however resorted to differentiated techniques to do so, which produced unequal results. Observations of the fathers' interactions with their families at mealtimes revealed they positioned themselves as the safe keepers of feeling rules in an authoritative manner: they tended to reprimand or exclude children when they were not in the proper mood by giving rule reminders. This, in turn, implied they were themselves relinquishing the performance of conviviality by neglecting



certain feeling rules (not getting angry, keeping emotions in control) or the overall commensal and family unity. Mothers also positioned themselves as the guardians of mealtime feeling rules, but they did so in a distinct, less invisible manner than did the fathers: they safeguarded mealtime feeling rules by producing reparation emotion work, that often went unnoticed. Most of the time, though, the meals happened in a relaxed, pleasant or even fun atmosphere.

Both parents produced humour that referred to their roles in the production of family meals, and tended to reinforce gendered conceptions of domestic food work. Observations revealed fathers had a pivotal role in the production of humour during family meals. The performance of humour served to reinforce normative dimensions of mealtimes, such as healthy eating and following table manners, but it was also performed for the sake of mastering humour itself and this socialisation to humour was done in differentiated ways according to children's ages.

Finally, the production of conviviality revealed some paradoxical dimensions. Mothers and fathers beard unequal roles in the sustaining of a pleasant, loving and fun atmosphere during mealtime, with fathers' authoritative position sometimes undermining mothers' emotion work and more generally the pleasant atmosphere and the commensal unity. Mothers were also less likely to accept the loss of convivial atmospheres, and could therefore sacrifice some of the sanitary dimensions of commensality (such as socialising to healthy and diverse food). This was done, however, in the name of another family imperative, which was in this case of a moral nature: spending a pleasant moment with children at the table was viewed as beneficial for children and the family's overall wellbeing. Paradoxically also, the successful performance of conviviality related back to some highly normative dimensions of mealtimes.





# Conclusion

This thesis invited the reader around the dinner table to look at the construction of commensality within the family. I interrogated the way the multiple dimensions of everyday mealtimes unfolded, were regulated and negotiated, in relation to the family's social and cultural conditions. I investigated more specifically how the performance of commensality was worked by and affected, in return, the family dynamics and health concerns within the household.

The general aim of this thesis was to better understand the way family mealtimes happened on an everyday basis, from a practical, interactional and emotional perspective and to unfold in particular the various commensal dimensions.

In order to do so, I had set the following objectives for this thesis:

- Investigate family mealtimes within the frame of family life and their social conditions
- Include all the family members in the investigation of their role and experiences of everyday family mealtimes
- Identify, in particular, how fathers take part and experience everyday family mealtimes, in relation to the rest of the family members
- Put into perspective the results from Lyon with those from the families from Adelaide

The previous chapter described the convivial dimensions of everyday family mealtimes. In a zooming out process, this conclusion will summarise and discuss the results of each chapter, beginning by conviviality, thus wrapping up commensality and taking some perspective from the table.

## 1. Summary and discussion of the main findings

### 1.1. *Emotion work and the maternal imperative of conviviality*

The various lockdown and curfew periods in France, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated health restrictions have prompted debates in the media about conviviality. A short article published on the website of Radio France in April 2021 is of particular interest<sup>103</sup>: the author questions the discourses around the loss of conviviality and the injunction to protect it, even during the pandemic. She argues that, perhaps, even before the pandemic, the necessity to characterise an event as convivial means precisely the absence of a convivial atmosphere and asks, 'is conviviality really that convivial?'. She concludes by arguing, "if we need to invoke it, it is because it does not exist". This representation about conviviality, which is actually quite common, is based on the idea that conviviality

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<sup>103</sup> <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/carnet-de-philo/rip-la-convivialite-2872996>

happens spontaneously and on its own and especially that it is not something that cannot be decided, worked upon. Based on my research, I find this argument problematic. The results of this thesis have shown that conviviality, like feelings, can be managed, modelled and produced and that creating a convivial atmosphere requires a significant amount of efforts, even if these appear effortless. Arguing that conviviality only happens spontaneously undermines the endeavours of those working to create pleasant, happy and fun gatherings.

One of the key arguments justifying the family meal imperative is the association and even confusion of mealtimes with conviviality and this logic even permeates research. This thesis has revealed the mechanisms in the construction of commensal conviviality. First, everyday family mealtimes were worked by the circulation of multiple intense emotions, from being very happy and excited to angry or sad, which required significant efforts to manage and balance out. The results have shown how everyday family mealtime conviviality is based upon various 'feeling rules' and built on a significant amount of 'emotion work' (Hochschild 1983b). These rules were built required avoid isolating behaviours and antagonising conduct, which were detrimental to the appropriate performance of conviviality as well as dictated family members to feel content and happy together.

Nevertheless, the fathers and mothers of the participating households had unequal roles in the work of maintaining pleasant, loving and fun mealtimes. Conviviality appeared to be a maternal imperative. The mothers were most concerned about the pleasant and loving aspects of mealtimes, and overall more attached to conviviality as a social and moral dimension of commensality. They also more commonly talked about the importance of maintaining conviviality, whereas it was not so central in the fathers' discourses. The mothers were also less likely to accept the loss of convivial atmospheres, and could therefore sacrifice some of the other dimensions of commensality (such as socialising to healthy and diverse food). This was done, however, in the name of another normative, moral dimension of family mealtimes: spending a pleasant moment with children

Commensal conviviality had rarely been studied, especially from a grounded approach and a gendered perspective. It has been investigated through the lens of food work and the food composition and has been characterised as a rather upper class objectives of mealtimes (Phull, Wills, and Dickinson 2015; de la Torre-Moral et al. 2021; Phull 2019). This thesis provides new knowledge on the rather invisible aspects of mealtime conviviality. I observed that the creation of shared pleasure during mealtimes was not so much the result of the food served, although it contributed to it, as mothers sought to prepare meals that everybody would like. Conviviality was mainly reached through significant emotional management, on mothers' side, of their own feelings and that of the other family members. It was mostly the mothers, who discreetly produced the emotion work. Some children were also witnessed

performing emotion work, as one of the specificities of this type of emotional management is that it invites others to model their own emotions. The fathers' contribution to conviviality was a major one as well – principally in that they made mealtimes fun – but they were not witnessed producing as much emotional management, which led them to regularly compromise the pleasant atmosphere. Overall, there existed an unstable balance between the feeling rules and the other mealtimes priorities, which was managed differently according to the fathers and the mothers, but also according to the mealtime circumstances (and particularly the production of food work before mealtimes), the family members' energy and state of mind and their acquired emotional management skills.

### **1.2. *The centrality of mealtime conversations in the creation of the family***

Additional unequal and hierarchical relationships were observed during mealtime conversations. Commensality was highly valued as a family communication opportunity, although this valorisation varied according to the time and space family members had together during the rest of the day. This association was based on the experience of time scarcity by parents and the lack of time they had with their children. Table talk was a way to reunite the family in a centripetal movement of reciting and sharing during mealtimes activities and experiences that happened to each individual outside the household. This created a sense of cohesion and was a way for parents to control and 'resignificate' (P. L. Berger and Luckmann 1967) what has happened in the children's daily life, at school or elsewhere. In recognizing and validating the children's experience outside the household, they created additional family cohesion and spirit. Getting children to talk about their day during mealtimes was also a way to check if children's life away from home was healthy and socially balanced.

However, the way communication happened in these families reinforced the fathers as custodians of parental authority and the mothers as guardians of egalitarian relationships between siblings and of family cohesion and, again, the guardians of children's health and wellbeing. During the visits, mothers more often than fathers, for example, were witnessed asking children about their daytime, to make sure their lifestyle away from home was adequately healthy (in dietary terms but also concerning children's wellbeing and educational development). The children were also expected to take part in mealtime conversations as a way of learning about the social rules of talking and listening. Nevertheless, as with food socialisation, the children were seen during the family observations showing resistance by engaging in conversations on their own terms and temporality, sometimes even refusing to engage. These findings provided new insight into Goffman's theories of conversational interaction, and in particular that children can resort to as much conversation and information preserve than adults (Goffman 1981).

The way mealtime conversations unfolded in the different households revealed different ways of being together as a family : the most demanding and normative way was building the family only through conversations and what happens to the family members (P. Berger and Kellner 1964). A second way of building the family was doing something together, such as watching the same show together (Maslet 2018). This allowed the family members to have an additional basis for their conversations but also distracted them from the family as a collective as they were talking about other topics than themselves and what they had in common. A another way of building the family was observed, which occasionally and temporarily allowed the family members to exit the commensal circle, through elements that sustained the individualisation rather than the collective (such as being on one's phone or tablet). In that case, the parents and the children did not have the same possibilities of in terms of leaving the table. A same household could resort to these different ways of being together as a family during mealtimes throughout the week or over the weeks, the imperative being trying to give space and freedom to each family member but to also create an environment of family unity and belonging (Singly 1996; 2000).

### **1.3. *Social variation in the health equation of commensality***

At the same time as producing conviviality and developing family communication, the family mealtimes observed unfolded according to various health imperatives. The parents strived to produce meals and get children to eat foods that were healthy, according to their own standards. This implied having meals with sufficient vegetables, not too many carbohydrates (especially in the upper class families, who tried to avoid them in the evenings), not too much red meat nor meat in general (for the upper class families in Lyon), avoiding deserts and drinks that were heavily sweetened. They aimed as well at not eating too much of a single ingredient within the frame of a day, a week and even over several weeks (for the upper class households). Finally, the parents paid attention to the quantities eaten, focusing on providing enough food, all while being careful that family members did not eat too much. These diet imperatives were mentioned by parents from all the households, whatever the class position and both in Lyon and in Adelaide.

Nevertheless, the way mealtime unfolded, in practice, varied according to the families. The practices of socialisation particularly to taste, appeared to be somewhat contradictory. Some households adopted pretty straightforward attitudes towards their children's eating and tasting: they considered that their children would develop a taste for healthy and varied food (in particular for green vegetables) later on in their life, and that there was no point in trying to get them eat foods they did not like. This was usually the case for the lower or intermediary middle class families across both cities, who let their children be rather autonomous in their eating, staying away from the children's plate.

The upper and upper middle class parents from Lyon and Adelaide put a lot of efforts into getting their children to eat, based on two assumptions. First, they considered their children's taste buds could already be fully developed. Second, they also thought that liking was an irreversible process. As a consequence, the parents put a lot of efforts into getting children to eat the food they proposed and they strived to expose them to a variety of food, in particular vegetables. Nevertheless, those parents also valued their children's individual singularities, and so they were caught in between wanting their children to eat the food proposed and respecting their own choices: they talked about giving their children freedom in the food they could eat (provided they at least tasted) but in reality, the observations showed the parents spent an incredible amount of time and efforts negotiating with their children to get them to eat. Because of the imperatives of having convivial mealtimes and the need to maintain quality communication with their children, the parents strived to negotiate in rather diplomatic manners or by tricking them into eating. Also, because parents viewed their children's liking as a linear process, they did not accept that their children have varying dislikes of certain foods, which was abnormal to them.

In addition to dealing with children's taste preferences, the parents strived to get the whole family to eat according to synchronised rhythms. This was not so much about maintaining the family unity as it was a health imperative. Seeking to control the temporality of eating proved to be a central aspect in the strategies parents mobilised to get children to eat. In Lyon, more than in Adelaide, the mealtime unfolded according to multiple courses, from the most important (in the meaning of healthy) to the least important. The synchronisation of eating was easier to maintain at the beginning of the mealtime, when everybody was hungry and willing to eat. They tried to make sure their children did not eat too fast, for digestion purposes, but most of all because if one child finished before another was done eating, then there was a risk that the later would no longer want to eat. In that sense, children ate best when they ate together. On the contrary, if a child ate slower than his or her siblings, then finishing the plate was also more difficult when eating alone. Parents tried to get children to eat slow enough, but not too slow as to compromise the after mealtime activities, some of which were also health related: getting children to bed at an appropriate hour so that they would have enough sleep, and so that parents could have enough time to relax. All these constituted quite heavy imperatives for parents and children at mealtime and also required constant adaptation to the children's capacities, their needs and the parents' energy and patience at the end of their day.

#### ***1.4. At the boundaries of family mealtimes and the subversion of commensal norms***

Looking at the boundaries of family mealtimes rituals has proved to be a particularly rich approach that has enabled me to identify several prisms through which commensality can to be apprehended.



The boundaries of conventional family mealtimes were regularly contested to the point of subversion of commensal norms, providing a greater space for individual preferences. But these subversion of norms strengthened them, in return.

These boundaries have revealed the ongoing challenges inherent to the creation of a collective unity and when it comes to family meals, the collective fell apart more easily than it came together. Looking at the boundaries of mealtimes has also strengthened the idea that family mealtime are built, today, around children. Parents expect more from children to create commensality (setting the table) than they did to undo or let it crumble, and when the later left the table, after having their desert, the family mealtime turned into a conjugal time.

Examining forms of transgression of normative mealtime boundaries, when the family did not eat altogether for instance, has shown that children can still be socialised to commensal norms when eating before their parents, if the later have the time and energy to spend with them.

What appeared as well by investigating the mealtime boundaries and the socialisation to eating were the challenges created by the different ages of children: performing commensality implied finding a balance between what should be asked of children (to socialise them into being proper commensals), what could be asked of them (what parents reckoned was possible) and what was actually asked from them (with many infringement to the rules being observed as we saw above).

Finally, there existed significant cultural differences in terms of commensality between Lyon and Adelaide, which were revealed, again, by the examination of transgressive forms of commensality. In Lyon, parents allowed themselves to subvert commensal norms precisely because they followed them the rest of the time. In that sense, subverting a norm actually reinforced it. In Adelaide, mealtime displacements and eating separately did not have the same significance and seemed to be closer to their own norm.

### **1.5. *The unequal experiences of the production of family meals***

If most of the families ate together daily and the others did so regularly, an examination of the food work that preceded family mealtimes and was necessary for them to happen revealed that the family members did not arrive at the table in the same circumstances. Most of these findings did not reveal novel dimensions of the food of feeding the family and the differentiated relationships to it according to mothers and fathers. The food work was experienced and discussed as a burden for every mother of this research. Their discourses highly contrasted with the fathers' experiences and talk about their engagement in cooking, which was overall positive and valued. Despite these diverging experiences,

most of the parents shared common health imperatives that resonated in their discourses about everyday family meals.

The gendered aspect of food work observed in the participating families was also associated to fathers' ability to turn their appropriation of the work of feeding the family – whether on a daily or exceptional basis – into a pleasurable and relaxing activity (individual or shared with other family members) and was associated with their detachment from other domestic chores and parenting activities. Nearly all the mothers from Lyon and Adelaide who cooked regularly or all the time expressed, on the contrary, feelings of weariness, stress or guilt.

Most of the mothers in this research carried the mental load of feeding the family. The mental load was viewed and experienced as the most burdensome and difficult aspect of food work and for some of the households, it had shifted over the week, with the meal planning happening during weekends. Meal planning is mostly thought of in positive terms in the scientific literature. Meal planning skills have been associated with high chances of home prepared meals (Horning et al. 2022). Low meal planning, on the contrary has been linked with the consumption of more fast food (Neumark-Sztainer et al. 2014) and pre-packaged food (Horning et al. 2017). The meal planning that the mothers in this research carried out, which was experienced as burdensome, facilitated the father's involvement in the everyday cooking. The burdensome aspect of food work was finding out what to eat rather than the food preparation in itself. However, as fathers did spend time in the kitchen, their involvement was sometimes hidden by both parents, behind a discourse of equal division of the domestic food work, as the 'doing' aspect of food appeared to be more valued than its 'planning'.

A central objective in the investigation of the food work of family meals was to investigate how it affected and was worked by, in return, the perspective of eating together as a family. In that respect, this thesis has provided an additional understanding of everyday domestic commensality. The burdensome aspect of planning and preparing family meals came from the anticipation of the mealtime experience in itself and particularly the potential rejection by children of the food served. Nevertheless, here again, there were unequal gendered experience in the apprehension to this relationship between food work and commensality. For most of the fathers who cooked, the mealtime was an occasion to obtain recognition of their food work and their cooking skills. They would arrive at the table being quite relaxed as their cooking skills, and the circumstances in which they cooked (being alone in the kitchen, for instance, or not having to deal with the mental load) did not require burdensome efforts. For most of the mothers, the food work was burdensome as they feared that the (healthy) food they had prepared would be rejected and they would arrive at the table being already mentally exhausted from having to find out menus that were varied, balanced and enjoyable by all.

### **1.6. *Family mealtimes compete with other work, family and health imperatives***

In addition to investigating mealtimes in light of their necessary food work, I examined everyday domestic commensality by putting it into perspective with the family members' social life rhythms. The attention paid to the health of children through mealtimes was inscribed in a larger consideration to children's global health, which was reached in particular by a good sleep, in terms of scheduling (bedtime hour), duration and quality (which was associated to a proper meal).

For the parents in this study, the imperative of getting children to bed at a regular hour, and not too late, in Lyon and in Adelaide determined the duration and ending of family mealtimes. Parents also strived to get children in bed early enough so that they could benefit in the evening from conjugal time or alone time to relax from the day. The health imperatives of appropriate sleep and meals were also affected by other domestic occupations, such as educational and recreational activities and hygiene routines (children's homework, playtime, bedtime stories, bathing). Family mealtimes were also planned according to family members' public social life engagements (parents' work hours and children's school and childcare schedules).

Overall, it appeared that, in Adelaide, family members individual activities (both parents and children) interfered greatly with the hour, duration and experience of family meals, resulting in occasions when the whole family did not eat together, when the mealtime was rushed and happened earlier or later than usual. In Lyon, while children also took part in extracurricular activities, there seemed to be less of them during weeknights and they did not push back the mealtime hour as much (although this interfered with the preparation). Also, the daily activities of homework and bathing were inverted between Lyon and Adelaide. Children always bathed and did their homework before the dinnertime in Lyon while this was rarely the case in Adelaide. This meant that, on top of being concerned about respecting an appropriate bedtime hour for children – a concern that existed in all the families of this research – parents in Adelaide were also concerned with the many post mealtime activities: bathing, homework, sometimes even some extracurricular activities. In Lyon, parents appeared to be able to unwind from the day at the end of the family mealtime (sometimes during) while in Adelaide, it seemed that parents managed to do so later, in the lounge room.

## **2. Transversal findings**

### **2.1. *The role and experiences of fathers in family meals***

One of the aims of this research was to know more about the fathers' roles and experiences of family mealtimes and the production of family meals. Some new results emerged from this research. As with

other studies (Burnod et al. 2022), this research has also shown that the fathers were well aware of the health imperatives that needed to guide the production of family mealtimes. Most fathers also felt confident in their cooking skills, which facilitated their ability to experience the food work positively. Previous studies have already documented how men commonly engage in cooking according to a rather hedonistic, leisurely register, and on their own temporal terms (Parsons 2016; Dubet 2017b; Meah and Jackson 2013). This research has shown that the fathers also experienced cooking as a positive experience, partly thanks to their control over the spatial conditions of cooking but also thanks to mothers facilitating their involvement by bearing most or all of the mental load (which is a less valued aspect of food work than the cooking itself). The findings also revealed a novel dimension of paternal engagement in food work: they also managed to turn it into a relaxing moment, a moment for themselves to alleviate stress from their workday. This also happened because they controlled the time and space of cooking, and more generally engaged in domestic activities according to their own spatial and temporal conditions (Singly 2005; O. Schwartz 2012b).

During the mealtimes themselves, the fathers occupied central positions for some of the commensal dimensions. In summary, they were witnessed as being both fun, but also rather authoritative and impatient. In terms of conversations, the mothers took care of getting children to engage in family exchanges, getting them to talk about themselves and their day. They made sure that the conversational space was equally distributed between children. The mothers would more easily accept to be interrupted and smoothly take up the conversation after. The fathers of this research tended to reinforce and legitimise the centrality of the mothers in the family conversation, but they were also less acceptant of being interrupted.

Finally, their position in terms of conviviality proved to be central as well, but in a highly paradoxical manner. They managed to make mealtime fun, engaging the whole family in many humorous interactions, but they were also witnessed as being quite impatient, again, and whenever a child did not conform to the expected happy or pleasant emotional state, the fathers rapidly got cross, which brought them to emotions that were contrary to the feeling rules of convivial mealtimes therefore further compromising the mealtime atmosphere. It was then the mothers who successfully produced emotion work to repair the mood. Interestingly, some children, both girls and boys, were witnessed producing emotion work as well, demonstrating how they had highly integrated commensal norms.

Nevertheless the fathers were also witnessed positioning themselves as the guardians of normative dimensions of mealtimes, and particularly of a convivial atmosphere, blaming their children whenever their emotions did not match the expected conventions. Paradoxically, they often did so by mobilising

emotions that were contrary to a pleasant and loving atmosphere, which then led the mothers, and sometimes even the daughters to need to produce emotions work to repair the atmosphere.

## **2.2. *Putting into perspective French family mealtimes with Australian practices***

Putting into perspective the findings from the French households with the results from the Australian families led to surprising and insightful results, although the limited amount of observational methods from Adelaide compel me to be cautious in my conclusion about the findings based on emotional or interactional aspects of mealtimes.. French food practices (or practices from Latin cultures in general) have been regularly compared with Anglo Saxon models (Fischler and Masson 2014; Ochs and Shoheit 2006b; Kremer-Sadlik et al. 2015; Phull 2019). In these studies, conviviality is often associated with the French or Latin eating model. If we understand commensal conviviality as pleasant, relaxed mealtime where everybody equally enjoys the gathering – basically a quality time moment that can contribute to overall wellbeing - then the Australian households seemed to particularly value conviviality, to the point of sometimes sacrificing the health equation of commensality (trying to get children to eat healthy food, enough but not too much of eat and at an appropriate rhythm). But then, again, in a context of elevated parental time stress, long working hours and little time spent with their children, quality time between parents and their children is perceived as one a central moral imperative of contemporary family life. This valorisation of mealtimes as quality moments also explained why the Australian households more commonly ate in the lounge room. It also seemed that the Australian households relied more on the environment of the mealtime to create conviviality (eating on the couch, serving food that everybody would enjoy and especially the children) than on emotional work.

Looking into the social life schedules of the households, I could better understand why the families from Adelaide seemed to eat less regularly together than the ones from Lyon. Extracurricular activities commonly happened at the moment when parents wanted to have their dinnertime to get children in bed at an early enough and ‘healthy’ hour. Also, in Adelaide, parents still had significant activities to carry out after the dinnertimes, including homework and bathing, whereas in Lyon, parents ‘only’ had to put children to bed. Finally, the mealtime conversations seemed to be more important for the parents from Lyon than for those from Adelaide and perhaps this was also the case because the families found other moments in the day to talk together and create a sense of family (such as in the car, after the mealtime in the lounge room).

## **2.3. *Commensality and its articulation with the making of the family and health***

The findings provided a detailed, grounded description of the unfolding of everyday family mealtimes, revealing the construction of health and wellbeing aspects, the sustaining of family unity while

authorising more or less space for family members as individuals. They also showed contradictory commensal imperatives that tended to reinforce unequal gendered parenting roles among the participating families and feelings of failure for mothers. The commensal and food norms were negotiated daily and this flexibility actually reinforced and was constitutive of the norms. The results from this thesis confirm that family mealtimes remained central in the functioning of the family.

Family mealtimes felt all the more like pressure cookers (Bowen, Brenton, and Elliott 2019) as the social, moral and health norms that underlaid the unfolding of everyday family commensality (being altogether, communicating, being happy together, eating and feeding healthy food) required many efforts and skills to articulate them during mealtime, and these skills varied according to the family's social position, but also according to the children's age and their energy as well as the parent's availability and energy at the end of their day.

### **3. Reflecting on the in-person observation of everyday family mealtimes**

To what point is it possible to observe everyday family commensality and how does my presence and my subjectivity affect this work? This question guided the construction of this research project and followed me along the fieldwork and through the analysis. It was all the more present in my mind that the participating families themselves and many of the people I talked to about my research wondered how I could observe private life if I was disrupting this very life, if I was anything else than a fly on their house walls. I have addressed this bias in Chapter 2 and throughout the manuscript, but I would like to come back to this question here. I believe this approach remained a valid method to examine family life and especially domestic commensality for several reasons: I was able to address the bias directly with the participants, after a few visits, the participants and especially children got more used to my presence and most of all, the disturbance I was creating provided additional materials on what the participants believed everyday commensality should be. Nevertheless, there was an unexpected consequence of my presence in the families. At first, I got caught in the trap of behaving like a rather usual commensal guest (helping setting and clearing, commenting on the food, engaging in conversations), which meant I was creating the conditions for extraordinary commensality to happen. What I wanted to observe was rather everyday domestic commensality or at least a slightly disrupted version of it. After a few visits, with the first households, I therefore made efforts before and during the mealtimes to shift more from the position of a guest to that of an observer.

I would like to conclude this section on a reflexive methodological note. I explained in the Introduction how society and even research is permeated by a family mealtime imperative, which portrays everyday domestic commensality as a pleasant and beneficial practice, thus urging households to eat altogether

more often. By fear of adhering too closely to this imperative, I initially fell into the opposite trap, secretly – and unscientifically – wishing I would observe many conflicts, tensions and generally reasons to debunk the family meal imperative. My fieldwork experiences initially puzzled me, in that manner. My first impressions, the rather non-analytical thoughts that initially came to my mind were that the family mealtimes observed were indeed pleasant, fun and healthy and an overall positive experience for all the commensals, myself included. It was only after months of transcription and coding that I really began to grasp the inner workings of commensality, and started to unfold the unconscious aspects of family mealtimes. This delay was probably all the more accentuated by the fact I was studying something extremely familiar, and about which there was not much literature from a grounded perspective. About at that time, I gave up wanting to prove anything about commensality, as I understood knowing more about them, opening up the black box, was sufficient. This, in itself, is a testament to the merits of the ethnographic approach for studying rather unnoticed and unconscious aspects of daily life: it allows to be so immersed in the everyday routines of the participants that the point of departure of the analytical process during fieldwork is to feel and experience.

#### **4. Strengths, perspectives and implications**

##### **4.1. *Strengths: being accepted into families' home and recording the observations***

The strength of this research lies in the nature of the materials collected and the participants who participated in the study. Visiting families' homes has been reported to be difficult in terms of access and possibility of recruiting the whole household for such a burdensome study. Despite the delay caused by the ethics approval procedures and by the COVID-19 restrictions, the fieldwork successfully unfolded and led to the collection of rich materials, also permitted by the audio recording of all the visits and their transcription.

Entering the households has also proved to be a successful way of getting fathers to fully participate in the study (for the interviews and during the observations), even for the households who were recruited through the mothers. Recruiting the households both through mothers and fathers has led to diversity in the observation of fathers engagement in domestic food work. In Lyon, the fathers through which I recruited the whole household were the fathers who were the most engaged in the domestic food work, to the point of bearing the mental load (Benoit Bourdon, Pierre Lebrun, Issa Nimaga, Guillaume Rizzo). The other households of Lyon were recruited through the mothers only. One of the gaps in the literature identified was the relative absence of fathers

Overall, I believe the nature and quantity of materials has led me to address the methodological gap that existed in the literature about the unfolding of everyday family mealtimes.

#### **4.2. *Perspectives and implications***

This thesis is built on my choice of privileging the ethnographic method, based on dense observations and on an inductive approach. As with most studies and especially research based on observations, the analysis of the materials can far exceed the scope of the research project, which is usually framed by various deadlines. The exercise of a doctoral research and particularly that of a thesis conducted within the particular frame of my project. This framework was set by the institutional and financial conditions of this research – in particular with a private funding and two private partners – which limited the overall schedule to three and a half years (including a 4 months delay obtained to compensate for loss of time due to the COVID-19 pandemic health restrictions), the question posed is the possibility to do it all. This meant finalising at regular intervals throughout the course of my PhD candidature deliverables for the various partners. While this was highly beneficial for the unfolding and progression of my research, I also sometime felt some frustration of not having enough to develop further some aspects of my research, especially as developing and finishing a doctoral thesis in sociology over three and a half years is rather unusual. As a consequence of the conditions in which I conducted my doctoral research, I privileged in the manuscript a detailed presentation of the ethnographic materials, through a thematical analysis, so as to address the research problem, and investigate a topic in a manner that had rarely been done before. As a consequence, this thesis necessarily opens up many perspectives for the study of family commensality, in particular by pursuing the analysis of some of the materials and developing further some of the theoretical perspectives.

This work also has some methodological limits, which constitute, again, new perspective for future research. First, the interviews with children were under exploited, as a method and as a material. This is due to my shortcomings in terms of interviewing skills mobilised with children, but also to the way I entered into the families' home. Lareau, in her study on childhood education inequalities in the US, met the parents through the children (Lareau 2011). She met the children at their school first and then, via them, were introduced to their parents. For my research, I met the children through the parents, which introduced a hierarchical relationship with children, as they viewed me as another adult in their home.

There are other limits to this research which are more contextual and which I already presented in the Chapter 1. The development of the Australian fieldwork was limited, but the preliminary results from the Australian households open up new perspectives for investigating family mealtimes in a proper cultural comparison perspective. Finally, there is a key puzzle missing in the analysis of commensality



presented in this thesis. My focus on physical table manners has been peripheral and transversal to all chapters. This is due to the methods mobilised. Filming all the visits would have been necessary to account for and analyse in depth the body manners, which most certainly would provide another rich insight into socialisation practices in everyday family life.

The results from this thesis lead us to question the possibilities of thinking about norms outside their practice. In particular, we are compelled to rethink larger scale research on everyday commensal socialisation and the importance given to information collected through indirect methods rather than through direct observation or recording. I believe results issuing from grounded, in depth research with a small number of participants are preliminary and thus complementary to larger scale research, perhaps based on more quantitative approaches. Knowing more about the way the various dimensions unfold can inform the development of future interview grids and questionnaires about commensality. The ethnographic approach with audio-recorded techniques has proven to be successful. I would recommend complementing this approach with family produced videos of their own practices (although only after having met the participants in-person and having begun in-person observations). Further research should also investigate practices of lower socio-economic groups as well as develop a deeper cultural comparison perspective.

Overall, the findings from this study require us to take into account the incredibly complex and somewhat contradictory nature of everyday domestic commensality, both in research and in the way we talk it in society. The results from this thesis compel us, in particular to be cautious about encouraging families to have regular family mealtimes. Whether or not they may be beneficial, eating together requires a significant amount of efforts from the family members, although these may not appear as such as they are rather invisibilised and unscientised. These are, in particular, efforts of synchronisation of the eating rhythms, negotiation with children to get them to eat, conversational endeavour as well as emotional management. All these are closely tied up to family life dynamics and expectations, but remain non the less efforts. When thinking about promoting normative mealtime, through media or advertisement for instance, it appears imperative to be aware of the gender inequalities that where at time enhanced through the production of family meals, before and during mealtimes. Multiple studies across many countries, following in particular in the steps of DeVault (DeVault 1991) have shown how domestic food work is often highly burdensome, even if it contains rewarding dimensions. In this thesis, I have shown that the work of feeding the family does not end when the food is prepared and family members arrive at the table. Once they are gathered to eat together, then the unfolding of the mealtime requires the articulation of multiple skills.

The family mealtimes that happened in an everyday life context were replete with competing social, moral and health imperatives. Sacrificing family mealtimes could simply be a way to prioritise one imperative over the other. Three central commensal dimensions were observed and analysed in this thesis: eating and feeding healthy meals, getting children to engage in quality family communication, and building as well as maintaining a pleasant, fun and loving atmosphere. These all appeared as equally important for the parents but required the mobilisation of significant interactional and emotional skills. Putting too much stress on one of the mealtime dimension could be detrimental to the other, which in return would augment parents' feeling of failure in the creation of a healthy and socially balanced family.



# Résumé de la thèse

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. *Naviguer autour de la table*

Les repas de famille ne constituent pas un sujet original. Tout le monde mange et la plupart des personnes ont déjà fait l'expérience des repas de famille, que ce soit au quotidien, de manière plus exceptionnelle ou encore dans le passé. J'ai grandi dans un foyer où manger signifiait manger ensemble et où les repas constituaient des pierres angulaires incontestables de la vie familiale. A chaque fois que j'expliquais à quelqu'un le sujet de ma recherche, mon interlocut.eur.rice comprenait et s'identifiait facilement au sujet, bien que de différentes manières selon la personne : beaucoup supposaient simplement que je ne faisais qu'étudier la nourriture, c'est-à-dire ce qui était servi et mangé. Certains réagissaient en déplorant que les membres des familles ne mangent plus ensemble, tandis que d'autres considéraient ce thème comme banal, voire trivial, se demandant pourquoi il fallait faire une thèse sur ce sujet (et qui pouvait bien financer une telle recherche).

Bien que j'avais auparavant déjà étudié les pratiques alimentaires, je n'avais jamais abordé les repas de famille et je considérais, naïvement, qu'il devait s'agir d'un sujet déjà largement exploité. Je me suis rapidement passionnée pour les repas de famille en tant qu'objet sociologique, notamment comme moyen de mieux comprendre et déconstruire les notions de famille et de santé. Pourtant, mes idées préconçues sur les repas de famille m'ont amené, dans un premier temps, à « tourner autour du pot » – ou plutôt de la table – dans la construction de mon objet de recherche. Il m'a fallu un certain temps pour bien appréhender le sujet et m'asseoir à table, au sens figuré comme au sens propre, puisque je n'ai pu commencer à observer des repas de famille qu'à partir de mai 2020, soit environ un an et demi après avoir débuté ma thèse en février 2019.

La manière dont je me suis initialement approprié ce projet de thèse est liée à la recherche actuelle sur les repas de famille et explique en partie la structuration de ce manuscrit. J'ai été initialement contactée par le Centre de Recherche de l'Institut Paul Bocuse pour un projet de recherche intitulé « Est-ce que le fait de manger ensemble en famille améliore la qualité et la variété de l'alimentation, améliore les relations psychosociales familiales et augmente le bien-être de la famille ? ». J'ai commencé à travailler sur ce sujet en menant de manière parallèle deux revues de la littérature distinctes sur le travail alimentaire domestique et les repas de famille. J'ai procédé à une revue narrative en sciences sociales (Le Moal et al. 2021) tout en participant, en parallèle, à une revue

systématique en sciences de la nutrition et santé publique (Middleton et al. 2020). Je me suis rapidement rendu compte que les repas de famille avaient fait l'objet de nombreuses études, du point de vue des sciences de la santé, et que la plupart des études étaient construites autour de l'hypothèse que les repas partagés étaient bénéfiques pour les membres de la famille. En sciences sociales, le travail alimentaire entourant les repas de famille avait également été étudié en profondeur, dans différents pays. Par ailleurs, une partie de la littérature en sociologie aborde de manière critique les études en sciences de la santé qui visent à promouvoir les repas de famille, soulignant que cette promotion est parfois moralement biaisée.

Toutefois, si dans l'ensemble les repas de famille ont fait l'objet de nombreux travaux, une lacune importante dans la littérature est apparue. Un grand nombre des études recensées sont centrées sur le travail alimentaire nécessaire et préliminaire aux repas de famille plutôt que sur le fait de manger ensemble en tant que tel, c'est-à-dire la commensalité familiale. Cela signifie également qu'il existe une forme de flou dans l'expression « repas de famille », imprégnant même les domaines de recherche qui s'y intéressent, les repas de famille étant généralement abordé par le seul biais de la préparation alimentaire ou du contenu de l'assiette. Cette confusion peut provenir de la polysémie du mot « repas » ou « meal » en anglais. Un repas est à la fois le contenu, c'est-à-dire la nourriture préparée et servie, et l'espace-temps dédié à la consommation de cette nourriture.

Pour clarifier ces ambiguïtés, j'ai utilisé dans mon manuscrit de thèse plusieurs expressions anglaises de manière distincte dans les chapitres suivants : *family meal* (ou *dinner*), *family mealtime* (ou *dinnertime*) et *family* ou *domestic commensality* (commensalité familiale ou domestique).

*Family meal* fait référence à l'ensemble du processus que les membres de la famille mettent en œuvre pour pouvoir manger ensemble, ce qui inclue les courses, la cuisine, la préparation de l'espace du repas (la table ou ailleurs) et le nettoyage, ainsi que l'organisation et la charge mentale (Haicault 1984) de ces activités et le partage de la nourriture en soi. Le *mealtime* – que l'on peut traduire littéralement par *le temps du repas* – fait partie du processus du repas familial, ce qui implique que la notion de *family meal* dépasse celle de *mealtime* en termes d'espace, de temporalité, de pratiques et de charge mentale. Autrement dit, le *family mealtime* constitue le *family meal* sans ses coulisses. Le *family mealtime* peut être définis de manière assez générique comme le moment et les actions où les membres de la famille se réunissent pour manger, dans un sens large et vague car il existe une flexibilité dans les multiples aspects de la convivialité du moment du repas. En français, une seule expression recouvre les termes anglais de *family meal* et *family mealtime* : le repas de famille. *Family mealtime* pourrait être traduit par le « le temps du repas de famille » ou le « repas partagé en famille » mais nous utilisons principalement, pour ce résumé en français l'expression « repas de famille ».

La commensalité familiale se réfère au repas partagé en famille, mais englobe un aspect plus théorique de l'expression (Grignon 2001; Sobal, Bove, and Rauschenbach 2002; Jönsson, Michaud, and Neuman 2021). Il existe la commensalité domestique ordinaire, désignant un repas partagé entre les membres proches de la famille de manière quotidienne et routinière, et la commensalité extraordinaire, indiquant une occasion exceptionnelle, généralement avec un cercle de commensaux plus large, un menu plus élaboré ou exceptionnel ou un repas pris dans un lieu différent (Grignon 2001).

Cette thèse porte sur les repas quotidiens partagés en famille (que nous nommerons ici *repas de famille*, à défaut d'un équivalent exact et concis dans la langue française de *family mealtime*). Ils sont toutefois également examinés à la lumière de certaines formes de commensalité extraordinaire au sein des ménages participants. Je les ai en outre analysés en prenant en compte leurs coulisses et les efforts nécessaires à leur préparation.

### **1.2. Une boîte noire cachée à la vue de tous**

En dehors du monde universitaire, la commensalité domestique quotidienne et exceptionnelle est généralement décrite de deux manières différentes et antagonistes. D'une part, les repas de famille exceptionnels sont représentés dans le cinéma populaire sous un angle plutôt dramatique, avec des conflits familiaux qui éclatent et se règlent (voir par exemple le film français *Le Prénom*), où des secrets de famille sont révélés, menaçant l'existence de l'unité familiale en elle-même, ou du moins de la famille en tant qu'espace d'affection, de sécurité et de développement (voir par exemple le film danois *Festen*). Dans l'ensemble, les représentations de la commensalité domestique exceptionnelles sont nombreuses et mettent en avant les difficultés que peut poser le fait de manger ensemble. Les repas quotidiens partagés en famille sont plus rarement représentés au cinéma (voir toutefois le film américain *Little Miss Sunshine*, par exemple).

D'autre part, les repas de famille quotidiens sont couramment décrits dans les médias comme étant intrinsèquement positifs, plutôt faciles à mettre en place et associés à un prétendu déclin de la manière et la régularité de manger ensemble. Alors qu'auparavant, les discours portaient généralement sur la montée d'une prétendue individualisation des habitudes alimentaires qui menacerait l'idée même de pouvoir manger ensemble (Fischler and Pardo 2013), il existe aujourd'hui des discours plus nuancés sur le repas de famille, qui soutiennent dans certains cas que l'impératif de manger ensemble est complètement infondé. Cependant, une communication médiatique plus spécialisée, destinée aux parents et plus particulièrement aux mères continue de promouvoir le repas de famille pour ses supposés bénéfices. Certains discours reconnaissent les difficultés auxquelles les parents sont confrontés lorsqu'il s'agit d'organiser et de préparer le repas, mais le message dominant est que cela en vaut la peine, en raison, par exemple, d'effets positifs en termes de composition des repas, de

communication et de réussite scolaire. Dans le contexte de la pandémie de COVID-19, ces messages ont été renforcés par la diffusion de discours médiatiques selon lesquels les épisodes de confinement et le télétravail constitueraient des occasions uniques et réconfortantes pour les familles de manger ensemble plus souvent et mieux.

En France, les repas de famille quotidiens sont également mis en avant dans le dernier Programme National Nutrition Santé comme support pour manger mieux et pour réduire le risque d'obésité. Il est toutefois notable que les études incluses dans les méta-analyses sur lesquelles se basent ces recommandations ont été le plus souvent menées aux États-Unis ; peu d'entre elles ont été menées en Europe et aucune en France (Dallacker, Hertwig, and Mata 2017). Le site internet du Programme National Nutrition Santé indiquait, en 2019<sup>104</sup>, par exemple que « les personnes qui prennent régulièrement des repas en famille auraient une meilleure alimentation que les autres et moins de risque d'obésité », et les repas de famille sont un « moyen éprouvé de lutter contre l'obésité ». Ici, le repas est ciblé comme un support de normalisation diététique. Les membres de la famille sont également encouragés à prendre régulièrement des repas ensemble car ce sont des occasions « conviviales ». Une promotion similaire est observée aux États-Unis (Bowen, Brenton, and Elliott 2019), au Royaume-Uni (Murcott 2012; Jackson 2009) et en Australie (Lindsay et al. 2019). Il existe par ailleurs des programmes d'intervention visant à augmenter la fréquence des repas en commun au sein des ménages, en mettant en avant ses prétendus avantages (The Family Dinner Project<sup>105</sup> aux États-Unis, Healthy Kids Association<sup>106</sup> en Australie). Cette dernière association, dont l'objectif est la promotion d'une alimentation saine pour les enfants, déclare sur son site web : « la recherche montre que les familles qui mangent ensemble régulièrement (c'est-à-dire plus de trois fois par semaine) ont obtenus des résultats plus positifs en matière de santé, de relations familiales et de développement social ». Ils reconnaissent également qu'il est « presque impossible » de manger ensemble en famille en raison des longues heures de travail et des activités des enfants, mais que les familles devraient quand même s'efforcer de le faire.

Pourtant, ce type de promotion des repas de famille est trompeur car, jusqu'à présent, seules des associations corrélationnelles ont été démontrées entre la commensalité domestique et des effets positifs en matière de santé et de bien-être (Middleton et al. 2020; Dwyer et al. 2015; Dallacker, Hertwig, and Mata 2017). Par ailleurs, nous manquons de recherches se penchant spécifiquement sur les différentes dimensions des repas de famille qui pourraient être bénéfiques, car la plupart des études précédentes se sont concentrées sur la fréquence des repas partagés en famille ou sur le travail

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<sup>104</sup> Le site internet [mangerbouger.fr](http://mangerbouger.fr) a depuis été refait et la recommandation de manger ensemble n'apparaît plus.

<sup>105</sup> <https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/>

<sup>106</sup> <https://healthy-kids.com.au/>

alimentaire nécessaire à ceux-ci. Les membres de la famille sont confrontés à de nombreuses injonctions quant à la manière de manger et de nourrir la famille et cet impératif de manger ensemble est lié à des préoccupations centrales concernant la santé et le bien-être des membres de la famille. Les repas de famille font l'objet de nombreux débats dans la recherche mais, paradoxalement, nous ne savons que peu de choses sur le déroulement réel des repas partagés au quotidien. La commensalité familiale quotidienne s'apparente ainsi à une boîte noire cachée à la vue de tous. Pour en revenir à la proposition de recherche initiale, il m'est apparu qu'avant d'essayer de déterminer si les repas de famille pouvaient être bénéfiques, il était nécessaire de mieux comprendre comment se déroulait la commensalité domestique quotidienne, dans ses différentes dimensions.

La mise en perspective de résultats issus de l'observation de repas de famille en France, avec des pratiques commensales dans un pays anglo-saxon m'est également apparu importante. Cette approche m'apparaissait comme prometteuse pour enquêter sur des dimensions aussi routinières de la vie familiale, la distance culturelle apportant un éclairage supplémentaire pour l'analyse de pratiques peu conscientisées telles les interactions et les émotions lors des repas partagés. De plus, même si l'impératif normatif du repas familial présenté ci-dessus est souvent basé sur des études émanant de pays anglo-saxons, cette promotion se traduit de manière similaire en France, indépendamment des différences culturelles.



## **2. Problématique : dévoiler la mise en œuvre de la commensalité quotidienne, à la lumière de la vie familiale, des rapports de genre, de la position sociale et des origines culturelles**

A partir de la revue de la littérature sur le travail alimentaire domestique et les repas de famille, j'ai identifié diverses lacunes dans la recherche sur la commensalité domestique quotidienne. Ces lacunes sont de nature épistémologique, théorique et méthodologique et m'ont conduit à recourir à divers cadres théoriques pour aborder ces limites et approfondir notre compréhension des repas de famille quotidiens. Une problématique matérialisée par un double questionnement émergea de ce processus, interrogeant les conditions, les formes et les effets de la commensalité domestique quotidienne

**Comment est-ce que se déploient les multiples dimensions des repas de famille quotidiens et de quelles manières sont-elles régulées et négociées, en fonction des rapports de genre, des conditions sociales de la famille ainsi que de ses origines culturelles ?**

**En quoi est-ce que la mise en œuvre de la commensalité d'une part, et les dynamiques familiales et les préoccupations de santé au sein des foyers d'autre part, s'influencent mutuellement ?**

L'objectif général de cette thèse est de mieux comprendre la manière dont les repas de famille quotidiens se déroulent, d'un point de vue pratique, interactionnel et émotionnel, et de mettre en évidence les différentes dimensions commensales. Il s'agit en particulier de répondre aux sous-objectifs suivants :

- Comprendre la place des repas de famille dans le cadre plus large de la vie familiale et des conditions sociales du foyer
- Différencier les rôles et les expériences de chacun des membres de la famille dans les repas quotidiens
- Identifier, en particulier, la manière dont les pères prennent part et vivent cette commensalité domestique
- Evaluer le poids de la dimension culturelle par la mise en perspective des matériaux de Lyon avec ceux de familles à Adélaïde

### **3. Aperçu de la méthodologie : observer les repas de famille**

Cette thèse s'appuie sur une ethnographie en personne avec 10 familles à Lyon (France), et sur une ethnographie digitale avec quatre familles à Adélaïde (Australie). Le groupe de famille participantes étaient issues des classes moyennes et classes supérieures. Les résultats proviennent de l'observation de 42 repas de famille, dont 33 en personne, cinq en vidéo conférence et quatre filmées par les familles elles-mêmes. Au total, environ 80 heures d'observations ont été réalisées, enregistrées et retranscrites. Entre un et sept repas de famille ont été observés par foyer, la moyenne étant une observation de quatre repas par famille. Les observations ont porté principalement sur la préparation alimentaire, la préparation des repas et de la table, les repas partagés, le débarrassage, le nettoyage de l'espace du repas et de la cuisine. Cinquante entretiens semi-directifs ont également été menés auprès de 15 pères, 14 mères et 21 enfants. Une partie des familles ont également participé à un journal alimentaire sur la durée d'une semaine.

### **4. Caractéristiques des familles et présentation des rythmes de leur vie sociale**

Les ménages étaient pour la plupart situés au sein des classes moyennes, avec quelques familles de classe moyenne inférieure et de classes supérieures. Les familles avaient entre un et cinq enfant(s) âgé(s) de 4 à 12<sup>107</sup> ans. Parmi le groupe de familles recrutées, il y avait deux familles recomposées et une famille monoparentale (père). Tous les parents, exceptée une mère, travaillaient professionnellement à un minimum de 80%.

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<sup>107</sup> A Adélaïde, deux familles avaient un enfant plus jeune.

Table 18. Caractéristiques générales des familles de Lyon

Famille	Composition familiale	Age des enfants	Occupation		Revenus annuels nets après impôts, en euros (approx.)	Classe sociale	Diplôme le plus élevé des parents	Quartier, type de logement et location/propriété
			Mère	Père				
Bourdon	Famille bi-parentale intacte	6, 8	Conseillère Principale d'Education	Ingénieur en environnement, chef de service	100 000	Classe supérieure	Master pour les deux	Lyon 7 Appartement Location
Imbert		5, 8	Industrie pharmaceutiques, ventes	Industrie pharmaceutique, technicien	100 000		Master pour les deux	Lyon 7 Appartement Propriété
Ferret		7	Ingénieure en environnement, associée	Consultant en management	85 000		Master pour les deux	Lyon 3 Appartement Location
Comescu		7, 10	Maîtresse de conférence	Ingénieur informatique	73 000	Doctorat pour Irina, Master pour Laurent	Lyon 7 Appartement Location	
Franquet <sup>108</sup>		10, 12	Enseignante dans une école d'ingénieur	Ingénieur en transport, responsable d'équipe	55 000	Classe moyenne supérieure	Master pour les deux	Lyon 7 Appartement Propriété
Obecanov		6 Public	Agente immobilière	Maître de conférence	48 000	Classe moyenne intermédiaire	Doctorat pour Viktor, Master pour Sophie	Lyon 7 Appartement Location
Lebrun	6, 8, 9, 10, 11	Ressources humaines	Responsable d'un relais d'assistante maternelle	46 500	Master pour les deux		Banlieue sud résidentielle Maison Propriété	
Nimaga	5, 12	Chercheuse (secteur privé)	Soudeur	46 800	Master for Ana Baccalauréat pour Issa		Lyon 7 Appartement Propriété	
Rizzo	Famille monoparentale	10		Artiste, directeur d'une compagnie	33 000 <sup>109</sup>	Baccalauréat	Lyon 7 Appartement Location	

<sup>108</sup> Sur la seule base de leurs revenus nets annuels, la famille Franquet se situeraient dans la classe moyenne intermédiaire. Cependant, plusieurs éléments indiquent qu'ils appartiennent à la classe moyenne supérieure : ils possèdent un appartement assez grand et neuf dans un quartier plutôt aisé du 7e arrondissement de Lyon, Lucas occupe un poste de manager en tant qu'ingénieur et Marie travaille dans l'enseignement supérieur. Leurs enfants vont tous les deux dans des collèges privés.

<sup>109</sup> Guillaume reported an annual net income before taxes of 35 000 which resulted, approximately, in an annual net income after taxes of 33 000 euros.

André	Famille bi-parentale intacte	4, 6, 7	Chômage, précédemment traductrice	Consultant en management dans une entreprise franchisée	41 450	Classe moyenne basse	Master pour Angélique CAP pour Pascal	Lyon 7 Appartement Location, lodgement social
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Table 19. Caractéristiques des familles d'Adélaïde

Famille	Composition familiale	Age des enfants compris dans les critères de recrutement	Ages des enfants en dehors des critères de recrutement	Occupation		Tranche de revenus annuels	Classe sociale	Quartier et type de logement
				Mère	Père			
Bennet	Bi-parentale intacte	7	3	Fonctionnaire (habitat)	Fonctionnaire, ingénieur	140 000–180 000	Upper middle class	Wynn Vale, maison
Brown		8, 6		Fonctionnaire (habitat)	Pompier	140 000–180 000		Burnside, maison
Chapman		7, 5	1	Maitresse d'école primaire	Fonctionnaire, manager, service sociaux	140 000–180 000	Intermediary middle class	Greenwith, maison
Davies		7, 5, 5		Assistante administrative à l'Université + gérante de son entreprise de célébration de mariage	Fonctionnaire Travailleur social	100 000–140 000	Lower middle class	Golden Grove, maison

Les repas de famille au sein des foyers de cette étude sont planifiés en fonction de différentes priorités. L'attention portée à la santé des enfants à travers les repas s'inscrit dans des considérations plus larges sur la santé globale des enfants, qui passe notamment par un bon sommeil, en termes d'horaires (heure du coucher), de durée et de qualité (qui est associé en retour à un bon repas).

Pour les parents de cette étude, l'impératif de coucher les enfants à une heure régulière, et pas trop tard, à Lyon comme à Adélaïde, détermine la durée et la fin des repas familiaux. Les parents s'efforcent également de coucher les enfants suffisamment tôt pour bénéficier le soir d'un temps conjugal ou d'un temps seul pour se détendre de la journée. Les impératifs de santé que sont un bon sommeil et des bons repas sont également influencés par d'autres occupations domestiques, telles que les activités éducatives et récréatives et les routines d'hygiène (devoirs des enfants, temps de jeu, histoires au coucher, bain). Les repas de famille sont également planifiés en fonction des différents engagements des membres de la famille en dehors de la maison (travail des parents, école, activités extra-scolaire, garde des enfants).

Dans l'ensemble, il est apparu qu'à Adélaïde, les activités individuelles des membres de la famille (parents et enfants) interfèrent fortement avec l'heure, la durée et l'expérience des repas de famille. À Lyon, si les enfants participent également à des activités extrascolaires, elles semblent être moins

nombreuses les soirs de semaine et ne repoussent pas autant l'heure du repas (même si cela interfère parfois avec la préparation). Par ailleurs, les activités quotidiennes que sont les devoirs et le bain sont inversées entre Lyon et Adélaïde. Les enfants prennent leur bain et font leurs devoirs avant l'heure du dîner à Lyon, alors que c'est rarement le cas à Adélaïde. Cela signifie qu'en plus d'être soucieux de respecter une heure de coucher appropriée pour les enfants - une préoccupation qui existe dans toutes les familles de cette étude - les parents d'Adélaïde sont également préoccupés par les nombreuses activités qui suivent les repas de famille : bain, devoirs, parfois même certaines activités extrascolaires. À Lyon, les parents semblent pouvoir se détendre de la journée à la fin du repas familial (parfois pendant) alors qu'à Adélaïde, il semble que les parents parviennent seulement à le faire plus tard.

## **5. Les conditions inégales de production des repas de famille : pression et plaisir en cuisine**

Examiner les rythmes sociaux de la vie quotidienne des parents et des enfants a montré que les membres de la famille devaient faire face à de nombreux impératifs concurrents, concernant notamment leur bien-être et santé. L'investigation de la commensalité se poursuit à travers la production des repas de famille (repas en tant contenu) et en particulier sur la façon dont les parents s'organisent pour fournir des repas qu'ils estiment sains. J'ai examiné par ailleurs les variations d'expériences entre les mères et les pères de cette étude et la manière dont, lorsqu'il s'agit de nourrir la famille, les rapports de genre traditionnels sont réinventés sous des formes plus complexes, ce qui les rend d'autant plus difficiles à reconnaître. J'ai également analysé les niveaux d'investissement variés des mères et des pères de cette étude en termes de responsabilité, de soin (*care*) de stress et de plaisir. Des expériences et des responsabilités inégales dans le travail alimentaire domestique ont été observées entre les pères et les mères des ménages participants, allant d'une forte implication à un désengagement presque total, en passant par un partage apparemment égal du travail alimentaire :

**Jérôme Ferret** [père, classe moyenne supérieure, Lyon]: C'est souvent que, Céline, elle rentre tard [habituellement autour de 18h30] donc quand elle arrive, on passe à table aussitôt. Mais à 99%, c'est Céline qui fait, qui prépare. Et c'est vrai que, des fois, Céline elle dit : "j'suis toute seule", [à cuisiner, dans une pièce séparée]. Et si j'suis pas en train d'faire un autre truc avec Ombeline [7 ans] comme les devoirs, je viens dans la cuisine, on discute, je l'aide à préparer des trucs. Puis après, sur la préparation, elle est crevée, elle dit : « Tiens, y'a ça à faire réchauffer, tu t'en occupes », voilà. Donc j'm'en occupe, ça me dérange pas trop, de l'aider dans l'exécution. Ou alors, si c'est faire de la cuisine, elle me dit « tu fais chauffer ça », « tu fais ci », « tu fais ça ». « Ok, d'accord », mais me demande pas de faire la recette ! Céline, elle aime cuisiner et elle aime manger. Moi, j'aime manger, j'aime pas cuisiner. Chacun son truc.

**Benoit Bourdon** [père, classe supérieure, Lyon]: Y'a des moments où je passe ma vie en cuisine. Enfin les weekends où je passe ma vie en cuisine, même moi j'ai envie de mettre le nez dehors... Pour Marie-Cécile, c'est tellement plié qu'elle se soucie pas du repas, forcément. Et pas parce qu'elle a pas envie mais juste parce qu'elle sait que je m'en occupe, donc basta. Et donc du coup, y'a des moments ça peut

me peser, quand y'a des moments où je me dis, si moi je le fais pas, ça va pas le faire. Mais bon... Non, non, je pense que on s'est trouvé un équilibre qui est bien. Et puis y'a le fait aussi que, si on fait pas ça, on est coincés avec des plats préparés, on sait pas trop ce qui a dedans...

**Marie-Cécile Bourdon:** Ouais, et puis là, tu t'éclates vraiment dans la cuisine!

**Benoit:** Et puis, ouais... on aime bien les légumes frais, voilà, les trucs comme ça... Et je pense que moi, j'ai chopé ça du fait que ma mère le faisait... et c'est aussi un truc qu'on veut transmettre, le fait que : "Lucie, qu'est-ce tu veux manger?" "Des haricots verts". C'est une victoire quoi!

*Dîner 2*

**Vanessa Bennet** [mother, upper middle class, Adélaïde] [Preparing vegetables in advance, on the weekend] is easier with working. Like, so for example, tonight I only logged off literally five minutes ago, I was working at six o'clock still and Craig's like, the chicken was defrosted in the fridge and he's like, "what's tonight's dinner?" And I'm like: "chicken curry". So he knows that the vegetables are already cut up in the fridge and he just empties them into the steamer. Because normally I would be at the gym, he got home from work, he went for a bike ride, the kids just got dropped off or he picks the kids up and then it's: walk in the door, chuck the veggies and chuck the chicken and cook it and within 15 minutes dinner's done [...]. And we kind of tag team. So if I'm going to the city and I go: right, my gym class is at this time, I know that everything's already prepared and Craig can put the vegetables in a saucepan, cook whatever the meat is and when I walk in the door sometimes the kids have already had dinner with him, other times we're about to sit down and eat dinner.

**Craig Bennet** [father, upper middle class, Adélaïde]: [Preparing meals in the evening] is very easy. Because we've got all the veggies cut up, ready to go. It's just: grab them from the fridge, throw it into the saucepan. Or if we're doing salad, the salad is already made, all cut up, ready to go. And then just cooking whatever meat we're having, pretty much [...]. I just do my fair share in those sorts of chores and stuff [...]. I guess it's just one thing that we need to do [meal planning and pre-preparing some vegetables in advance] because, just, of our busy life. Like sometimes we don't finish until five o'clock at night, we're not getting home until quarter past six, half past six. So if we were to come home and then have to prepare all our meals, it could be 8-8:30 before actually eating dinner, whereas now we know that our meal's prepared when we get home, come in, half hour later we're eating dinner.

Jérôme Ferret indique que Céline et lui sont inscrits dans des rôles plutôt traditionnels en matière de production des repas de famille : elle s'occupe de trouver les menus et de cuisiner, tandis qu'il aide occasionnellement, sans supporter la charge mentale du travail alimentaire. Ce sont les efforts de Céline qui leur permettent de manger ensemble rapidement après leur retour à la maison. La conversation des Bourdon révèle qu'ils ont inversé – tout en les reproduisant – les relations traditionnelles entre les sexes : Benoit s'occupe de la plupart du travail alimentaire, c'est surtout lui qui est chargé de trouver et de créer des menus sains et il s'occupe de produire les repas parce qu'il aime cuisiner. Le discours des Bennet suggère un partage plutôt équilibré de la préparation des repas du soir, leur permettant de manger ensemble peu de temps après avoir franchi la porte.

L'activité consistant à nourrir la famille, qu'elle soit caractérisée comme du travail, du soin (*care*), un loisir ou une combinaison de tous ces éléments, a fait l'objet de nombreuses études (Middleton et al. 2022 ; Mehta et al. 2019 ; Fielding-Singh 2017a ; Wright, Maher, et Tanner 2015 ; B. Beagan et al. 2008a ; DeVault 1991) et ce sujet dépasse largement le cadre restreint de notre travail. Il existe cependant très peu de recherches récentes sur la planification et la réalisation des repas de famille dans une perspective holistique. Notre étude se concentre sur la planification et la préparation alimentaire en relation avec la commensalité domestique quotidienne, en examinant la manière dont la planification

et la préparation des repas de famille affectent les repas partagés et l'expérience qu'en ont les membres de la famille. L'accent a été mis dans cette partie sur les pères et les mères (ainsi que sur les enfants s'ils étaient impliqués) et la planification comme la préparation des repas ont été étudiées sur plusieurs jours ou même semaines. L'approvisionnement alimentaire a été laissé de côté afin de limiter l'étude aux foyers, bien que la production de repas de famille s'étende aux courses et constitue une dimension importante de l'activité.

Les résultats révèlent qu'être satisfait de la façon dont les repas de famille sont produits implique de répondre, à nouveau, à de multiples impératifs : créer des menus équilibrés, avec suffisamment de légumes (en particulier les légumes "verts"), sans trop de glucides et ni de viande rouge. Cependant, les menus des repas de famille sont également produits dans un contexte beaucoup plus large que celui d'un seul dîner. Les repas doivent différer, dans la mesure du possible, du menu de la cantine enfant (et éventuellement l'équilibrer, en termes de quantités et de variété). Les repas doivent également varier avec les dîners de la semaine, mais aussi d'une semaine à l'autre. Cette approche à plus long terme des menus sains implique d'autoriser des écarts hebdomadaires aux règles (généralement le vendredi soir ou le week-end). La production des repas de famille se réalise également de manière à satisfaire les préférences individuelles, faire face aux restrictions alimentaires particulières et tenir compte d'autres considérations importantes (économiser de l'argent et éviter le gaspillage alimentaire).

D'une part, certaines familles mobilisent des stratégies d'anticipation dans la production du travail alimentaire hebdomadaire, afin de simplifier la préparation quotidienne et, finalement, vivre plus sereinement les repas de famille de la semaine. Ces stratégies d'anticipation facilitent la préparation quotidienne des repas - ce qui signifie que n'importe lequel des parents peut s'en charger. Toutefois, cela implique aussi une charge de travail importante le week-end et sur la semaine de planification des menus, et cette charge de travail est encore souvent prise en charge par les mères. Décider des menus à l'avance pour les repas de famille de toute la semaine a également pour effet de restreindre les possibilités de négociation des enfants, qui ont leur mot à dire sur les menus, mais uniquement en fonction d'un choix restreint de plats ou de légumes. Certains parents estiment également qu'il est plus facile de refuser les demandes des enfants en se référant aux règles de la planification des repas. Dans ce cas, la décision se prend le weekend, au moment de la planification du repas et il doit y avoir suffisamment de légumes, les options moins saines restant exceptionnelles.

D'autre part, les autres familles - dont certaines subissent également un stress lié au manque de temps - s'occupent du travail alimentaire sur une base quotidienne, de manière plutôt improvisée. Cette gestion du travail alimentaire au quotidien conduit à deux résultats différents : soit les parents

simplifient les menus, ce qui signifie souvent l'exclusion des légumes et la présence de glucides comme ingrédient. C'est le cas des familles issues de la classe moyenne inférieure. En outre, la difficulté de certains parents à faire manger suffisamment de légumes à leurs jeunes enfants restreint les possibilités de prévoir des menus en avance (certains parents jugent qu'il est plus facile de conserver plusieurs jours des légumes cuits que des féculents ou de la viande). Dans d'autres cas, les parents réussissent à créer des menus dont ils sont satisfaits en termes de bénéfices pour la santé, mais ces familles ont généralement des enfants plus âgés, un accès facile aux magasins d'alimentation et des compétences culinaires développées, ce qui facilite largement l'improvisation quotidienne.

En plus de ces différentes manières de produire des repas de famille, ont également été observées des expériences contrastées de la préparation des aliments en elle-même, variant d'une expérience relaxante et globalement agréable à une corvée ou même une activité redoutée. Certains des pères qui s'occupent de la majeure partie du travail alimentaire le vivent comme un véritable plaisir. Ils en font un moment de transition vers la vie familiale (après le travail), soit en passant du temps seul dans la cuisine— en écoutant des émissions de radio— soit en passant un moment de partage privilégié avec certains ou tous les membres de la famille. Ces pères cuisinent au quotidien et sont fiers de pouvoir proposer des plats sains et savoureux que toute la famille apprécie.

Les différentes formes d'implication dans la planification et la préparation des repas de famille présentées ci-dessus sont encore construites de manière fortement genrée, reproduisant plutôt que diminuant les inégalités de genre, bien que sous des formes plutôt complexes ou subverties.

Les mères de cette étude gèrent en grande majorité la charge mentale du travail alimentaire, qui constitue indéniablement l'aspect le plus pesant de l'activité de nourrir la famille. Par ailleurs, cette charge s'est déplacée au cours du week-end pour la plupart des mères (avec la planification des menus pour la semaine) ce qui renforce le fait qu'elles seules en sont responsables. Cela facilite par ailleurs la participation des pères à la préparation des repas, qui s'apparente alors davantage à une forme d'exécution, dénuée de la gestion sanitaire et émotionnelle. Enfin, l'aspect pénible du travail alimentaire— qui consiste plus à trouver quoi manger qu'à cuisiner les aliments— est parfois caché, par les deux parents, derrière un discours de partage égalitaire du travail alimentaire domestique, dans lequel l'aspect « faire » des repas de famille apparaît plus valorisé que la dimension « penser à », la planification.

Les pères de cette recherche qui cuisinent beaucoup au quotidien (Pierre Lebrun) et ceux qui sont également en charge des courses et de la recherche des menus (Benoit Bourdon, Issa Nimaga, Guillaume Rizzo) entretiennent tous un rapport plutôt épicurien à la nourriture et à la cuisine (Parsons 2015, Scholliers 2001). Ils sont également soucieux de donner à leurs enfants des repas sains.



Mais l'implication différenciée des pères dans le travail alimentaire quotidien présente un aspect supplémentaire : le temps qu'ils passent dans la cuisine est développé et vécu comme un temps et un espace pour soi. Cuisiner est donc pour eux une activité de plaisir mais aussi une activité de détente, un moyen de se déconnecter du travail, un moment qui les aide à être prêts pour une transition vers la vie familiale, ou un moment de transition en soi dans la vie familiale. Ce temps et cet espace particuliers de la cuisine, comme « chambre de décompression », selon l'expression de Benoit Bourdon, existent cependant grâce au fait d'être libéré des autres tâches domestiques (faire le ménage pour Issa Nimaga et Pierre Lebrun) (Hochschild 1989) et des responsabilités parentales (ne pas prêter attention à ce que font les enfants, pour Benoit Lebrun, lorsqu'il cuisine), toutes étant des activités domestiques non valorisées (à la maison et hors de la maison). La manière dont certaines mères organisent le travail alimentaire, avec beaucoup d'anticipation et de planification, leur permet de dégager du temps pour elles, mais elles ne semblent pas tirer de plaisir du travail alimentaire en lui-même. Leurs stratégies organisationnelles d'anticipation de la charge mentale des repas de famille leur permettent d'avoir du temps supplémentaire pour faire d'autres activités dans la semaine, comme le sport pour Vanessa Bennet. Toutefois, ce temps libéré dans la semaine était généralement affecté à d'autres activités professionnelles, à d'autres activités parentales et aux repas de famille.

J'ai interrogé la manière dont le travail alimentaire domestique était vécu et impacte sur les relations familiales et la manière dont cela influence les repas pris en commun. Les modalités contrastées selon lesquelles les mères et les pères de cette recherche s'investissent dans le travail alimentaire domestique révèlent des différences en termes de relations familiales et par rapport à la notion de partage au sein de la famille et dans la préparation des repas.

La préparation des repas de famille peut être soit un moment de partage entre les différents membres de la famille, soit, au contraire, un moment d'isolement, contraint et vécu plutôt négativement ou au contraire choisi et valorisé. En ce sens, le travail alimentaire peut affecter l'expérience du repas de famille (arriver à table de manière détendue ou non). De plus, le travail alimentaire est influencé par la perspective de manger ensemble : l'aspect stressant du travail alimentaire, lorsqu'il est vécu comme tel, est directement lié aux préférences et au rejet alimentaire des enfants des commensaux, et notamment au rejet potentiel des enfants. L'aspect pénible de la préparation des aliments est donc directement lié au moment du repas en lui-même.

Les résultats révèlent ainsi que le moment du repas est très présent dans l'esprit des parents qui préparent à manger, d'autant plus qu'ils anticipent les réactions des enfants, qui sont constitués en " jury " de leur cuisine. Pour certains parents au contraire, et surtout pour les pères, le moment du repas est l'occasion d'obtenir une reconnaissance des efforts produits et de leur savoir-faire culinaire. Pour

d'autres, et surtout pour les mères, le repas est un moment de stress car elles redoutent que la nourriture (saine) qu'elles ont préparée soit rejetée. Certains parents arrivent par ailleurs à table en étant tout à fait détendus, car leurs compétences culinaires mais aussi les circonstances dans lesquelles ils cuisinaient (le fait d'être seul dans la cuisine, par exemple, ou de ne pas avoir à s'occuper de la charge mentale du travail alimentaire) ne nécessitaient pas d'efforts pénibles. D'autres parents et - encore une fois, principalement des mères, arrivent à table déjà mentalement épuisés par le fait de devoir trouver quoi cuisiner, le cuisiner et parfois faire face à l'insatisfaction du menu.

## 6. Aux frontières des repas de famille

La partie précédente a analysé les circonstances dans lesquelles les repas de famille sont produits, en particulier les expériences inégales entre les pères et les mères, la plupart de ces dernières trouvant le travail alimentaire pour les repas de famille lourd et stressant tandis que les pères sont capables de le transformer en une expérience positive. L'analyse se poursuit dans cette partie en se déplaçant aux frontières des repas de famille, examinant les modalités selon lesquelles la commensalité se forme et s'achève, ainsi que les défis supplémentaires auxquels les membres de la famille sont confrontés.

Lors de la quatrième visite chez les Bourdon, une famille de classe supérieur de Lyon un vendredi soir, Marie-Cécile s'occupait de préparer le dîner tandis que Benoit, son mari, était encore au travail. À un moment donné, les enfants, Marius (8 ans) et Lucie (6 ans), entrèrent brièvement dans la cuisine, interrompant leur jeu de balle, ce qui incita leur mère à leur rappeler qu'ils devaient mettre la table :

**Marie-Cécile:** Vous mettez la table s'il vous plait?

**Marius:** Quoi?

*Elle répète plus lentement.*

**Les enfants:** Oh, non !!

**Marie-Cécile :** [à moi] J'aime cet enthousiasme [ironie]

*Elle sort de la cuisine pour les rejoindre*

**Marie-Cécile:** Allez ! [en colère] J'en peux plus là !

*Les enfants râlent*

**Lucie:** ... mais justement, je voulais que tu me la donnes ! [en colère, elle aussi. Marie-Cécile a dû lui retirer sa balle]

**Marie-Cécile:** Et dis donc ! Tu me parles pas sur ce ton !! [en criant]

*Silence*

**Marie-Cécile:** J'ai sorti des trucs, vous allez mettre le couvert [plus calme]

**Marius:** On le fait toujours [en râlant]

**Marie-Cécile:** Non, vous mettez pas toujours le couvert, vous mettez le couvert de temps en temps

**Lucie:** Et si c'est tout seul, moi je le fais pas!

**Marie-Cécile:** Mais vous le faites tous les deux ! J'ai TOUT sorti sur la table

**Lucie:** Mais si c'est que nous deux, moi j'le fais pas [affirmée]

**Marie-Cécile:** Mais je vais venir vous aider, mais vous commencez et...

**Marius:** Oui, mais pourquoi... ?

**Marie-Cécile:** ... parce que vous avez les parents les plus horribles du monde et que je vous le demande [ironique, énervée]

**Lucie:** ... Maman..., Maman, en fait quand tu dis que tu vas nous aider, tu nous aides presque jamais !

**Marie-Cécile:** Allez, on y va !  
**Marius:** ...moi, j'ai envie...  
**Marie-Cécile:** ...mais, c'est parce que je suis obligée de discuter pendant des plombes et qu'en attendant je fais autre chose. Non, non, tu te planques pas dans ton lit, tu vas...  
**Marius:** ... oui, mais tu m'as coupé la parole, je voulais pas...  
**Marie-Cécile:** ... non, mais c'est quoi ce chantage-là ?  
**Marius:** non, mais j'te jure, tu m'as coupé la parole [ton pleurnichant]  
**Marie-Cécile:** Oh ! Allez !  
**Marius:** Ça me rend triste  
**Marie-Cécile:** Je comprends que ça te rende triste. Allez [plus calme], on va mettre le couvert, s'il vous plaît. Allez. Lucie, tu viens.  
**Lucie:** Oui  
*Marie-Cécile aide les enfants à mettre la table.*  
**Marie-Cécile:** Alors ça va là, je vous aide : vous survivez ?  
*Lucie chantonne*

A la fin du repas, les enfants se montrèrent beaucoup plus enthousiastes à l'idée de quitter la table qu'ils ne l'étaient pour la préparation du repas. Par ailleurs, il n'était pas requis de débarrasser quoi que ce soit :

**Benoit:** Est-ce que tu as fini ma puce ?  
**Lucie:** Oui  
*Elle se lève pour sortir de table*  
**Marie-Cécile:** Non, non, non, non.  
**Lucie:** Oh [déçue]  
**Marie-Cécile:** Si tu veux sortir de table, tu plies ta serviette et tu peux sortir de table  
**Benoit:** ... (en même temps) tu plies ta serviette et tu peux sortir de table  
*Elle étale la serviette carrée sur la table et l'aplatit avec sa main*  
**Lucie:** Voilà, j'ai plié ma serviette !  
**Marie-Cécile:** C'est plié ça ?  
**Marie-Cécile:** Hhmmm  
**Lucie:** Ben pourquoi ? Je l'ai plié en carré [légère moquerie]  
**Marie-Cécile:** C'est un gros carré hein [mi humour, mi reproche]  
**Lucie:** Ben non, c'en est un tout petit, regardez !  
**Benoit:** Hmm hmm  
**Marie-Cécile:** Allez choupette  
**Benoit:** Allez, jeune fille  
*Benoit se lève pour débarrasser*  
**Lucie:** Voilà, j'ai plié, blablabi (elle a plié sa serviette en quatre)  
**Marie-Cécile:** Très bien, merci mademoiselle  
**Benoit:** Bien, merci jeune fille. Silence. Du coup, tu peux peut-être aller faire les mains et les dents.  
**Marie-Cécile:** ... (en même temps) faire les mains, les dents. [à Benoit] : alors, quand même, j'ai demandé qu'ils mettent le couvert aujourd'hui...  
**Benoit:** Ouais ?  
**Marie-Cécile:** J'ai eu le droit à: "oh noon, c'est toujours nous qui mettons le couvert !" [rire]  
*Dîner 4*

Marie-Cécile a d'abord eu du mal à amener Lucie et Marius à quitter leur jeu et à s'engager ensemble dans la préparation d'un événement pour toute la famille. Après quelques interactions conflictuelles et de la négociation intergénérationnelle, elle revit finalement à la baisse ses attentes vis-à-vis de ce que ses enfants devaient faire : tous les trois mirent la table ensemble. L'enjeu était ici de faire participer les enfants à une activité pour la famille, initiant ainsi la commensalité. A la fin du repas, la commensalité s'effrita plus facilement qu'elle ne s'était constituée, les enfants étant pressés de partir

et n'étant pas invités à débarrasser la table. La commensalité domestique, en tant que rituel familial collectif, est ainsi plus difficile à construire qu'à défaire et les repas partagés en famille, en particulier leurs limites, constituent des occasions d'observer l'équilibre et les tensions entre les individus et la famille en tant que collectif.

La théorisation par Bourdieu de la notion de rituel d'institution éclaire notre compréhension du quotidien des repas de famille (1982). Bourdieu analyse la notion de rite de passage, initialement développée par Van Genep (1991) puis complétée par Turner (1995), selon sa fonction sociale, dont celle de séparer ceux qui ont subi le rite de passage de ceux qui ne le subiront jamais. Il substitue à la notion de rituel de passage celle de rituel d'institution, analysant le passage d'un état à l'autre et mettant en avant les autorités qui le font respecter. Pour Bourdieu, la ligne ou la limite franchie lors du rituel est particulièrement intéressante : ce n'est pas tant le passage qui importe que cette ligne franchie qui sépare deux groupes et institue un ordre social particulier.

Les repas de famille quotidiens, en tant que rituels, ont effectivement une dimension instituante : ils construisent et confirment, sur une base routinière, la famille en tant qu'institution, par opposition à une collection d'individus et par rapport aux autres groupes de la société. Ils ré-instituent, au fil des jours et des semaines, les individus en tant que membres d'une famille et cette dimension cyclique se produit justement parce que le rituel et le rassemblement de la famille se désagrège par ailleurs facilement chaque soir. La performance quotidienne des repas de famille confirme l'existence de la famille comme groupe privé constitué en opposition aux autres groupes ou membres de la société. En effet, C. Grignon nous rappelle que la commensalité est avant tout un acte social ségrégatif (C. Grignon 2001) :

« Consommer ensemble des aliments et des boissons peut sans doute activer et resserrer la solidarité interne ; mais cela se produit parce que la commensalité permet d'abord de redessiner les limites du groupe, de restaurer ses hiérarchies internes et, si nécessaire, de les redéfinir » (2001, 24).

Ce que Grignon nomme la commensalité ségrégative est une manière de renforcer les frontières entre les groupes : " se réunir pour manger et boire est une manière d'instituer et de restaurer le groupe en le fermant, une manière d'affirmer ou de renforcer un "Nous" en désignant et en rejetant, comme symboles d'altérité, les "pas Nous" " (2001, 28).

Pourtant, cet acte instituant ou ségrégatif n'est pas nécessairement un processus évident. S'il est clair que le temps du repas réaffirme la famille en tant que groupe, comme l'a déjà noté C. Grignon, on connaît moins les difficultés qui lui sont inhérentes. Pour De Singly, la distance qui caractérise les relations familiales doit être à la fois « faible pour créer un sentiment de communauté et forte pour protéger l'individualité de chacun. La difficulté réside alors principalement dans l'accord entre les membres de la relation sur ce qui est approprié à tel ou tel moment » (2000, 6). J'ai appréhendé les

rituels familiaux quotidiens en gardant à l'esprit ce type de relation familiale, interrogeant la manière dont ils pouvaient être réalisés— nécessairement de manière assez molle dans le contexte de la vie familiale— pour englober à la fois un espace de liberté individuelle mais aussi pour créer et maintenir l'unité du groupe.

Avec le concept de rite d'institution, Bourdieu nous encourage à examiner les délimitations dont le rituel marque le passage d'un état à un autre. Cette partie interroge ces délimitations, ou frontières, et examine les circonstances dans lesquelles les membres de la famille se réunissent et se séparent pour les repas. J'ai interrogé les frontières des repas de famille d'un point de vue spatial et temporel, en me concentrant sur le lieu et le moment où la commensalité se forme et se dissout et sur les défis que ces passages posent dans le contexte de la vie familiale contemporaine. L'étude des frontières du temps des repas implique également d'examiner la manière dont les délimitations habituelles sont transgressées et quelles sont les significations de ces transgressions en termes de commensalité et de vie familiale.

Les résultats révèlent que, dans tous les foyers lyonnais, la table à manger est au centre des pratiques alimentaires des familles et elle est fortement associée dans les discours des parents à la notion de commensalité et de production de famille. A Adélaïde, la table à manger n'est pas tant un pilier de la commensalité familiale, ni dans les discours, ni dans les pratiques. Dans un ménage d'Adélaïde, le salon est même le principal espace de commensalité pour les enfants, qui mangent sur le canapé ou autour de la table basse.

Pourtant, dans toutes les familles participantes sauf deux (à Lyon), les repas de famille sont régulièrement déplacés et ont lieu ailleurs dans la maison des participants. Ces déplacements ont des causes et des significations différentes selon les ménages. Dans certaines familles— issues des classes moyennes intermédiaires ou inférieures— il s'agit d'une adaptation assez spontanée à d'autres aspects de la vie familiale (absence temporaire d'un parent, table à manger recouverte de linge, par exemple), à des conditions matérielles qui poussent les parents à vouloir manger dans le salon (température ambiante inconfortable) ou résulte de la volonté des parents d'établir un cadre de repas plus détendu.

Dans d'autres familles - situées dans les classes moyennes intermédiaires et supérieures - ce type de déplacement du repas de famille est planifié à l'avance et intégré dans la routine de la semaine. Pour comprendre cette routinisation des déplacements des repas de famille quotidiens, il faut considérer les heures de repas des familles dans un cadre hebdomadaire. Comme la plupart des familles de classes moyennes supérieures reproduisent des formes normatives de commensalité pendant plusieurs jours, les parents se permettent ensuite de déplacer temporairement le moment du repas de la table conventionnelle vers d'autres espaces domestiques, comme le canapé ou la table basse du salon.

Dans les 4 familles d'Adélaïde, les enfants mangent régulièrement seuls. À Lyon, quelques familles seulement mentionnèrent dîner après leurs enfants. Il y a de nettes différences culturelles entre ces dîners d'enfants à Lyon et ceux des foyers d'Adélaïde. A Lyon, les observations ont montré que même si les enfants mangent avant les parents, ces derniers s'efforcent de faire de ce moment un repas familial, en surveillant l'alimentation des enfants, leurs manières de table et en leur faisant parler de leur journée. Les repas d'enfants à Adélaïde se déroulent de manière assez différente : si les parents s'assurent que les enfants mangent, ils ne restent pas nécessairement avec eux pendant le repas, ces derniers regardant généralement leurs écrans (tablette ou télévision) et mangeant de manière plus indépendante.

Du point de vue spatial, les repas de famille sont théoriquement délimités par le fait de rester assis ensemble. Le fait de s'asseoir ensemble reste une norme commensale hautement valorisée et pratiquée dans ces familles des classes moyennes et supérieures et les parents déploient de nombreux efforts pour maintenir la cohésion familiale et l'unité commensale par ce biais. Cependant, il y a de nombreuses raisons pour lesquelles les parents et les enfants se lèvent pendant le repas, la principale étant liée au travail alimentaire. Ainsi, comme pour beaucoup d'autres normes, le fait de rester assis ensemble autour de la table constitue-t-il plus un cadre assez théorique, régulièrement transgressé dans les faits.

Les repas de famille sont également encadrés par plusieurs structures temporelles : la transition dans le repas, la synchronisation du début et de la fin du repas et la sortie de table. J'ai observé deux façons d'entrer dans le repas : la première consiste à mettre la table et, dans la grande majorité des familles, les enfants sont censés y participer d'une manière ou d'une autre, que ce soit en faisant tout eux-mêmes ou en participant avec les parents. Le fait d'amener les enfants à faire cela, puis de les faire venir à table, se fait rarement sans rappels et efforts de la part des parents pour réunir la famille. La deuxième manière d'entrer dans la commensalité que j'ai observée est de manger avant l'heure du repas, correspondant à une étape transgressive, où les règles normatives de la commensalité sont inversées. Pourtant, cette étape est toujours contrôlée et encadrée par les parents afin de s'assurer qu'elle ne gâche pas la commensalité en soi, notamment car celle-ci est en partie destinée à préserver la santé des enfants.

Les enfants sont souvent impatients de sortir de la commensalité et les parents leur demandent régulièrement de rester un peu plus longtemps à table. Parfois, ils mettent plus de temps que les parents ne le souhaitent pour manger, ce qui contrarie les parents et empiète sur les autres impératifs de la soirée (coucher les enfants à une heure raisonnable et, pour les parents, avoir du temps pour soi ou pour le couple).

La sortie de la commensalité implique beaucoup moins de contrainte pour les enfants. Contrairement au fait de mettre la table, les parents demandent plus rarement aux enfants de débarrasser. Quand c'est le cas, ils n'ont souvent à débarrasser que leurs propres assiette et couverts. Le dessert constitue une étape de déliaison du temps de repas, dans laquelle ce qui est mangé et le rythme peut plus facilement différer entre les différents membres de la famille. Les enfants sont régulièrement autorisés à quitter la table avant que tout le monde a fini son dessert ou à se lever temporairement. Dans ce cas, lorsque les parents s'attardent un peu, le repas se transforme en une phase adulte où ils peuvent enfin prendre le temps de discuter entre eux, témoignant d'une autre forme de commensalité familiale, plus restreinte.

La construction d'un espace-temps favorable au déroulement du repas de famille repose sur des normes qui peuvent être variables selon les familles, n'impliquant même pas forcément la présence d'une table ou la fait de manger en même temps, et pouvant aller à l'inverse jusqu'à la réglementation du dressage et du débarrassage, ainsi que la synchronisation du fait de commencer à manger, voire du fait de sortir de table. Toutefois ces normes ne sont pas forcément respectées systématiquement, elles peuvent être plus ou moins présentes à chaque repas, et même oubliées pour des repas "exceptionnels" mais pourtant routiniers. L'important semble être davantage qu'elles soient connues et partagées par les membres de la famille, qu'elles soient respectées de façon absolue. Reste à voir maintenant si ce rapport différencié et parfois distendu aux normes se retrouve dans d'autres domaines, à commencer par l'équation sanitaire de la commensalité.

## 7. L'équation sanitaire de la commensalité

Après avoir examiné les frontières temporelles et spatiales des repas de famille, une analyse des structures internes au temps du repas partagé a mis en avant les normes de santé qui sous-tendent le contrôle du rythme du repas et le partage de la nourriture.

À la fin du septième dîner chez la famille Lebrun, un ménage de classe moyenne intermédiaire vivant dans une banlieue résidentielle de Lyon, les adultes - Pierre, Laëtitia et Arthur (le neveu de Pierre, âgé de 23 ans) - s'attardèrent à la table de leur terrasse après que les enfants étaient partis jouer dans le jardin. Nous discutons de la façon dont se déroulaient les repas de famille chez eux :

**Laëtitia:** S'ils n'ont jamais goûté, ils doivent essayer [...]. On leur demande de goûter plusieurs fois et ensuite, quand tu vois qu'ils aiment pas, eh ben voilà [...]

**Pierre:** Mais quelqu'un qui aime pas quelque chose, à quoi ça sert de le forcer ? Peut-être qu'il aimera plus tard, au contraire, plus tu le forces...

**Arthur:** Ouais, mais en forçant juste un tout petit bout, tu vois...[...]. Chloë, elle aime bien râler, pour ne pas finir son assiette.

**Pierre:** Mais c'est pas qu'elle râle, c'est qu'en fait elle est captivée par raconter des choses.

**Arthur:** Oui, mais quand elle est toute seule à finir à manger, elle a pas envie de finir son assiette

**Pierre:** Ah non, non, non ! Elle s'arrête de manger, oh ben oui, oui

**Laëtitia:** Mais c'est jamais un conflit.

**Pierre:** C'est jamais un conflit car à partir du moment où l'enfant s'est nourri, le reste [il mime qu'il s'en moque. ...]

**Laëtitia :** Y'a des fois où il faut, voilà, un peu lui demander [à Chloë] de finir son assiette...

**Arthur:** ... un peu lui forcer la main...

**Laëtitia:** ... mais c'est surtout, comme tu disais, quand tous les autres déjà ont fini et qu'elle est toute seule à table, enfin, voilà... [se montre compréhensive]

**Arthur:** Le problème, c'est qu'elle est trop inattentive, elle se laisse trop vagabonder quoi, quand ça commence à parler.

**Pierre:** Elle préfère être dans la discussion, dans le contact avec les autres, que de manger. Mais parce qu'elle est pas concentrée sur manger

**Arthur:** Oui, mais même, elle mange moins vite, naturellement, que les autres. Enfin tu sais, au début, personne parle quasiment, ils mangent un peu tous et elle, il lui reste toujours des trucs quand les autres commencent à parler quoi.

**Laëtitia:** C'est ça.

*Dîner 7*

Cette discussion révèle des dimensions centrales de la commensalité domestique quotidienne et les tensions qui existent entre leurs aspects sociaux et physiologiques. Faire manger les enfants lors des repas de famille, c'est d'abord satisfaire un besoin physiologique, comme le soutenait Pierre. Laëtitia et Arthur lui rappellent que faire manger les enfants à table nécessite des efforts constants pour les socialiser à une variété d'aliments (ou aux mêmes ingrédients cuisinés de différentes manières) et à manger une quantité appropriée. Il en résulte l'établissement de règles de commensalité obligeant les enfants à finir leur assiette et à goûter les aliments qui leur sont servis, que ces derniers tentent constamment de négocier. Ces processus de socialisation aux goûts et à la consommation alimentaire varient en fonction de la perception qu'ont les adultes du développement du goût des enfants et de leurs préférences alimentaires. Pour Laëtitia, les enfants doivent goûter plusieurs fois avant de pouvoir accepter la décision des enfants de ne pas aimer certains aliments. Pour Arthur, les enfants peuvent également être poussés à aimer les aliments. Pour Pierre, au contraire, forcer les enfants à manger des plats ou ingrédient qu'ils n'aiment pas peut les traumatiser et les empêcher de les aimer plus tard dans leur vie. Contrairement à Laëtitia et Arthur, il considère que les enfants ne finissent de développer leurs papilles gustatives qu'à un âge plus avancé.

Ces normes commensales de socialisation alimentaire sont liées à d'autres dimensions sociales du repas, comme la conversation, et les enfants sont censés pouvoir articuler et participer aux différents aspects du repas en commun.

Par ailleurs, ces différents impératifs commensaux – goûter, manger, échanger – doivent se dérouler selon des rythmes synchronisés entre tous les participants. Articuler ces attentes quelque peu contradictoires (manger et parler) requière de la part des enfants des compétences particulières, dont la maîtrise varie selon l'âge des enfants et les particularités individuelles. Comme l'a noté Arthur, Chloë



mange aussi plus lentement que les autres, même quand personne ne parle, ce qui semble être la raison pour laquelle la synchronisation s'avère difficile. Il décrit également avec pertinence la synchronisation par ailleurs réussie, du moins au début du repas, lorsque « personne ne parle vraiment, ils mangent tous », soulignant que l'articulation du rythme biologique et social varie au cours des différentes étapes du repas, l'appétit des commensaux prenant le pas sur les échanges verbaux en début de repas. Dans ce cas, le non-respect de la synchronisation commensale eu pour conséquence que Chloë ne voulait plus manger, car elle ne voulait pas manger seule.

Le principe du partage de la nourriture dans le contexte des repas de famille présente de multiples facettes. Le partage peut vouloir dire partager le temps et l'espace du repas, comme les résultats sur les frontières des repas l'ont montré. Partager peut aussi signifier manger la même nourriture : tout le monde mange une portion du même plat ou de la même préparation, ce qui implique qu'un menu unique est préparé pour tous. Le partage consiste également à diviser la nourriture (qu'il s'agisse d'un menu unique ou non) en portions relativement équitables, adaptées à l'appétit et à la physiologie des mangeurs.

Les résultats ont montré que la commensalité domestique quotidienne se construit autour de la gestion de la quantité de nourriture partagée et consommée, de la variété et de l'équilibre des aliments ingérés, en prenant en compte les rythmes individuels et collectifs du manger ensemble. Cette gestion varie selon les catégories sociales, le genre, l'âge des enfants, le contexte de la commensalité (jour de la semaine) et l'étape du repas (les normes alimentaires varient selon l'entrée, le plat principal et le dessert).

Pour que les enfants mangent réellement la nourriture que les parents souhaitent, il faut un processus à long terme de socialisation à des goûts nouveaux et sains : cela se fait de différentes manières et à différents moments selon la position sociale de la famille et l'âge des enfants. Les parents de la classe moyenne inférieure considèrent que leurs enfants développeront leur sensibilité à une variété d'aliments plus tard dans leur vie et ne considèrent donc pas comme impératif de les habituer à la diversité dès leur jeune âge. Ils estiment plutôt qu'ils doivent manger en quantité suffisante, bien que certains parents, et en particulier des mères, expriment une forme de culpabilité à privilégier la quantité à la quantité et à la variété de la nourriture servie.

Dans certaines familles de la classe moyenne intermédiaire, les deux parents s'efforcent de préparer un menu varié pour eux-mêmes et aiment étaler cette variété sur la table, afin d'inciter les enfants à manger des légumes, par exemple. Cela suggère une approche non interventionniste de l'alimentation des enfants et indique que les parents donnent à leurs enfants l'espace nécessaire pour décider de ce qu'ils aiment.

À l'autre extrémité du continuum des pratiques, dans certaines classes intermédiaires et dans les classes supérieures, j'ai observé une gestion extensive par les parents des pratiques alimentaires des enfants. Ils s'efforcent d'amener les enfants à manger à un rythme similaire au leur en les exhortant à mobiliser des compétences d'autocontrainte, comme terminer leur assiette même s'ils ne sont pas friands de la nourriture ou en parlant de la nourriture en termes de plaisir. Ces parents gèrent les pratiques alimentaires des enfants dès leur plus jeune âge, surveillant de près la quantité d'aliments qu'ils consomment, les incitant par la négociation à manger davantage tel ou tel morceau. Ils le font en discutant longuement de la nourriture avec leurs enfants et en associant la nourriture au plaisir (ce qui constitue un moyen de les socialiser à des aliments sains et variés). Mais les parents gèrent aussi les capacités d'attention des enfants et leurs conversations afin de les maintenir concentrés sur leur assiette, sans pour autant sacrifier la communication familiale et l'atmosphère positive du repas.

Dans les familles des classes moyennes intermédiaires et inférieures, les efforts de synchronisation semblent cesser à l'heure du dessert, lorsqu'il est toléré que les enfants quittent la table avant que leurs parents ont commencé ou terminé leur propre dessert. La condition qui prévaut est que les enfants mangent de manière synchronisée entre eux, plutôt qu'avec l'ensemble de la famille (c'est-à-dire avec les parents), ce qui montre ici encore comment la famille est souvent construite de manière centrale autour des jeunes enfants.

Dans l'ensemble, l'analyse montre que l'effort des parents pour contrôler le rythme selon lequel les enfants mangent est un moyen pour eux de contrôler l'ingestion de nourriture de leurs enfants. Mais en conséquence, les enfants résistent également aux attentes des parents en prenant le contrôle de leurs propres temporalités de consommation alimentaire.

Il existe un continuum de socialisation des pratiques de santé par la commensalité qui varie selon la position de classe sociale du ménage et selon la manière dont les rituels de repas sont orchestrés. L'âge des enfants est également un facteur déterminant dans ce processus de socialisation. D'un côté, il y a un rapport très physiologique à la commensalité, ce que les familles de la classe moyenne intermédiaire d'Adélaïde et la famille de la classe moyenne inférieure de Lyon tendent à vivre également : la commensalité consiste à manger et à se nourrir parce que les conditions de travail des parents ne leur permettent pas d'incorporer des dimensions supplémentaires au temps du repas. À l'autre extrémité du continuum, la commensalité consiste à nourrir les corps, bien sûr, mais surtout à maintenir les corps en bonne santé et à éprouver du plaisir pendant le repas, ces deux aspects étant médiatisés par la communication familiale. Dans tous les cas, la mise en œuvre et la socialisation à la commensalité impliquent un souci de maintenir la santé à court ou à long terme des membres de la famille.

Les résultats ont montré des difficultés associées au fait de manger ensemble à table et en particulier des défis en termes d'alimentation et de socialisation des enfants à différents goûts, tout en déployant la commensalité de manière synchronisée. Un autre défi mentionné réside dans la coordination de la consommation et du partage de la nourriture avec une autre dimension centrale du repas : la conversation familiale à table.

## 8. Echanger à table : unir et maintenir une famille en bonne santé

Les épisodes où les familles durent passer toute la journée ensemble, enfermées à la maison en raison des restrictions sanitaires liées à la pandémie de COVID-19, impactèrent le rôle des repas partagés en termes de communication familiale. Ces changements ont cependant reflété ce que les parents considèrent habituellement comme important lorsqu'il s'agit d'échanger à table. C'est par exemple le cas, à Lyon, des descriptions que firent Laurent et Irina Comescu, les parents d'une famille de classe supérieure qui travaillent tous deux de la maison, de leurs repas de famille pendant le confinement du printemps 2020 en France :

**Laurent Comescu :** Comme on a un peu plus de temps, où j'essaie d'avoir des coupures pour aider Irina, la journée, et donc de jouer avec les enfants ou d'être tous les deux, ça fait que le repas, on l'utilise plus pour un moment ludique aussi, on regarde un peu plus la télé. Ou un moment d'information, puisque c'est pendant les infos.

Les changements qu'ils apportèrent à leurs pratiques quotidiennes de commensalité domestique mirent également en évidence ce qui comptait le plus pour eux, et pour de nombreuses autres familles de cette étude à propos de la commensalité. Le fait que Laurent qualifie leurs repas pendant le confinement de « ludiques », en raison de la pleine intégration de la télévision à table, montre le besoin de combler un vide créé par l'absence de volume importants de conversations, habituellement nécessaire pour faire partie de la vie des autres, d'autant plus lorsque les membres de la famille passent la journée séparément (Berger and Kellner 1964).

**Laurent:** Comme on se voit toute la journée, on a le temps de discuter dans d'autres moments.

**Fairley:** Donc les repas sont un peu différents, y'a moins de...? C'est moins le moment de la discussion ?

**Irina:** Mais du coup, on s'est..., on a parlé toute la journée... Bon, on parle déjà le repas de midi, parce que d'habitude on se voit pas aux repas de midi donc on se voit pour la première fois le soir, donc chacun raconte un peu sa journée. Mais là... [rire]

**Fairley:** Mais là, vous avez plus rien à vous dire ?

**Laurent:** Oh, si, mais...

**Irina:** ...si, mais...

**Laurent:** ... y'a toujours des choses...

**Irina:** ... mais c'est pas pareil.

*Silence*

**Laurent:** Si, on parle boulot, on parle autre... mais c'est différent.

*Dîner 1*

Lorsque Irina commente « ce n'est pas pareil », elle souligne l'importance du repas en tant que lieu de remémoration de ce qui s'est passé individuellement, pour chaque membre de la famille, en dehors du foyer, que ce soit dans la journée des enfants ou celle des parents. Le repas partagé est en effet généralement l'occasion de construire la famille comme un collectif d'individus qui passent la majorité de leur temps séparés.

De nombreux impératifs familiaux sont en jeu autour des conversations de repas. Ils sont liés à une variété de questions telles que la santé des enfants, leur bien-être et leur développement éducatif (y compris l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de la participation aux conversations), la démonstration de l'amour parental et le maintien de la cohésion familiale. Les repas de famille sont également l'occasion de reproduire des relations inégalitaires, entre la mère et le père, mais aussi entre les parents et les enfants. Le déroulement du repas renforce le père comme dépositaire de l'autorité parentale et la mère comme gardienne des relations égalitaires entre frères et sœurs et de la cohésion familiale. On voit les mères, plus souvent que les pères, interroger les enfants sur leur journée, et notamment sur leurs devoirs et leur alimentation. Les pères qui cuisinent démontrent leurs compétences et leur affection à travers leur cuisine et demandent à être reconnus pour cela pendant le repas, alors que les mères qui cuisinent ne demandent pas de formes de reconnaissance de leurs efforts et compétences. Globalement, le déroulement des conversations du temps du repas répond à trois impératifs. 1- Amener les enfants à se raconter et à raconter leurs activités de la journée : les parents, et souvent les mères, s'assurent que leur vie en dehors de la maison se passe bien, que leur éducation et leur vie sociale à l'école est satisfaisante ou qu'ils ont mangé correctement à la cantine. 2- Socialiser les enfants aux règles de la parole et de l'écoute en société. 3- Créer une mémoire et une conscience collective de la famille, en rappelant les activités passées et en partageant les expériences individuelles, mais était aussi créer des projets collectifs familiaux.

## **9. Le repas convivial, un impératif maternel**

Lors du troisième dîner chez les Lebrun, une famille de classe moyenne intermédiaire d'une banlieue résidentielle de Lyon, nous mangions des crêpes. Ils avaient ce genre de menu de temps en temps et cela créait généralement les conditions d'un moment en famille plutôt agréable et détendu. Les crêpes étaient cuites directement sur la table, sur une machine qui en faisait de petites individuelles. Chacun pouvait choisir parmi une variété d'ingrédients disposés sur la table pour la garniture (salée puis sucrée) et les enfants les plus âgés étaient autorisés à les faire eux-mêmes. L'atmosphère était très agréable, détendue et joyeuse et tout le monde semblait heureux d'être ensemble à table. Quelques échanges affectueux avaient lieu entre les parents et les enfants et ces derniers se réjouissaient de la

nourriture et des boissons servies. Pour l'occasion, les parents avaient également ouvert du jus de pommes pétillant et du cidre et les enfants les plus âgés pouvaient goûter l'alcool, rajoutant à l'excitation générale, d'autant plus qu'ils étaient autorisés à faire sauter le bouchon :

**Laëtitia** (mère) : Nolan, tu voulais goûter le cidre rosé., non ?

**Nolan** (9) : Ah non, pas le cidre rosé, le cidre normal

**Laëtitia** : D'accord. Tu peux en avoir un fond de verre.

**Nolan** : Le cidre rosé, je l'ai déjà goûté.

**Laëtitia** : D'accord.

**Nathan** (11) : Moi aussi.

**Laëtitia**: Pierre (père), tu peux servir un fond de verre de cidre à Nolan ... et Nathan ? Je lui ai promis un fond de verre. [ferme mais douce] Nathan, c'est de l'alcool ! Je dois te le rappeler combien de fois ? C'est de l'alcool. Normalement, tu ne dois pas en avoir, ok ?

[...]

**Chloë** (8) : Papa, je pourrais ravoir de l'alcool ?

**Pierre**: [ferme] Non ! Oh, eh, c'est bon là !

[...]

**Lena** (10): Maman à chaque fois que je lui en demande, elle me met un petit peu de l'alcool.

[...]

**Nathan**: Oh, du Champomy, j'en ai pas eu, vous, vous en avez tous eu deux verres !

**Pierre**: ...oh, ça va, t'as vu ce que t'as eu, déjà ? [reproche]

**Nathan**: J'ai eu un verre.

**Pierre**: Ouais.

**Laëtitia**: Et alors ?

**Pierre**: Les autres ils ont eu du Champomy, toi, t'as eu autre chose.

**Laëtitia**: Ben ouais, t'as eu du cidre. Si tu préférerais un grand verre de Champomy, t'aurais eu un grand verre de Champomy.

**Chloë**: J'en ai eu un de Champomy, euh, de cidre.

**Laëtitia**: Et moi j'ai eu un verre de cidre, et je me plains pas hein ! Pour l'instant, je bois mon verre de cidre.

[...]

**Lena**: Papa ? Papa ? J'en reveux de ça.

**Pierre**: [énervé!] Lena, arrête, oh ! Mais vous me saoulez là ! Tiens, tu vas poser ça à côté et vous arrêtez ! J'en ai marre !

**Léo** (6) : [reproche] Tu l'as fini.

**Lena**: [défense] Ben, y'en avais plus.

**Nolan**: [reproche] Ben, t'en a pris trois verres au final.

**Léo**: Quatre verres.

**Nolan**: [mécontent] Maman, Léo, il en a pris quatre verres !

**Pierre**: [il souffle fort, encore plus énervé] C'est la dernière fois !!

*Silence des enfants*

**Pierre**: [énervé] Vous voulez compter quoi là ? Les gouttes qu'y avaient dans le verre ?

*Silence*

**Laëtitia**: [calme] La prochaine fois, on fera une soirée crêpes sans cidre, Champomy.

**Pierre**: Voilà.

**Laëtitia**: On vous fait plaisir, c'est quand même cool.

**Léo**: Hmm.

**Lucien** (21, neveu de Pierre): En plus, c'était pour les adultes.

**Pierre**: [toujours énervé] Et vous comparez quoi ? Tout ! ...

**Laëtitia**: ... oui, c'est vrai, que c'était pour les adultes, à la base...

*Lucien commente qu'il aurait dû en prendre plus*

**Laëtitia**: Non, mais c'est parfait...

**Pierre**: [encore énervé] ... « qui », « quoi », « moi, j'ai eu », « plus que toi », « plus que l'autre ». C'est bon ! Y'en a marre !!

**Laëtitia:** [calme] L'idée, c'est qu'on partage un truc, et peu importe si y'en a un qui en a eu une goutte de plus, ou une crêpe de plus...

**Pierre:** ... [encore énervé] par contre, on veut partager un truc, et vous gâcher tout !

**Laëtitia:** ... [toujours même ton calme] ce qui est sympa c'est que tout le monde ait ce qui lui fasse plaisir.

*Silence*

**Laëtitia:** Donc regardez, il reste... (*inaudible*), si quelqu'un veut une crêpe, c'est le moment ou jamais.

[rire]

*Elle détend l'atmosphère avec cette phrase. La discussion continue sur les crêpes. Pierre n'a plus le même ton, il est devenu sérieux.*

Dîner 3

Les repas de famille étaient en réalité couramment faits de ces moments pesants, même lorsque des circonstances apparemment idéales étaient créées pour que la convivialité se déploie. Dans l'ensemble, des émotions variées, parfois d'une extrême intensité, circulèrent autour de la table lors de la commensalité observée. Durant ce repas crêpes chez la famille Lebrun, le bonheur, l'amour, le plaisir, l'excitation, mais aussi le mécontentement, le conflit et la colère furent vécus et exprimés. Les émotions passaient rapidement de l'une à l'autre et devenaient incontrôlables lorsqu'elles n'étaient pas gérées. Pierre et Laëtitia réagirent cependant différemment face à la gestion des émotions négatives. Lorsque les enfants commencèrent à se chamailler et à se plaindre à leurs parents des inégales portions de cidre ou de jus de pomme servies, ils s'éloignaient de l'impératif initial d'être heureux ensemble, ce que Laëtitia leur fit d'ailleurs remarquer. Pierre se fâcha facilement avec ses filles et ses beaux-fils et son agacement— qui fut peut-être déclenché par le commentaire de sa fille à propos de sa mère, indiquant que c'était mieux chez elle— se ressentait dans les mots qu'il utilisait mais surtout dans son ton colérique. Laëtitia réagit de manière plus calme et pédagogique, en commentant ses propres bonnes manières de table et en rappelant aux enfants les règles de sentiments (Hochschild 1983) qu'ils devaient respecter. Enfin, à la fin de la discussion, elle effectua un travail émotionnel de réparation en ramenant l'attention de tous sur la nourriture et en particulier sur les crêpes, qui constituaient l'activité ludique du repas. Son ton était léger et humoristique. Pierre ne redevint pas tout de suite aussi joyeux qu'au début du repas : il resta sérieux et irrité pendant un moment.

L'examen de la convivialité est basé des matériaux d'observation et, à ce titre, les résultats rapportés ici portent principalement sur les familles de Lyon. Cependant, j'ai comparé les matériaux issus des entretiens avec les parents de Lyon avec ceux des parents d'Adélaïde et des différences significatives ont été constatées en termes de référence et de discussion de la convivialité au moment des repas, qui ouvrent de nouvelles perspectives de recherche.

Comme les autres dimensions centrales de la commensalité analysées, la convivialité lors des repas doit soutenir certains principes de la vie familiale contemporaine : les repas de famille doivent se dérouler de manière à renforcer la cohésion familiale, tout en permettant la reconnaissance et l'expression des singularités individuelles ainsi qu'en favorisant la manifestation de l'affection

familiale. La combinaison de la création de la cohésion familiale et de l'espace pour les individualités signifie qu'une certaine égalité ou équité doit être atteinte dans l'espace accordé à chaque membre de la famille.

Une dimension particulièrement centrale des repas de famille est la performance de la convivialité. La plupart des mères mentionnèrent spontanément l'importance des repas de famille en tant que moment agréable, contrairement aux pères qui abordèrent peu cette dimension commensale. Cela ne signifie pas qu'ils ne valorisaient pas la convivialité, dans les faits, mais simplement que les mères l'abordent plus directement. A la fois les mères et les pères de Lyon veillent à créer et à maintenir des atmosphères conviviales. Ils ont cependant recours à des modalités différenciées pour y parvenir, ce qui produit des effets inégaux en termes de commensalité. Les pères observés dans cette enquête se positionnent comme les gardiens des règles de sentiment, mais de manière autoritaire : ils ont tendance à réprimander ou à exclure les enfants lorsque ceux-ci ne sont pas d'humeur appropriée. Cela a pour effet que les pères renoncent eux-mêmes à la convivialité en négligeant certaines règles de sentiments (notamment, ne pas se mettre en colère, garder le contrôle de ses émotions) ou l'unité commensale et familiale. Les mères se positionnent également en gardiennes des règles de sentiment lors des repas, mais elles le font différemment et de manière plus invisible que les pères : je les ai observées produisant un travail émotionnel de réparation de l'atmosphère à table, qui passaient souvent (presque) inaperçu mais était efficace pour maintenir une ambiance conviviale. La plupart du temps, cependant, les repas se déroulaient dans une atmosphère détendue, agréable, voire amusante, mais l'équilibre émotionnel à table restait fragile et pouvait basculer, faute de gestion de l'intensité et des types d'émotions (contenir les émotions négatives), dans la tension, la frustration.

Parmi les différentes manières de produire la convivialité à table, l'humour a une place centrale et d'autant plus que je participais au repas et ma position en tant qu'invitée observatrice renforçait l'impératif de représenter une famille drôle et heureuse ensemble. Les observations révélèrent que les pères jouent un rôle central dans la production de l'humour pendant les repas de famille. La production de l'humour sert à renforcer les dimensions normatives des repas, telles qu'une alimentation saine et le respect des règles de la table, mais elle est également réalisée dans le but socialiser à l'humour en tant que tel, ce qui se fait de manière différenciée selon l'âge des enfants.

Enfin, la production de la convivialité révèle des dimensions paradoxales. Les mères et les pères jouent des rôles inégaux dans le maintien d'une atmosphère agréable, aimante et amusante pendant le repas. La position autoritaire des pères sape parfois le travail émotionnel des mères et plus généralement l'atmosphère agréable et l'unité commensale, tandis que les mères sont moins susceptibles d'accepter de sacrifier l'ambiance conviviale, et peuvent donc, paradoxalement, mettre de côté certaines des

dimensions sanitaires de la commensalité (comme la socialisation à une alimentation saine et diversifiée). Cela se fait toutefois au nom d'une autre norme centrale de la vie familiale contemporaine : l'impératif moral d'être heureux ensemble.

## **10. Conclusion**

Dans l'ensemble, les résultats de cette étude nous obligent à prendre en compte la nature incroyablement complexe et quelque peu contradictoire de la commensalité domestique quotidienne, tant dans la recherche que dans la façon dont nous en parlons dans la société. Les repas de famille pris dans le contexte de la vie quotidienne sont remplis d'impératifs sociaux, moraux et sanitaires contradictoires. Le fait de sacrifier les repas de famille pourrait simplement être une façon de donner la priorité à un impératif de la vie familiale. Trois dimensions centrales de la commensalité ont été observées et analysées dans le cadre de cette thèse : l'équation sanitaire de la commensalité, amener les enfants à s'engager dans une communication familiale de qualité, et créer et maintenir une atmosphère agréable, amusante et aimante. Toutes ces dimensions sont centrales pour les parents mais nécessitent la mobilisation d'importantes compétences interactionnelles et émotionnelles. Mettre trop d'accent sur l'une des dimensions du repas pourrait nuire à l'autre, ce qui, en retour, augmenterait le sentiment d'échec des parents dans la création de la famille.

Les résultats de cette thèse nous amènent en outre à nous interroger sur les possibilités de penser les normes en dehors de leur pratique. En effet, les normes mises en avant par les familles sont, dans les faits, constamment transgressées, négociées et ajustées. Il semble même que ce ne soit justement pas tant les normes en elles-mêmes qui créent la cohésion familiale autour du repas, mais plutôt cet espace de variation autour de ces normes, qui implique des échanges interindividuels riches entre les membres de la famille. Cela amène dès lors à repenser les recherches sur la socialisation quotidienne des commensaux et l'importance accordée aux informations recueillies par des méthodes indirectes plutôt que par l'observation ou l'enregistrement direct. Je pense que les résultats issus d'une recherche approfondie et fondée sur un petit nombre de participants sont préliminaires et donc complémentaires à une recherche à plus grande échelle, peut-être basée sur des approches plus quantitatives. Le fait d'en savoir plus sur la manière dont les différentes dimensions se déploient peut contribuer à l'élaboration de futures grilles d'entretien et de questionnaires sur la commensalité. L'approche ethnographique avec des techniques d'enregistrement audio s'est avérée fructueuse. Je recommanderais de compléter cette approche par des vidéos produites par les familles sur leurs propres pratiques (mais seulement après avoir rencontré les participants en personne et avoir commencé les observations en personne). D'autres recherches devraient également porter sur les



pratiques dans des familles de milieux populaire et développer une perspective de comparaison culturelle plus approfondie.

## List of figures

Figure 1. COVID-19 sanitary restrictions that impacted fieldwork .....	58
Figure 2. Lunch 4, video conf. Bourdon.....	79
Figure 3. Final organisation of codes into chapters .....	91
Figure 4. Final organisation of codes into transversal results.....	91
Figure 5 Noémie Ferret can have sushi whenever she wants, providing she follows the game rules .....	157
Figure 6 Meal planner at the Franquet household – For the first visit, on Tuesday, dinner is vegetable flan and gyozas.....	161
Figure 7. Vanessa Bennet’s meal plan notepad .....	163
Figure 8. Vanessa Bennet’s reference books for her meal plans .....	164
Figure 9. Batch cooking of soup on Sunday, eaten for Monday dinner - Ferret.....	167
Figure 10. Dinner 2, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit precooked chards for the upcoming week.....	168
Figure 11. Dinner 2, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit cuts up the chards to that they will be ready for a gratin during the week. The cod cheeks will be cooked on eaten over the weekend and perhaps on Monday as well.....	169
Figure 12. Lunch 5, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit prepared some vegetables for the upcoming week.....	170
Figure 13. Lunch 5, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit was preparing tomato sauce for the upcoming week .....	170
Figure 14. ‘Three nights of veg prepared’, food diary Bennet, Sunday .....	172
Figure 15. Dinner 2 Rizzo: Zoé is kneading the ravioli pastry.....	174
Figure 16. Dinner 2 Rizzo: Guillaume filling up the home made ravioli .....	175
Figure 17 Dinner 7, Lebrun: Pierre happily displaying his tian of courgettes .....	176
Figure 18. Dinner 7, Lebrun: Family meal resulting of an ad hoc preparation.....	177
Figure 19. Dinner 4 at the Obecanov household: Melon as a starter then croque-monsieur and salad as the main course.....	179
Figure 20. Sunday roast chicken at the Chapman household .....	182
Figure 21 Monday dinner for the Chapman household children: Maccaroni and cheese.....	182
Figure 22. Simple meals during the lockdown at the Comescu household .....	186
Figure 23. Simple meals during the lockdown at the Comescu household .....	187
Figure 24. ‘Example of one of our meals to nibble on’, Bianca Armand, Food diary .....	188

Figure 25. Lunch 5, Saturday, Bourdon - Benoit is preparing sole for the weekend and upcoming week .....	203
Figure 26. Dinner 1, Franquet household – Meal plan on the right, recipe on the left: Lucas cuts up vegetables for a flan that he already prepared a few times before .....	208
Figure 27. Dinner table at the Lebrun household, lunch 5.....	222
Figure 28 Dinner table at the Imbert household, dinner 1 .....	223
Figure 29. Dinner table at the Comescu household, dinner 4 .....	223
Figure 30. Dinner table at the Obecanov household, dinner 2.....	224
Figure 31. Dinner table at the Lebrun household, dinner 6.....	224
Figure 32 Dinner table at the Chapman household, Food diary .....	225
Figure 33. Dinner table at the Davies, dinner 3, family produced video .....	225
Figure 34 Dinner table at the Bennet, Food diary.....	226
Figure 35 Dinner table at the Bennet household, Food diary .....	226
Figure 36. Dinner 4 at the Lebrun household, on the couch, watching Friends .....	228
Figure 37. Dinner 4 at the Lebrun household .....	228
Figure 38. Dinner 4 at the Lebrun household: eating on pillows on the couch .....	228
Figure 39. Apéro dinatoire Imbert: the coffee table is neatly layed, dinner 6.....	231
Figure 40. Dinner 2, Davies: All three children - and the dog - having dinner on the couch, watching TV .....	234
Figure 41 Children's dinnertime at the bench, Food diary Chapman .....	240
Figure 42. Table layed at the Imbert: the dessert is already put out, dinner 1 .....	243
Figure 43. Dinner 1, family produced video, Davies: children bouncing on the couch during dinner	248
Figure 44. Dinner 2 at the Las: no napkins needed at the table .....	255
Figure 45. Dinner 6 at the Lebrun household: Nolan has to remain at the table to finish his main dish while his siblings have left before the dessert is served .....	291
Figure 46 Dinner 6 at the Lebrun household: Chloë is trying to finish her peas while the other children are gettting the table ready for dessert .....	292
Figure 47 Crepes at the Lebrun household, third dinner .....	347
Figure 48 Children getting excited over the exceptional drinks. Third dinner at the Lebrun household .....	348
Figure 49 Enzo André eating like a dinosaur, dinner 2, family produced video.....	382
Figure 50 Lucas André making fun of his son for eating like a dinosaur, dinner 2, family produced video .....	383

## List of tables

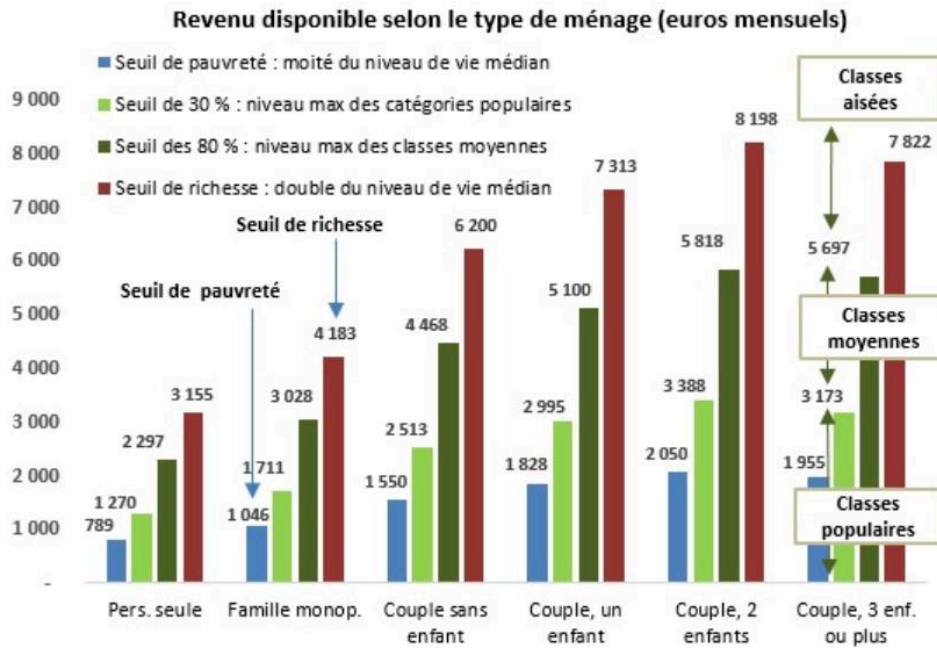
Table 1. Participating households from Lyon.....	16
Table 2. Participating households from Adelaide .....	17
Table 3. Keywords used for the databases searches .....	25
Table 4. The normative family meal promotion: assumptions, premises and limitations.....	26
Table 5. Prevalence of family meals.....	34
Table 6. Key findings from qualitative studies of family meals.....	37
Table 7. General characteristics of the participants from Lyon .....	73
Table 8. General characteristics of the participants from Adelaide.....	75
Table 9. Leisure individual activities at the Bennet household.....	120
Table 10 Leisure individual activities of the Brown family.....	121
Table 11 Leisure individual activities of the Chapman family .....	122
Table 12. Schedules of the families from Lyon.....	131
Table 13 Schedules of the families from Adelaide .....	133
Table 14. Menus prepared at the Imbert household throughout the 5 visits or video conference observations .....	151
Table 15 Dinner menus of the 4 visits at the Rizzo family .....	175
Table 16 Menus at the Obecanov household for the 5 visits.....	178
Table 17 Menus reported on a WhatsApp food diary by Amy and Glen during 11 days.....	181
Table 18. Caractéristiques générales des familles de Lyon.....	423
Table 19. Caractéristiques des familles d'Adélaïde.....	424
Table 20. <a href="https://www.observationsociete.fr/categories-sociales/donneesgenerales/riches-pauvres-moyens/">https://www.observationsociete.fr/categories-sociales/donneesgenerales/riches-pauvres-moyens/</a> .....	450



# Appendices

## 1. Appendix 1. Social class categorisation according to household composition and income in France

Table 20. <https://www.observationsociete.fr/categorie-sociales/donnees-generales/riches-pauvres-moyens/>

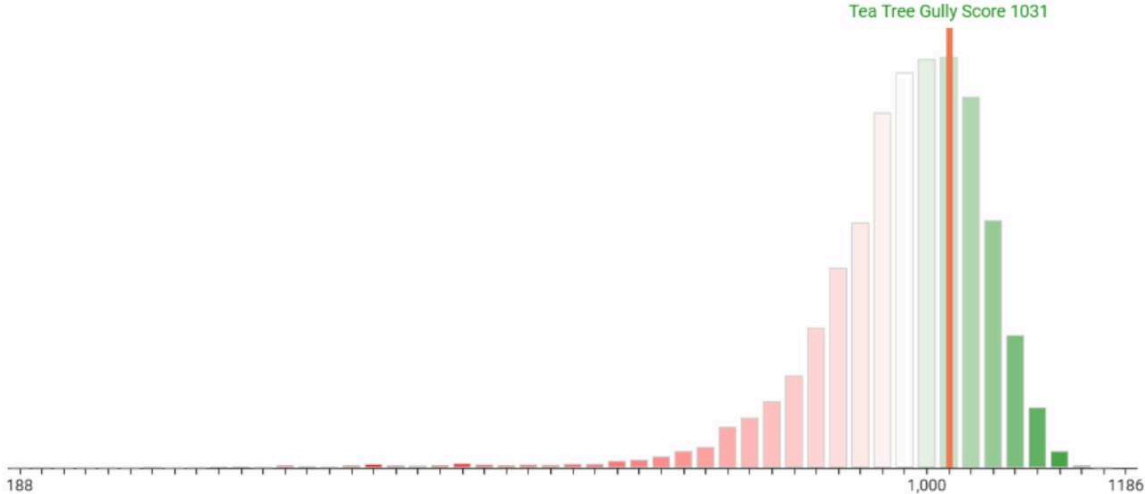


Source : calculs du Centre d'Observation de la société d'après Insee. Données 2017, après impôts et prest. sociales.

2. **Appendix 2. SEIFA categorisation of Tea Tree Gully: a middle class neighbourhood in Adelaide<sup>110</sup>**

Tea Tree Gully

SEIFA Score



<sup>110</sup> <https://app.remplan.com.au/teatreegully/community/wellbeing/seifa-relative-disadvantage?state=Q8QMSK!Zb8eS3g5ZFn2waNtN83z8S1IXuX6gT3uvuyueewQ>

### 3. Appendix 3. Recruitment flyers for households from Lyon



The flyer features a red border and a row of six icons at the top: a shopping basket, a smartphone, a cooking pot, a bowl of food, a fork and knife, and a trash bin. The text is centered and uses a mix of red and black fonts.

**CONTRIBUEZ À LA RECHERCHE**  
Votre expérience nous intéresse!

Aimeriez-vous participer à une enquête sur  
**L'ALIMENTATION À LA MAISON ?**

Nous recherchons des **FAMILLES**  
- avec des **enfants âgés de 5 à 12 ans**  
- qui habitent dans la **Métropole de Lyon**

**Ce que votre participation implique:**  
Rencontrer une doctorante en sciences sociales!  
Participer à des observations et à des entretiens!

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LYON 2**

Si vous avez des questions ou souhaitez participer,  
n'hésitez pas à contacter  
Fairley Le Moal  
(doctorante en Anthropologie-Sociologie)  
[f.le-moal@univ-lyon2.fr](mailto:f.le-moal@univ-lyon2.fr)

*Une compensation est prévue pour votre participation.*



The flyer features a red border and a row of six icons at the top: a shopping basket, a smartphone, a cooking pot, a bowl of food, a fork and knife, and a trash bin. The text is centered and uses a mix of red and black fonts.

**CONTRIBUEZ À LA RECHERCHE**  
Votre expérience nous intéresse!

Aimeriez-vous participer à une enquête sur  
**L'ALIMENTATION À LA MAISON**

Nous recherchons des **PÈRES!**  
- avec des **enfants âgés de 5 à 12 ans**  
- qui habitent dans la **Métropole de Lyon**  
- dans une famille hétéroparentale  
avec 2 parents actifs

**Ce que votre participation implique:**  
Rencontrer une doctorante en sciences sociales!  
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(doctorante en Anthropologie-Sociologie)  
[fairley.lemoal@institutpaulbocuse.com](mailto:fairley.lemoal@institutpaulbocuse.com)

*Une compensation est prévue pour votre participation.*



#### 4. Appendix 4. Recruitment flyers for households from Adelaide



The flyer features a yellow border and icons at the top representing a shopping basket, refrigerator, pot, cooking, cutlery, and trash bin. The text is centered and includes the following information:

**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED**

Would you like to take part in a research study about **FOOD ACTIVITIES AT HOME?**

We are looking for full time **working parents** from **dual headed families**, living in Adelaide and who have **children between the ages of 5 to 11**.

**What is involved?**

- Video interviews about your practices with each family member (audio recorded)
- Digital food diary from parents

**We are interested in your experience !**

**You will be compensated for your time and your participation!**

**Flinders**  
UNIVERSITY  
ADELAIDE • AUSTRALIA

If you are interested in participating and want to know more about the study, please contact  
Fairley Le Moal (PhD student)  
lemo002@flinders.edu.au



The flyer features a yellow border and icons at the top representing a shopping basket, refrigerator, pot, cooking, cutlery, and trash bin. The text is centered and includes the following information:

**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED**

Would you like to take part in a research study about **FOOD ACTIVITIES AT HOME?**

We are looking for full time **working parents** from **dual headed families**, living in Adelaide and who have **children between the ages of 5 to 11**.

**What is involved?**

- Video interviews about your practices with each family member (audio recorded)
- Self video recording of meals

**We are interested in your experience !**

**You will be compensated for your time and your participation!**

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**université**  
**Lumière**  
**LYON 2**

If you are interested in participating and want to know more about the study, please contact  
Fairley Le Moal (PhD student)  
f.le-moal@univ-lyon2.fr

## **5. Appendix 5. The bias of a high participation burden: response to call for participation and loss of participants**

In total, 45 households from Lyon responded the recruitment message by communicating an interest to participate. Thirty-five of the respondents were mothers and 10 were fathers. 18 of 45 households were not eligible to participate, of whom seven were single mothers, the 11 others had children outside the designated age range. Of the 27 eligible households, 10 did not respond further once that I had send them the complete information about the study and two responded that the study was finally too burdensome for them, one of them replying: 'je n'ai pas le temps pour un protocole aussi chronophage' and the other one indicating she could not participate in the study as it was too 'burdensome'.

Of the 15 who finally agreed to participate, I lost contact with 3 households before their participation began (Serena, Stéphanie and Eric). Two other households did not take part in the whole study (Bianca Armand no longer replied and Sébastien Cellier did not wish to pursue with the observations). I still integrated the interviews of Bianca Armand and Sébastien Cellier as well as Bianca Armand's food diary, as I was interested in analysing materials from households who were not that keen on participating. I was unable to define the total response rate but positive response rate of the families from Lyon who showed initial interested in participated the study in Lyon was 27 percent. One of the six families from Adelaide who initially agreed to participate in the study never answered further.

## 6. Appendix 6. Blank information and consent forms for the participants from Lyon and Adelaide



Lettre d'Information.

Participation à l'« Enquête sur les repas et les activités alimentaires familiales. »

**Chercheurs :**

**1. Fairley Le Moal, Doctorante et Chercheuse Principale**

Université Lumière Lyon 2  
UMR 5283 Centre Max Weber  
Centre de Recherche de l'Institut Paul Bocuse  
Flinders University (Australie)  
College of Nursing and Health Sciences

**2. Isabelle Mallon, Professeur de Sociologie, Directrice de thèse**

UMR 5283 Centre Max Weber  
Université Lumière Lyon 2

**3. John Coveney, Professeur d'Etudes en Santé Publique, Co-directeur de thèse**

College of Nursing and Health Sciences  
Flinders University (Australie)

**3. Maxime Michaud, PhD, Chargé de recherche, co-encadrant**

Centre de Recherche de l'Institut Paul Bocuse

**4. Carol Anne Hartwick-Pflaum, PhD, chercheuse en étude de consommateurs, co-encadrante**

Mars Food Global

**Description de l'étude**

Cette étude s'intitule « Enquête sur les repas et les activités alimentaires familiales ».

Nous enquêtons sur les activités alimentaires quotidiennes (la préparation, les repas, le rangement et le nettoyage, l'organisation de ces pratiques) et sur les interactions de tous les membres de la famille lors de ces activités.

**Objectif de l'étude**

Ce projet vise à obtenir une meilleure compréhension des activités alimentaires familiales et de l'expérience des membres de la famille.

**Qu'est-ce qu'on me demandera de faire?**

Fairley Le Moal vous demandera si vous acceptez qu'elle soit présente dans votre maison pour prendre part et observer les activités alimentaires. Elle discutera avec vous et avec votre famille lors de ces observations et entretiens de vos habitudes et de votre expérience de l'alimentation à la maison. Elle vous demandera si elle peut prendre part dans certaines de ces activités, notamment les repas. Elle prendra des notes et vous demandera si elle peut prendre des photos pendant les sessions d'observations.

Les entretiens avec vous et votre conjoint.e auront lieu chez vous, ou dans un lieu de votre choix. Les entretiens avec vos enfants auront lieu chez vous, en votre présence.

PENDANT LE CONTEXTE DE LA CRISE SANITAIRE DU COVID-19, CES OBSERVATIONS EN PERSONNE PEUVENT ETRE REMPLACEES PAR DES REPAS EN VISIO D'UNE PART ET PAR L'ENVOI DE COURTES VIDEO DE VOS ACTIVITES EN LIEN



AVEC L'ALIMENTATION D'AUTRE PART.

Votre participation est entièrement volontaire et vous êtes libre d'interrompre ou de retirer votre participation à tout moment et sans préjudice. Votre enfant est également libre d'interrompre ou de retirer sa participation à tout moment et sans préjudice.

#### **Estimation de votre temps de participation**

Le temps total de votre participation est estimé à une dizaine d'heures par famille. Ceci est une estimation et dépend du temps que durent vos activités alimentaires quotidiennes.

Entre 4 à 6 visites d'observations sont nécessaires pour prendre part à cette étude.

Par ailleurs, les entretiens avec les parents (un par parent) dureront environ 1 heure et l'entretien avec chaque enfant durera plus ou moins une demi-heure.

Le temps de participation total peut être réparti sur une ou plusieurs semaines.

#### **Bénéfices attendus**

Vous ne bénéficierez pas directement de votre participation à cette étude.

#### **Est-ce que je serai identifiable à la suite de ma participation à cette étude?**

Toutes les informations fournies et collectées seront traitées dans la plus stricte confidentialité et aucun des participants ne pourra être identifié individuellement dans le manuscrit de thèse, les rapports ou autres publications qui en résulteront. Tous les renseignements et les résultats obtenus dans le cadre de cette étude seront conservés de manière sécurisée au Centre de Recherche de l'Institut Paul Bocuse, l'accès étant réservé aux chercheurs dont le nom figure sur la présente Lettre d'Information. Étant donné que les observations seront effectuées au domicile et à l'extérieur du domicile avec les autres membres de la famille, elles ne seront ni anonymes ni confidentielles.

#### **Législation et confidentialité**

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche du Collège Universitaire de Médecine Générale (Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1) a étudié ce projet et a émis un avis favorable à sa réalisation le 14/01/2020.

Vous pourrez contacter à tout moment le Délégué à la Protection des Données de l'Université Lumière Lyon 2 (Dyland Galland, Direction des affaires juridiques, institutionnelles et des marchés : [dajim@univ-lyon2.fr](mailto:dajim@univ-lyon2.fr)) afin de récupérer vos données. Si le besoin se fait de partager vos données avec d'autres parties, vous serez contacté par les chercheurs. A la fin du projet, les données seront conservées de manière anonymisée et dé-identifiée au Centre de Recherche de l'Institut Paul Bocuse.

#### **Financements du projet**

La doctorante est embauchée en contrat CIFRE par le Centre de Recherche de l'Institut Paul Bocuse pour réaliser ce projet de thèse. Ce dernier perçoit des financements de l'Association National de la Recherche Technologique, de l'Université de Flinders (Adélaïde, Australie) et de Mars Food. Il n'y a pas de conflit d'intérêt des chercheurs participant à ce projet.

#### **Y a-t-il des risques ou des désagréments si je participe ?**

Les chercheurs prévoient que votre participation à cette étude comporte peu de risques. Toutefois, l'exploration de certains sujets (tels que la parentalité, les relations familiales, la santé, etc.) pourraient provoquer chez des participants un malaise émotionnel ou psychologique. Soyez toutefois assuré que Fairley Le Moal ne portera pas de jugement de valeur et que cette recherche ne vise pas à promouvoir une façon particulière de manger, de nourrir la famille ou d'être parent.

Si votre participation à cette étude provoque de tels troubles, vous pourrez contacter les directeurs de ce projet de



thèse qui vous dirigeront vers un.e professionnel.le pour une prise en charge gratuite.

Fairley Le Moal sera tenue d'informer les autorités compétentes si elle est témoin d'abus envers les enfants, auquel cas vous ne serez pas à l'abri d'une perquisition et d'une saisie légale par celles-ci.

#### **Comment est-ce que j'accepte de participer?**

Des formulaires de consentement, pour vous, votre conjoint et votre ou vos enfant(s) accompagnent cette Lettre d'Information. Si vous acceptez de participer, veuillez lire et signer ces formulaires et les retourner au Centre de Recherche de l'Institut Paul Bocuse ou en personne, à Fairley Le Moal.

Vous êtes bien-sûr libre d'interrompre ou de retirer votre participation à tout moment et sans préjudice. Vous pouvez également refuser de répondre à n'importe quelle question.

Pour qu'une famille puisse participer à cette étude, tous les membres de la famille doivent accepter de prendre part dans les sessions d'observations. Si les enfants refusent d'être inclus dans les observations, la famille ne sera pas éligible, même si l'accord des parents a été donné. Si les enfants refusent de prendre part aux entretiens seulement, alors Fairley Le Moal ne mènera pas ces entretiens mais la famille reste éligible.

Les enfants peuvent refuser de participer à l'étude à tout moment et sans préjudice, même si les parents ont déjà donné leur accord.

#### **Compensation pour votre participation**

Votre famille sera compensée pour la participation à cette étude. Vous recevrez une première enveloppe contenant 40 euros lors de la seconde visite et une seconde enveloppe de 110 euros à la fin de votre participation.

#### **Comment est-ce que je recevrais un retour sur ma participation ?**

A l'issue du projet, une synthèse des résultats sera communiquée aux participants par mail ou en personne.

Nous vous remercions d'avoir pris le temps de lire cette Lettre d'Information et nous espérons que vous accepterez de participer.

Bien à vous (au nom de tous les chercheurs)

Isabelle Mallon et John Coveney



## Formulaire de consentement – Participation à des observations (adulte).

Je soussigné.e ..... ayant plus de 18 ans, consent par la présente de participer aux observations dans le cadre de l'étude qui s'intitule « Enquête sur les repas et les activités alimentaires familiales ».

1. J'ai lu la Lettre d'Information fournie.
2. Je comprends les détails et les risques potentiels de l'étude.
3. Je suis consciente que je dois conserver une copie de la Lettre d'Information et de ce Formulaire de consentement pour toute consultation future.
4. J'accepte que les sessions d'observations soient audio-enregistrées.
5. Je comprends que:
  - a) Je ne bénéficierai pas directement de cette étude.
  - b) Ma participation est entièrement volontaire et je suis libre d'interrompre ou de mettre fin aux sessions d'observations à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - c) Je suis libre de décliner de répondre à des questions à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - d) Je peux demander que les enregistrements audio soient interrompus à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - e) Si moi ou un des membres de ma famille décide d'interrompre ou de décliner de participer à des observations, alors la session d'observation avec toute la famille sera interrompue ou prendra fin.
  - f) Les informations fournies et collectées seront publiées comme expliqué dans la Lettre d'Information. Vous ne serez pas identifiable dans les publications. Ces informations seront traitées avec la plus stricte confidentialité mais votre participation ne sera pas anonyme étant donné l'implication de toute la famille lors des observations.
  - g) Même si vos informations seront traitées avec la plus stricte confidentialité, Fairley Le Moal sera tenue d'informer les autorités compétentes si elle est témoin d'abus envers les enfants, auquel cas vous ne serez pas à l'abri d'une perquisition et d'une saisie légale par les autorités compétentes.
  - h) Seuls les chercheurs listés sur ce projet auront accès à mes données, à moins que je n'autorise explicitement le contraire. Si le besoin se fait de partager vos données avec d'autres parties, vous serez contacté par les chercheurs.

**Nom et prénom du/de la participant.e :**

**Date et signature du/de la participant.e :**

Je certifie que j'ai expliqué l'étude au/à la participant.e et je considère qu'il/elle comprend ce qui est impliqué et accepte librement de participer.

**Nom et prénom de la chercheuse principale :**

**Date et signature de la chercheuse principale :**

*NB: Deux copies doivent être signées et conservées.*

## Formulaire de consentement - Participation à des observations (parent/gardien légal).

Je soussigné.e ..... étant le parent/gardien légal (rayer les mentions inutiles) de ....., qui a ..... ans, consent par la présente que mon enfant participe aux observations dans le cadre de l'étude qui m'a été expliquée dans la Lettre d'Information ci-jointe et qui s'intitule « Enquête sur les repas et les activités alimentaires familiales ».

1. J'ai lu la Lettre d'Information fournie.
2. Je comprends les détails et les risques potentiels de l'étude.
3. Je suis consciente que je dois conserver une copie de la Lettre d'Information et de ce Formulaire de consentement pour toute consultation future.
4. J'accepte que les sessions d'observations soient audio-enregistrées.
5. Je comprends que:
  - a) Mon enfant peut décliner de participer même si je donne mon consentement.
  - b) Mon enfant ne bénéficiera pas directement de cette étude.
  - c) Sa participation est entièrement volontaire et elle/il est libre d'interrompre ou de mettre fin aux observations à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - d) Elle/il est libre de décliner de répondre à des questions à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - e) Elle/il peut demander que les enregistrements audio soient interrompus à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - f) Elle/il est libre de refuser que des photos soient prises à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - g) Si mon enfant décide d'interrompre ou de décliner de participer à des observations, alors la session d'observation avec toute la famille sera interrompue ou prendra fin.
  - h) Les informations fournies et collectées seront publiées comme expliqué dans la Lettre d'Information. Votre enfant ne sera pas identifiable dans les publications. Ses informations seront traitées avec la plus stricte confidentialité mais sa participation ne sera pas anonyme étant donné l'implication de toute la famille lors des observations.
  - i) Même si ces informations seront traitées avec la plus stricte confidentialité, Fairley Le Moal sera tenue d'informer les autorités compétentes si elle est témoin d'abus envers les enfants, auquel cas vous ne serez pas à l'abri d'une perquisition et d'une saisie légale par celles-ci.
  - j) Seuls les chercheurs listés sur ce projet auront accès à mes données. Si le besoin se fait de partager ces données avec d'autres parties, vous serez contacté par les chercheurs.

**Nom et prénom du parent/gardien :**

**Date et signature du parent/gardien :**

Je certifie que j'ai expliqué l'étude au parent/gardien du/de la participant.e et je considère qu'elle/il comprend ce qui est impliqué et consent librement que l'enfant participe.

**Nom et prénom de la chercheuse principale :**

**Date et signature de la chercheuse principale :**

*NB: Deux copies doivent être signées et conservées.*



### Formulaire de consentement – Autorisation de droit à l'image (adulte et parent/gardien légal)

Je soussigné.e ..... ayant plus de 18 ans et étant le parent/gardien légal (rayer les mentions inutiles) de ....., qui a ..... ans consent par la présente que des photos soient prises de moi-même, de mon/mes enfant(s) et de ma maison pendant les sessions d'observations de l'étude qui s'intitule « Enquête sur les repas et les activités alimentaires familiales ».

1. J'ai lu la Lettre d'Information fournie.
2. Je comprends les détails et les risques potentiels de l'étude.
3. Je suis consciente que je dois conserver une copie de la Lettre d'Information et de cette Formulaire de consentement pour toute consultation future.
4. Je comprends que:
  - a) Je ne bénéficierai pas directement de cette étude.
  - b) Je suis libre de décliner que des photos soient prises de moi, de mes enfants ou de ma maison à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - c) Les informations fournies et collectées seront publiées comme expliqué dans la Lettre d'Information. Vous et votre/vos enfant(s) ne serez pas identifiables dans les publications. Ces informations seront traitées avec la plus stricte confidentialité mais votre participation ne sera pas anonyme étant donné l'implication de toute la famille lors des observations.
  - d) Seuls les chercheurs listés sur ce projet auront accès à mes données, à moins que je n'autorise explicitement le contraire. Si le besoin se fait de partager vos données avec d'autres parties, vous serez contacté par les chercheurs.

**Nom et prénom du/de la participant.e et parent ou gardien.nne :**

**Date et signature du/de la participant.e et parent ou gardien.nne :**

Je certifie que j'ai expliqué l'étude au/à la participant.e et je considère qu'il/elle comprend ce qui est impliqué et accepte librement de participer.

**Nom et prénom de la chercheuse principale :**

**Date et signature de la chercheuse principale :**

*NB: Deux copies doivent être signées et conservées.*



## Formulaire de consentement - Participation à des entretiens (adulte).

Je soussigné.e .....ayant plus de 18 ans, consent par la présente de participer aux entretiens dans le cadre de l'étude qui s'intitule « Enquête sur les repas et les activités alimentaires familiales ».

1. J'ai lu la Lettre d'Information fournie.
2. Je comprends les détails et les risques potentiels de l'étude.
3. Je suis consciente que je dois conserver une copie de la Lettre d'Information et de ce Formulaire de consentement pour toute consultation future.
4. J'accepte que les entretiens soient audio-enregistrés.
5. Je comprends que:
  - a) Je ne bénéficierai pas directement de cette étude.
  - b) Ma participation est entièrement volontaire et je suis libre d'interrompre ou de mettre fin aux entretiens à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - c) Je suis libre de décliner de répondre à des questions à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - d) Je peux demander que les enregistrements audio soient interrompus à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - e) Les informations fournies et collectées seront publiées comme expliqué dans la Lettre d'Information. Vous ne serez pas identifiable dans les publications.
  - f) Seuls les chercheurs listés sur ce projet auront accès à mes données, à moins que je n'autorise explicitement le contraire. Si le besoin se fait de partager vos données avec d'autres parties, vous serez contacté par les chercheurs.

**Nom et prénom du/de la participant.e :**

**Date et signature du/de la participant.e :**

Je certifie que j'ai expliqué l'étude au/à la participant.e et je considère qu'il/elle comprend ce qui est impliqué et accepte librement de participer.

**Nom et prénom de la chercheuse principale :**

**Date et signature de la chercheuse principale :**

*NB: Deux copies doivent être signées et conservées.*

### Formulaire de consentement - Participation à un entretien (parent/gardien légal).

Je soussigné.e ..... étant le parent/gardien légal (rayer les mentions inutiles) de ....., qui a ..... ans, consent par la présente que mon enfant participe à un entretien dans le cadre de l'étude qui m'a été expliqué dans la Lettre d'Information ci-jointe et qui s'intitule « Enquête sur les repas et les activités alimentaires familiales ».

1. J'ai lu la Lettre d'Information fournie.
2. Je comprends les détails et les risques potentiels de l'étude.
3. Je suis consciente que je dois conserver une copie de la Lettre d'Information et de ce Formulaire de consentement pour toute consultation future.
4. J'accepte que l'entretien soit audio-enregistré.
5. Je comprends que:
  - a) Mon enfant peut décliner de participer même si je donne mon consentement.
  - b) Mon enfant ne bénéficiera pas directement de cette étude.
  - c) Sa participation est entièrement volontaire et elle/il est libre d'interrompre ou de mettre fin à l'entretien à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - d) Elle/il est libre de décliner de répondre à des questions à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - e) Elle/il peut demander que les enregistrements audio soient interrompus à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - f) Les informations fournies et collectées seront publiées comme expliqué dans la Lettre d'Information. Votre enfant ne sera pas identifiable dans les publications.
  - g) Même si ces informations seront traitées avec la plus stricte confidentialité, Fairley Le Moal sera tenue d'informer les autorités compétentes si elle est témoin d'abus envers les enfants, auquel cas vous ne serez pas à l'abri d'une perquisition et d'une saisie légale par celles-ci.
  - h) Seuls les chercheurs listés sur ce projet auront accès à ces données. Si le besoin se fait de partager ces données avec d'autres parties, vous serez contacté par les chercheurs.

**Nom et prénom du parent/gardien :**

**Date et signature du parent/gardien :**

Je certifie que j'ai expliqué l'étude au parent/gardien du/de la participante et je considère qu'elle/il comprend ce qui est impliqué et consent librement que l'enfant participe.

**Nom et prénom de la chercheuse principale :**

**Date et signature de la chercheuse principale :**

*NB: Deux copies doivent être signées et conservées.*



## Formulaire de consentement - Participation à un journal alimentaire (adulte).

Je soussigné.e .....ayant plus de 18 ans, consent par la présente de participer au journal alimentaire dans le cadre de l'étude qui s'intitule « Enquête sur les repas et les activités alimentaires familiales ».

1. J'ai lu la Lettre d'Information fournie.
2. Je comprends les détails et les risques potentiels de l'étude.
3. Je suis consciente que je dois conserver une copie de la Lettre d'Information et de ce Formulaire de consentement pour toute consultation future.
4. J'accepte que les informations que je fournis par messages (sur mon téléphone) soient enregistrées.
5. Je comprends que:
  - a) Je ne bénéficierai pas directement de cette étude.
  - b) Ma participation est entièrement volontaire et je suis libre d'interrompre ou de mettre fin au journal à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - c) Je suis libre de décliner de répondre à des questions à tout moment et sans préjudice.
  - d) Les informations fournies seront publiées comme expliqué dans la Lettre d'Information. Vous ne serez pas identifiable dans les publications et vos informations seront traitées avec la plus stricte confidentialité.
  - e) Seuls les chercheurs listés sur ce projet auront accès à mes données, à moins que je n'autorise explicitement le contraire. Si le besoin se fait de partager vos données avec d'autres parties, vous serez contacté par les chercheurs.

**Nom et prénom du/de la participant.e :**

**Date et signature du/de la participant.e :**

Je certifie que j'ai expliqué l'étude au/à la participant.e et je considère qu'il/elle comprend ce qui est impliqué et accepte librement de participer.

**Nom et prénom de la chercheuse principale :**

**Date et signature de la chercheuse principale :**

*NB: Deux copies doivent être signées et conservées.*

## Formulaire de consentement – Participation à des observations (adulte).

Je soussigné.e ..... ayant plus de 18 ans, consent par la présente de participer aux observations dans le cadre de l'étude qui s'intitule « Enquête sur les repas et les activités alimentaires familiales ».

1. Je me porte volontaire pour la poursuite de cette étude et j'ai proposé à Fairley Le Moal qu'elle vienne chez moi en personne.
2. Je comprends que ces visites d'observations débiteront lors de la phase de déconfinement liée à l'épidémie de coronavirus covid-19 et j'ai pris connaissance des risques associés à cette épidémie sur le site internet du gouvernement français<sup>1</sup>
3. Je prends la responsabilité d'inviter Fairley Le Moal à mon domicile et qu'elle rencontre tous les membres de ma famille, sous les conditions suivantes
  - a) Fairley Le Moal désinfecte le matériel qu'elle utilise (dictaphone, stylo, carnet de note, téléphone) avant d'arriver à mon domicile.
  - b) Fairley Le Moal se désinfecte les mains en arrivant à mon domicile.
  - c) Fairley Le Moal se tient à une distance d'un mètre minimum de moi-même et de chaque membre de ma famille lors de toute la visite.
  - d) Fairley Le Moal porte un masque lors de la visite, sauf pendant le repas.
  - e) Fairley Le Moal annulera toute visite si elle présente des symptômes associés au covid-19.<sup>2</sup>
  - f) Fairley Le Moal annulera toute visite si elle infectée par le covid-19.
4. J'accepte d'adopter systématiquement les mesures suivantes lors de la visite de Fairley Le Moal.
  - a) Je me désinfecte les mains avant la préparation alimentaire, avant de mettre la table et avant le repas et je veille à ce que les membres de ma famille, y compris les enfants, fassent de même.
  - b) Je veille à ce que les ustensiles de cuisine utilisés soient désinfectés.
  - c) J'annule toute visite si moi ou un membre de ma famille présente des symptômes associés au covid-19.
  - d) J'annule toute visite si moi ou un membre de ma famille est infectée par le covid-19.

Chacune des parties (désignées comme étant Fairley Le Moal et les membres de la famille présentes au domicile lors de la visite) décline toute responsabilité en cas d'infection au covid-19.

**Nom et prénom du/de la participant.e :**

**Date et signature du/de la participant.e :**

Je certifie que j'ai expliqué l'étude au/à la participant.e et je considère qu'il/elle comprend ce qui est impliqué et accepte librement de participer.

**Nom et prénom de la chercheuse principale :**

**Date et signature de la chercheuse principale :**

*NB: Deux copies doivent être signées et conservées.*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gouvernement.fr/info-coronavirus>

<sup>2</sup> Fièvre, toux, fatigue, courbatures, maux de gorge, diarrhée, conjonctivite, maux de tête, perte d'odorat ou du goût, éruption cutanée ou décoloration des doigts ou des orteils

## LETTRE D'INFORMATION POUR ENFANT - PARTICIPATION À UNE ETUDE

### Qu'est-ce qu'une étude ?

Une étude est ce que tu fais quand tu veux apprendre quelque chose ou découvrir quelque chose de nouveau. Un chercheur est la personne qui fait cette étude. Dans ce cas, la chercheuse est une femme appelée Fairley Le Moal. Tu la rencontreras avant le début de l'étude.

### Pourquoi est-ce que cette étude est faite ?

Nous faisons cette étude pour apprendre des choses sur les activités de la famille en rapport avec la nourriture.



### Qu'est-ce qui m'arrivera si je participe ?

1) Si tu le veux, Fairley te demandera d'écrire ton nom sur une lettre. Cette lettre est pour dire que tu comprends cette étude et ce qui va se passer. Tu devras garder une copie de la lettre.

2) Fairley viendra plusieurs fois dans ta maison pour observer et participer aux activités liées à la nourriture. Cela veut dire qu'elle sera présente quelques fois pendant les repas, la cuisine, la vaisselle et les courses.

3) Elle enregistrera les discussions pendant ces activités sur un dictaphone, qui est un outil qui ressemble à une petite télécommande. Tu peux demander à Fairley à n'importe quel moment qu'elle arrête l'enregistrement.



4) Elle prendra aussi quelques photos de ta maison et tu seras peut-être sur ces photos. Mais ne t'inquiète pas, on ne te reconnaîtra pas sur ces photos (ton visage sera caché). Tu peux aussi demander à Fairley à n'importe quel moment qu'elle arrête de prendre des photos.



4) Fairley te demandera aussi si tu acceptes de parler quelques minutes avec elle au sujet de la nourriture à la maison. Cette discussion sera aussi enregistrée, et aura lieu chez toi, avec tes parents présents. Tu ne seras pas obligé.e de parler avec Fairley si tu ne le veux pas.

### Est-ce que je dois accepter de participer ?

Non. Tu n'es pas obligé.e de participer à cette étude, même si tes parents ont accepté pour toi. C'est toi qui décide. Tu as juste besoin de dire non si tu ne veux pas, ce n'est pas grave. Tu peux aussi changer d'avis après avoir dit oui, ce n'est pas grave non plus.

### Qu'est-ce que les chercheurs vont faire avec les informations ?

Fairley et les autres chercheurs qui participent à cette étude vont utiliser ces informations pour écrire et publier des connaissances sur l'alimentation dans les familles.

### Qu'est-ce que je dois faire maintenant ?

Maintenant que tu es au courant de l'étude, prend le temps de réfléchir si tu veux participer ou pas.

Tu peux demander à tes parents si tu ne comprends pas certaines choses.

Est-ce que l'étude me fera du bien ou du mal?

Non. Cette étude ne changera rien pour toi.

Merci d'avoir pris le temps de lire cette lettre.

N'hésite pas à poser des questions si tu as besoin !

La date d'aujourd'hui, ton prénom et ton nom:

Date, nom, prénom et signature du parent/gardien:



### LETTRE D'ASSENTIMENT (ACCORD) POUR PARTICIPER A CETTE ETUDE

Entoure tes réponses:

Est-ce que quelqu'un t'a expliqué cette étude?	Oui / Non
Est-ce que tu comprends ce qu'est cette étude?	Oui / Non
Est-ce que tu as posé toutes les questions que tu avais?	Oui / Non
Est-ce qu'on a répondu à tes questions?	Oui / Non
Est-ce que tu comprends que tu peux arrêter de participer quand tu veux?	Oui / Non
Est-ce que tu veux bien participer ?	Oui / Non

Si tu ne veux pas participer, tu n'as pas besoin d'écrire ton nom en bas.

Si tu veux participer, écris s'il te plaît ton prénom, ton nom et la date en bas.

La date d'aujourd'hui, ton prénom et ton nom:

Tes parents doivent aussi signer en dessous s'ils veulent bien que tu participes:

Nom et prénom du parent/gardien:

Date et signature du parent/gardien :

La chercheuse doit aussi signer ce document:

Nom et prénom de la chercheuse :

Date et signature de la chercheuse :



## LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Sir/Madam

This letter is to introduce Fairley Le Moal, who is a PhD student in the College of Nursing and Health Sciences at Flinders University.

She is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis publication on daily family food activities and the interactions between family members during those practices, in particular the role and experience of fathers in them.

Fairley will ask you and your children to describe your food practices at home (grocery shopping, preparation, meal and cleaning up after the meal) and talk about your experience of these. This will happen during individual interviews.

She will also ask you to video tape three meals (day and type of meal defined with Fairley Le Moal during the interview).

The interviews will be audio recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with reviewing the results. The interviews will take place by video considering the current COVID-19 context - and Fairley will ask your permission as well as your child's assent to interview him/her by video and send her a couple of videos of meals.

Note that Fairley is currently in Lyon, France and she will be calling you from Lyon and conducting the interviews with you over Zoom or Skype, or whatever is most convenient for you. The interviews will be scheduled for times that are most convenient for you and your family.

Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting publication.

You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

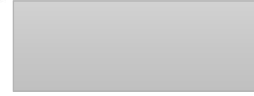
Fairley will seek your consent on the attached forms to participate in this research and to use the recordings in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed, and to make the recording available to other researchers on the same conditions (or that the recording will not be made available to any other person).

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 0405031970 or e-mail [john.coveney@flinders.edu.au](mailto:john.coveney@flinders.edu.au)

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,  
John Coveney

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## LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Sir/Madam

This letter is to introduce Fairley le Moal, who is a PhD student in the College of Nursing and Health Sciences at Flinders University.

She is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis publication on daily family food activities and the interactions between family members during those practices and in particular the role and experience of fathers in them.

Fairley will ask you to talk describe your food practices at home (grocery shopping, preparation, meal and cleaning up after the meal) and talk about your role and experience in these.

She will also ask you to report your practices and thoughts about your food activities in a digital food diary, during one week.

The interviews will be audio recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with reviewing the results.

The interviews will take place by visio considering the current COVID-19 context - and Fairley will ask your permission as well as your child's assent to interview him/her by visio.

Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting publication.

You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

Since Fairley intends to make a tape recording of the interview and as well as well as record the information provided in the diary about your family food activities she will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the interview and the discussions, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed, and to make the recording available to other researchers on the same conditions (or that the recording will not be made available to any other person).

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 0405031970 or e-mail [john.coveney@flinders.edu.au](mailto:john.coveney@flinders.edu.au)

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## INFORMATION SHEET

Participation in a study: "Food habits and family meals: investigating family interactions and fathers' role in food activities"

### Researchers

1. Professor John Coveney, Professor of Global Food, Culture and Health, PhD supervisor  
College of Nursing and Health Sciences  
Flinders University

Tel: [REDACTED]

2. Professor Isabelle Mallon, Professor of Sociology, PhD co-supervisor  
UMR 5283 Centre Max Weber  
University Lumière Lyon 2

Tel: [REDACTED]

3. Maxime Michaud, PhD, research scientist  
Institut Paul Bocuse Research Centre

Tel: [REDACTED]

4. Fairley Le Moal, PhD student, principal investigator  
Flinders University

Université Lumière Lyon 2

Institut Paul Bocuse Research Centre

Tel: [REDACTED]

### Description of the study

This study is part of the project titled "Food habits and family meals: investigating family interactions and fathers' role in food activities". This project will investigate daily family food activities (planning, provisioning, preparing, eating, cleaning) and family members' experience of these. This project is supported by Flinders University, through the College of Nursing and Health Sciences. The researchers listed above are part of this project and Fairley Le Moal is the principal investigator with whom you will be in contact.

### Purpose of the study

This project aims to gain a better understanding of family food habits in different cultural and social contexts.

### What will I be asked to do?

Fairley Le Moal will ask you and each family member (including the children) to take part an individual interview during which you will be asked to describe your family food activities such as: grocery shopping, food preparation, meals, after meal clean up and your experience of these. The interviews will happen by video and be audio recorded with a digital voice recorder to help with reviewing the results. She will also ask you to video tape three meals (day and type of meal defined with Fairley Le Moal during the interview).

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to interrupt or drop out from the study without prejudice. Your child is also free to do so at any time and without prejudice.

The interviews and videos will be typed-up and stored on a secure drive and will only be destroyed if the participant checks the transcript.

### Expected time commitment

The interviews will last for approximately one hour per parent and about 30 minutes per child. The duration of the three video recordings will correspond to the time you spend on meals.

Your whole participation can be scheduled to fit in a week or be spread out on several weeks.

### What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

You will not directly benefit from participating in this study.

### Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

Any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, reports or other publications. All information and results obtained in this study will be stored in a secure way, with access restricted to the researchers listed on this Information Sheet.

### Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

We anticipate few risks from your involvement in this study, however, given the nature of the project, some participants could experience emotional discomfort or distress, since sensitive issues can emerge when discussing the topics of parenting, family relationships, the responsibility of feeding the family or the mental load of these activities. Be assured however that the researcher will be non-judgmental and that she understands that parenting and feeding the family implies many difficulties and ordeals. This

research does not aim at putting forward a particular way of eating, feeding the family or parenting. If any emotional discomfort or distressed is experienced, please contact LIFELINE (13 11 14) , Beyond Blue (1300224636) or Kids Helpline (1800551800) for counselling that may be accessed free of charge by all participants. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher.

Any information disclosed, or witnessed, about child abuse and/or domestic violence will not be secure from lawful search and seizure from the relevant authorities.

**How do I agree to participate?**

A consent form for you and for parents/guardian as well as a child assent form will be given to you. If you agree to participate, please read and sign the form and send it to Fairley Le Moal. You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

Children can choose not to participate even if their parent/guardian has already provided consent for them to be involved. If the child expresses the wish not to be interviewed, then the interview will end.

All the information provided will be anonymized and stored securely on a drive of Flinders University.

Only the researchers on this project will have access to your research data and raw results; unless you explicitly provide consent for it to be shared with other parties. If the need to seek your consent to share your research data with other parties does arise, you will be contacted by the researchers. You will have the possibility to review and edit your transcripts of interviews and discussions.

**Recognition of Contribution / Time / Travel costs**

Your family will be compensated for participating with \$200.

**How will I receive feedback?**

On project completion, outcomes of the project will be given to all participants via email or in person.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet, and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.

Yours (on behalf of the researchers)

Professor John Coveney

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## CHILD INFORMATION SHEET

### What is a study?

A research study is what you do when you want to learn about something or find out something new. A researcher is the person who does this study. In this case, the researcher is a woman called Fairley Le Moal.

### Why is this study being done?

We are doing this study to find out more about eating at home, as a family.

### What will happen to me if I take part?

- 1) If you are able, you will be asked to write your name on a form. This form is to say that you understand the study and what will happen. You will be given your own copy of the form to keep, as well as this sheet.
- 2) The researcher will ask you to talk about food activities at home, like the meal, preparing food, cleaning up. This discussion will happen on a computer or by phone, with your parents present.
- 3) Your parents will video tape a couple of meals that you have with your family and send the video to Fairley Le Moal for her study.

### Do I have to say yes?

No - you don't have to agree to be part of this study, even if your parents said that you could participate. It's up to you! Just say if you don't want to join in. Nobody will mind. If you change your mind, that's ok as well.

### What will the researcher do with my information?

The might record the discussion you have with her and will use this information to learn but no one else, other than the people on this project, will have access to it.

### What shall I do now?

Now that you know about the study you need to think about if you want to take part in the study.

### Who can I ask about this?

Your mum or dad (or carer) have been given lots of information.

### Will the study upset or help me?

No - the study will not change how you are looked after.

**Thank you very much for taking time to read this. Please ask any questions if you need to.**

Child's name and signature:

Parent/guardian's name and signature:

Researcher's name and signature:

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## Participation in a study: “Food habits and family meals: investigating family interactions and fathers’ role in food activities”

### Researchers

1. Professor John Coveney, Professor of Global Food, Culture and Health, PhD supervisor  
College of Nursing and Health Sciences

Flinders University

Tel: + [REDACTED]

2. Professor Isabelle Mallon, Professor of Sociology, PhD co-supervisor

UMR 5283 Centre Max Weber

University Lumière Lyon 2

Tel: + [REDACTED]

3. Maxime Michaud, PhD, research scientist

Institut Paul Bocuse Research Centre

Tel: + [REDACTED]

4. Fairley Le Moal, PhD student, principal investigator

Flinders University

Université Lumière Lyon 2

Institut Paul Bocuse Research Centre

Tel: + [REDACTED]

### Description of the study

This study is part of the project titled “Food habits and family meals: investigating family interactions and fathers’ role in food activities”. This project will investigate daily family food activities (planning, provisioning, preparing, eating, cleaning) and family members’ experience of these. This project is supported by Flinders University, through the College of Nursing and Health Sciences. The researchers listed above are part of this project and Fairley Le Moal is the principal investigator with whom you will be in contact.

### Purpose of the study

This project aims to gain a better understanding of family food habits in different cultural and social contexts.

### What will I be asked to do?

Fairley Le Moal will ask you to take part in two interviews and a weeklong digital food diary, during which you will be asked to describe your family food activities such as: grocery shopping, food preparation, meals, after meal clean up and you experience of these. There will be one short introductory interview with you and one longer interview with each family member. Only the parents will be asked to fill in the digital food diary.

The interviews will happen by visio and be audio recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with reviewing the results.

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to interrupt or drop out from the study without prejudice. Your child is also free to do so at any time and without prejudice.

The interviews will be transcribed (typed-up) and stored on a secure drive and will only be destroyed if the transcript is checked by the participant.

### Expected time commitment

The interviews will last for approximately one hour per parent and about 30 minutes per child. The introductory interview will last approximately 30 minutes (1 introductory interview per family).

The reporting on the digital food diary will take approximately ten minutes per day for seven days.

Your whole participation can be scheduled to fit in a week or be spread out on several weeks.

### What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

You will not directly benefit from participating in this study.

### Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

Any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, reports or other publications. All information and results obtained in this study will be stored in a secure way, with access restricted to the researchers listed on this Information Sheet.

### Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

We anticipate few risks from your involvement in this study, however, given the nature of the project, some participants could experience emotional discomfort or distress, since sensitive issues can emerge when discussing the topics of parenting, family relationships, the responsibility of feeding the family or the mental load of these activities. Be assured however that the researcher will be non-judgmental and that she understands that parenting and feeding the family implies many difficulties and ordeals. This research does not aim at putting forward a particular way of eating, feeding the family or parenting. If any emotional discomfort or distressed is experienced, please contact LIFELINE (13 11 14) , Beyond Blue (1300224636) or Kids Helpline (1800551800) for

counselling that may be accessed free of charge by all participants. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher.

Any information disclosed, or witnessed, about child abuse and/or domestic violence will not be secure from lawful search and seizure from the relevant authorities.

**How do I agree to participate?**

A Consent form for you and for Parents/Guardian as well as a child assent form will be given to you. If you agree to participate, please read and sign the form and send it back to me at the College of Nursing and Health Sciences, Flinders University. You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

Children can choose not to participate even if their parent / guardian has already provided consent for them to be involved. If the child expresses the wish not to be interviewed, then the interview will end.

All the information provided will be anonymized and stored securely on a drive of Flinders University.

Only the researchers on this project will have access to your research data and raw results; unless you explicitly provide consent for it to be shared with other parties. If the need to seek your consent to share your research data with other parties does arise, you will be contacted by the researchers. You will have the possibility to review and edit your transcripts of interviews and discussions.

**Recognition of Contribution / Time / Travel costs**

Your family will be compensated for participating in this study by a voucher of \$100 to use in a food store in your neighbourhood.

**How will I receive feedback?**

On project completion, outcomes of the project will be given to all participants via email or in person.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet, and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.

Yours (on behalf of the researchers)

Professor John Coveney

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## ADULT CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH (Interviews)

### Food habits and family meals: investigating family interactions and fathers' role in food activities

I .....being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the interview for the research project with the title listed above.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to the audio recording recording of my information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. I understand that:
  - a) I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
  - b) Participation is entirely voluntary, I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and can decline to answer particular questions.
  - c) The information gained in this study will be published as explained, no identifying information will be published, and information will be treated with the strictest confidence, my participation will not be anonymous due the involvement of the whole family.
  - d) I may ask that the audio recording during the interview be stopped at any time and I may withdraw from the interview at any time and without disadvantage.
  - e) Even though the information provided will be treated with the strictest confidence, disclosure of illegal activities will not be safe from legal search and seizure and may need to be reported to authorities.
6. I understand that only the researchers on this project will have access to my research data and raw results; unless I explicitly provide consent for it to be shared with other parties. If the need to seek consent to share your research data with other parties does arise, I will be contacted by the researchers.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....Date.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name.....

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

#### Review / Approval of Interview Transcriptions

I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my interview participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

Participant's signature.....Date.....

NB: Two signed copies should be obtained.

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**CHILD ASSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE  
INTERVIEW AND VIDEO TAPES OF THE STUDY ABOUT  
EATING AT HOME.**

To be completed by the child and their parent/guardian

Please circle all you agree with: (Child)

- Has somebody explained this study to you? Yes / No  
Do you understand what the study is about? Yes / No  
Have you asked all the questions you want? Yes / No  
Have you had your questions answered in a way you understand? Yes / No  
Do you understand it's OK to stop taking part at any time? Yes / No  
Are you happy to take part in the interview and the video recordings? Yes / No

If any answers are 'no' or you don't want to take part, don't sign your name!

If you do want to take part, please write your name and today's date

Your Name:

Today's Date:

Your parent or guardian must write their name here too if they are happy for you to do the study.

Parent/Guardian Full Name:

Parent/Guardian Signature:

Today's Date:

The researcher who explained this study to you needs to sign too:

Researcher Full Name:

Researcher Signature:

Today's Date:

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## ADULT CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH (Video recordings)

Food habits and family meals: investigating family interactions and fathers' role in food activities.

I ..... being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the self video recording of meals for the research project with the title listed above.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of what will be involved in the video recording of meals and any potential risks that may be associated with participation have been explained to me in the Information Sheet.
3. I agree to the recording of my information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. I understand that:
  - a) I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
  - b) Participation is entirely voluntary and I am free to cease recording at any time and without disadvantage.
  - c) The information gained in this study will be published as explained, no identifying information will be published, and information will be treated with the strictest confidence, that anonymity cannot be guaranteed as other members of your family will know you are participating.
  - d) I can choose to stop video recording meals and withdraw from participation at any time.
6. I understand that only the researchers on this project will have access to my research data and raw results; unless I explicitly provide consent for it to be shared with other parties. If the need to seek your consent to share your research data with other parties does arise, I will be contacted by the researchers.
7. I agree that the information provided through the mobile device be stored by the researcher on a secure cloud storage at Flinders University

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....Date.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name.....

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

NB: *Two signed copies should be obtained.*

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee in South Australia (Project number 8596). For queries regarding the ethics approval of this project, or to discuss any concerns or complaints, please contact the Executive Officer of the committee via telephone on +61 8 8201 3116 or email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)*





## PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH (Interview and video recordings)

Food habits and family meals: investigating family interactions and fathers' role in food activities.

I .....being the parent or guardian of .....  
who is/are .....years old, hereby give my consent for my child[ren]/step-child[ren] to participate  
as requested in the interview and the video recordings for the research project on family food practices.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
4. I understand that:
  - a) My child[ren] may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
  - b) Participation is entirely voluntary and I am free to withdraw my child[ren] from the project at any time.
  - c) Children can choose not to participate in the interview or the video recording even if their parent / guardian has already provided consent for them to be involved. The child[ren] will not be interviewed or filmed if she/he/they refuse[s] so.
  - d) While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, no identifying information will be published about my child[ren], and information about my child[ren] will be treated with the strictest confidence. However, observations will not be anonymous due the involvement of whole family.
  - e) Even though information provided will be treated with the strictest confidence, disclosure of illegal activities will not be safe from legal search and seizure and may need to be reported to authorities.
5. I understand that only the researchers on this project will have access to my child[ren]'s research data and raw results; unless I explicitly provide consent for it to be shared with other parties. If the need to seek your consent to share your research data with other parties does arise, I will be contacted by the researchers.

Participant's parent/guardian's signature.....Date.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name.....

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

*NB: Two signed copies should be obtained.*

### Review / Approval of Interview Transcriptions

I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my child[ren]'s interview and video recording participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

Participant's signature.....Date.....

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee in South Australia (Project number 8596). For queries regarding the ethics approval of this project, or to discuss any concerns or complaints, please contact the Executive Officer of the committee via telephone on +61 8 8201 3116 or email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)*



## ADULT CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH (Digital food diaries)

**Food habits and family meals: investigating family interactions and fathers' role in food activities.**

I ..... being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the self reporting of my family food activities and my thoughts about these on a digital phone application for the research project with the title listed above.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of what will be involved in keeping a digital phone application diary; and any potential risks that may be associated with participation have been explained to me in the Information Sheet.
3. I agree to the online recording of my information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. I understand that:
  - a) I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
  - b) Participation is entirely voluntary and I am free to cease reporting at any time and without disadvantage.
  - c) The information gained in this study will be published as explained, no identifying information will be published, and information will be treated with the strictest confidence, that anonymity cannot be guaranteed as other members of your family will know you are participating.
  - d) I can choose to stop completing the digital diary and withdraw from participation at any time.
6. I understand that only the researchers on this project will have access to my research data and raw results; unless I explicitly provide consent for it to be shared with other parties. If the need to seek your consent to share your research data with other parties does arise, I will be contacted by the researchers.
7. I agree that the information provided through the mobile device be stored by the researcher on a secure cloud storage at Flinders University

**Participant's name**.....

**Participant's signature**.....**Date**.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

**Researcher's name**.....

**Researcher's signature**.....**Date**.....

*NB: Two signed copies should be obtained.*

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee in South Australia (Project number 8596). For queries regarding the ethics approval of this project, or to discuss any concerns or complaints, please contact the Executive Officer of the committee via telephone on +61 8 8201 3116 or email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)*

## **7. Appendix 7. In-person visits during the COVID-19 pandemic**

I visited the families from Lyon during a period of low circulation of the COVID-19 virus, but I also knew they had differentiated attitudes towards the COVID-19 and the health precautions. As a consequence, I let the families invite me back into their homes on their own conditions and temporalities, always making sure to propose the safest option first (family produced video and video conference dinners). Thus, for example, one family (Imbert: up. class) wanted to pursue the video conferences dinners longer than the other families did and I only returned into their home in September 2020. At the Franquet household (up. mid. class), for my three visits at this household, I kept a mask on at all times and did not eat with the family. Nathalie invited me to their home on this conditions in order to protect Marco, who was considered at risk due to his Crohn' disease. I sat a meter away from the table, watching the participants eat and interacting with them. I audio registered and took pictures as usual, but also noted elements in my notepad. As I was not eating and my position away from the table already accentuated my role as an observer, I thought I might as well take notes at the same time. I did not feel that the parents and children from this household were more uneasy than for the other in-person visits where I shared the meal. The other families who did not require additional sanitary measures, apart from the physical distance and the recommended hygienic precautions (no kissing, no shaking hands, washing hands regularly, no sharing of utensils) and other than me sitting at the end of the table, a bit further away from the participants. Some families even went a step further, by disregarding some of these measures and acting as if the pandemic was over or COVID-19 was not a health issue. In any case, I always tried to follow their attitude towards COVID-19, in order to avoid making them feel (more) uncomfortable by my presence. I took measures outside of fieldwork, though, to make sure I was not putting these families at risk. I arranged to visit only one household per week, spacing out visits between different households. I also limited my social contacts and situations that could be considered 'risky' (COVID-19 wise) during the period of fieldwork in Lyon.

## 8. Appendix 8. Total amount and type of observations per household

	Total observations	In person visits	Video conf. meals	Family produced videos	Week long diaries
<b>LYON</b>					
<b>Bourdon</b>	5	5			Yes
<b>Imbert</b>	6	3	3		Yes
<b>Franquet</b>	3	3 (I had a mask on and did not share the food)			No
<b>Comescu</b>	4	3	1		Yes
<b>Ferret</b>	1	1			Yes
<b>Obecanov</b>	5	4	1		Yes
<b>Lebrun</b>	7	7			No
<b>Nimaga</b>	2	2			Yes
<b>Rizzo</b>	4	4			No
<b>André</b>	2	1		1	No
<b>Armand</b>					Yes
<b>Cellier</b>					No
<b>ADELAIDE</b>					
<b>Bennet</b>					Yes
<b>Brown</b>					Yes
<b>Chapman</b>					Yes
<b>Davies</b>	3			3	No
<b>Total all families</b>	42	33	5	4	

## 9. Appendix 9. Duration of each visit, video conference and family produced video

OBSERVATIONS OF THE FAMILIES FROM LYON								
	Family Meal (FM) 1	FM 2	FM 3	FM 4	FM 5	FM 6	FM 7	FM 8
<b>Bourdon</b>	0h30	2h06	1h33	1h51	2h45			
<b>Imbert</b>	1h32	0h55 (video conference )	0h57 (video conference)	0h47 (video conference)	1h16	1h26		
<b>Franquet</b>	1h54	1h24	1h30					
<b>Comescu</b>	1h15 (video conference)	1h36	1h29	2h08				
<b>Ferret</b>	3h							
<b>Obecanov</b>	2h47	1h52	3h	3h				
<b>Lebrun</b>	3h13	1h40	3h18	2h54	2h	2h10	3h40	
<b>Nimaga</b>	1h52	2h14						
<b>Rizzo</b>	2h10	2h58	3h45	1h30				
<b>André</b>	2h	1h06						

OBSERVATIONS OF A FAMILY FROM ADELAIDE								
<b>Davies</b>	0h53	0h22	0h68					

Total observations (meals duration)	In-person	Video-conference	Family produced video
42 meals 78h56	33 meals 70h36	5 meals 5 hours	4 meals 3h20

## 10. Appendix 10. Mobilisation of the materials throughout the manuscript

Households from Lyon												
	Bourdon	Imbert	Franquet	Comescu	Ferret	Obecanov	Lebrun	Nimaga	Rizzo	André	Armand	Cellier
Interview Father	11	9	10	7	3	1	15	1	5	5		4
Interview Mother	12	11	22	6	16	15	6	4		7	7	
Interview Children	x	M.: 2 N.: 5	H.: 1	x		x	N.: 2 C.: 1		3			
Visit 1	2	4	5	7	2	1	6	2	2	7		
Visit 2	11	3	3	1		4	8	2	3	1		
Visit 3	11	6	7	11		2	9		1	8		
Visit 4	11	2		3		1	1		2			
Visit 5	7	4				3	1					
Visit 6		4					7					
Visit 7							6					
Food diary	1	2		2	3	x		4			1	
Ethnographic description	2	x	x	1	x	x	x	x	x	1	x	x
Legend	[number]	Number of time the type of material is mobilised throughout the manuscript			X	Material not mobilised				Absence of material		

Households from Adealaide				
	Bennet	Brown	Chapman	Davies
Interview Father	16	6	10	6
Interview Mother	23	10	12	14
Interview Children	1	3	3	x
Video 1				1
Video 2				1
Video 4				1
Food Diary	1	1	16	



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# Table of contents

Summary of thesis	2
Acknowledgements	4
Summarised table of contents	6
Note to the reader	12
Glossary	14
Participating households	16
Introduction	18
1. Overlooking family mealtimes	18
2. A black box hidden in plain sight	19
3. Overview of the methodology	22
4. Manuscript structure	22
Chapter 1. Addressing everyday commensality within the family: literature review, theoretical frameworks and research problem	24
1. Introduction	24
2. Literature review	24
2.1. Methods of the literature review	24
2.2. Deconstructing the object	25
2.2.1. The Strength of the Normative Model of Family Meals	27
2.2.2. The Durability of a Nostalgic Approach to Family Meals	28
2.2.3. Searching for Health Benefits of Family Meals: A Preventive Approach	28
2.2.4. Domestic Commensality is Not Conviviality	30
2.2.5. Ignoring the Impact of Systemic Inequalities on Family Food Practices	31
2.3. Results from the literature review	32
2.3.1. Families Still Eat Together	32
2.3.2. Barriers to Having Regular Family Dinners	35
2.3.3. Challenges during Family Mealtimes	35
2.3.4. Social Variations in the Practices of Family Meals	35
2.3.5. Gendered Aspects of Family Meals	36
2.4. Gaps in the literature	38
2.4.1. Including Fathers	38
2.4.2. Including Children	39
2.4.3. Focusing on Family Interactions and Relationships	40

2.4.4.	Food Work and Family Meals throughout the Week	41
3.	Epistemology and theoretical perspective	42
3.1.	Socialisation theories	43
4.	A research object overlapping several sociological fields	45
4.1.	Sociology of food and eating	45
4.2.	Sociology of family life	45
4.3.	Sociology of emotions	47
5.	A two-fold questioning: unfolding everyday commensal performances, in relation to family life, gender, social position and cultural origins.	49
Chapter 2. Observing family meals: ethical issues, methodological choices and practical adjustments		52
1.	Introduction	52
2.	Finding a way to ethnography: an access to fieldwork repetitively hindered	52
2.1.	The methodological approach of ethnography	52
2.2.	Legitimising the ethnographic approach as a scientific method	53
2.2.1.	A tripartite institutional collaboration	53
2.2.2.	Institutionalised research ethics: benefits, constraints and effects on fieldwork	54
2.3.	The COVID-19 pandemic: delay in the fieldwork access and impossible in-person fieldwork in Adelaide	57
2.3.1.	Dampened hopes of accessing fieldwork	57
2.3.2.	At distance investigation with households from Adelaide	60
3.	Recruiting households for a burdensome study	62
3.1.	Different ways of accessing to families: recruitment process	62
3.1.1.	Recruitment criteria	62
3.1.1.1.	Gathering a small sample of participants	62
3.1.1.2.	Putting into perspective results from Lyon to materials from Adelaide	63
3.1.1.3.	Focusing on middle class families	64
3.1.1.4.	Primary school aged children	65
3.1.1.5.	Working parents	65
3.1.1.6.	Adapting the recruitment criteria to Adelaide	65
3.1.1.7.	Compensation for participation in research	66
3.1.2.	Recruitment process	66
3.1.2.1.	Recruitment media	66
3.1.2.2.	Recruitment messages	67
3.2.	Obtaining participants' consent and assent: between a bureaucratised process and informal interactions	67
3.3.	Participating families	72

3.3.1.	Final group from Lyon	72
3.3.2.	Final group from Adelaide	75
4.	Organisation of the ethnography and the different methods used	76
4.1.	Various types of observational methods	76
4.1.1.	Home visits	76
4.1.1.1.	Focus of the observations	76
4.1.1.2.	Position as an observer and impact of my interference	76
4.1.2.	Video conference dinners	79
4.1.3.	Family produced videos	81
4.1.4.	Ethnographic field notes and audio recordings	82
4.2.	Interviews	82
4.2.1.	Online interviews	82
4.3.	Digital reporting of food practices	83
4.4.	Arriving in families' homes	84
4.5.	Leaving families' homes	84
4.6.	Ending fieldwork	85
4.7.	Summary of the different materials constructed	87
5.	The analytical process	88
5.1.	Instant fieldwork analysis	88
5.2.	Transcription	88
5.3.	Coding	90
5.4.	Analysing through writing	92
5.5.	Reflexivity	92
6.	Conclusion	94
Chapter 3. Family portraits and social life rhythms		96
1.	Introduction	96
2.	'Disclosing their private life without revealing their identities'	97
3.	Families from Lyon	98
3.1.	The Bourdon, a rich family with high cultural capital	98
3.2.	The Imbert family, a socio-economic ascension from a working-class background	104
3.3.	The Franquet family, an established upper middle class household accommodating their son's illness	107
3.4.	The Comescu family, a relatively high economic capital and Eastern European cultural origins	109
3.5.	The Ferret family, maintaining an upper class position while developing a career	110
3.6.	The Obecanov family, an intermediary middle class family with Eastern European cultural origins	111

3.7.	The Lebrun family, a new couple and a large family of intermediary social class	112
3.8.	The Nimaga family, a multicultural, socially mixed and reconstituted household	118
3.9.	The Rizzo family, maintaining an established intermediary middle-class position as a single father	118
3.10.	The André family, a lower middle class household with interrupted professional careers	119
4.	Families from Adelaide	119
4.1.	The Bennet family, happy at work, extensive sports practice and traditional parental roles	119
4.2.	The Brown family, happy at work and rather traditional parental roles	120
4.3.	The Chapman family, demanding jobs, many organised leisure activities, and bringing up children with large age differences	121
4.4.	The Davies, over worked, exhausted and caring parents	122
5.	The everyday family rhythms and routines	123
5.1.	Cultural and social differences in the children's bedtime hours	124
5.2.	Differences in the social life rhythms between Lyon and Adelaide	130
5.3.	Later and longer family dinners in Lyon than in Adelaide	134
5.4.	Priority of children's extracurricular activities over mealtimes	137
5.5.	Homework and bathing temporalities were inverted between Lyon and Adelaide	138
6.	Conclusion	141

#### Chapter 4. The unequal circumstances behind family mealtimes: pressure and pleasure in the kitchen 143

1.	Introduction	143
2.	The rationales for providing family meals	146
2.1.	Time scarcity and stress	146
2.2.	The healthy meal imperative	147
2.3.	The weight of individual preferences and dietary restrictions	153
2.3.1.	'We choose meals that are gonna be what they eat': adapting the menu to children's preferences	158
3.	Anticipation and improvisation in the organisation of food work	160
3.1.	Anticipation strategies	160
3.1.1.	Planning the menus	160
3.1.2.	Preparing food in advance	165
3.2.	Ad hoc approaches	173
4.	Repetition and creation in the experience of food work	183
4.1.	Food work care as a burden	184
4.2.	Cooking as pleasurable and relaxing activity	192
5.	Conclusion	210

Chapter 5. The boundaries of family mealtimes	215
1. Spatial delimitations	219
1.1. From the dining table to the lounge room	219
1.1.1. The dining table as a pillar of commensality	220
1.1.2. The significance of eating elsewhere	227
1.1.2.1. Reinforcing commensal norms by eating in the lounge room	227
1.1.2.2. Dissociating commensality from the dining table	233
1.2. Sitting together and its interruptions	237
1.2.1. The significance of children eating separately	238
1.2.1.1. Sustaining commensality without eating altogether	238
1.2.1.2. When commensality is impossible	239
1.2.2. Sustaining commensality by getting up	241
1.2.3. Breaches in the commensal unity	244
2. Temporal structures	248
2.1. Setting the table for the family, clearing for oneself	248
2.2. Not eating before the mealtime: exceptions to the rule	250
2.3. Waiting till everybody is served to begin to eat	253
2.4. Separating together	256
2.5. When commensality crumbled	257
3. Conclusion	263
 Chapter 6. The health equation of commensality	 267
1. Introduction	267
2. From the satisfaction of physiological needs to sustaining healthy bodies	270
3. Sharing food	272
3.1. Socialising to taste: from the display to the ingestion of new food	273
3.1.1. Socialisation through the display of consumption	273
3.1.2. Socialisation through taste	274
3.1.3. Socialisation to self-constraint	276
3.1.4. Socialisation tricks	280
3.2. Contradictory apprehensions of the socialisation to taste process between parents and children	281
3.3. Sharing equals quantities as a moral value and a way to control the diet	284
4. Sharing time	286
4.1. Controlling food ingestion through multiple courses	287
4.2. Unsynchronised rhythms: when children eat too quickly and are in a haste to leave	288
4.3. Unsynchronised rhythms: when children want to stay longer at the table and parents are anxious to leave	290



4.4.	The unity of time and content crumbles at the desert	295
5.	Conclusion	296
Chapter 7. Creating the family through mealtime conversations		299
1.	Introduction	299
2.	A traditionally privileged scene for conversations	302
2.1.	Representations of commensality as a communication facilitator	302
2.2.	Shifts in commensal practices: when other times and spaces exist for family communication	305
2.3.	When screens support mealtime communication	308
3.	The centrality of conversations in the creation of a family unity	309
3.1.	The family is constructed through children and what is important in their life	310
3.2.	Getting children to talk about their day: checking their health is sustained outside the household	312
3.3.	Creating a common world and defining its boundaries	318
4.	Hierarchies and tensions in the creation of a family unity	323
4.1.	Generational and gendered hierarchies in the creation of the family unity	323
4.1.1.	Triggers and tricks to get children to engage in conversations	323
4.1.2.	Regulations of conversations	328
4.1.2.1.	Impact of daytime on the conversations	328
4.2.	Tensions between individual singularities and the collective	329
4.2.1.	Attention to individualities and equality between children at the table	330
4.2.1.1.	Mothers protecting children's conversation turn and feelings	330
4.2.2.	Claiming conjugal conversational territories	333
4.2.2.1.	Parents include their children in their conversational territories	333
4.2.2.2.	Parents try to claim their own conversational preserve	335
4.2.2.3.	Parents have mealtime conversations, after the children have left	338
5.	'Hush, let Mum finish speaking': gendered mealtime interactions	339
5.1.	Gendered differences in the valorisation of mealtime conversations	339
5.2.	Fathers distribute conversations turns and keep it for themselves	343
6.	Conclusion	345
Chapter 8. Mealtime conviviality, a maternal responsibility		347
1.	Introduction	347
2.	The management of discontent and conflict at the table	351
2.1.	Isolating behaviours	352
2.2.	Antagonising demeanours	354

2.3.	Gendered management of mealtime interferences	359
2.3.1.	Maternal emotion work and paternal transgressions	359
3.	The maternal praise of conviviality	363
4.	The work of being happy together at the table	366
4.1.	Pleasant and affectionate mealtimes	366
5.	The meaning of having fun at the table	368
5.1.	Conjugal mocking interactions	370
5.2.	Intergenerational teasing	376
5.2.1.	A fun way to recall rules of healthy food	376
5.2.2.	Mocking table manners and socialising to food work	379
5.2.3.	Laughing at children and weakening commensality	385
5.3.	Socialisation to humour through children's ages	387
6.	The effects of prioritising conviviality over other commensal dimensions	392
7.	Conclusion	396
Conclusion		400
1.	Summary and discussion of the main findings	400
1.1.	Emotion work and the maternal imperative of conviviality	400
1.2.	The centrality of mealtime conversations in the creation of the family	402
1.3.	Social variation in the health equation of commensality	403
1.4.	At the boundaries of family mealtimes and the subversion of commensal norms	404
1.5.	The unequal experiences of the production of family meals	405
1.6.	Family mealtimes compete with other work, family and health imperatives	407
2.	Transversal findings	407
2.1.	The role and experiences of fathers in family meals	407
2.2.	Putting into perspective French family mealtimes with Australian practices	409
2.3.	Commensality and its articulation with the making of the family and health	409
3.	Reflecting on the in-person observation of everyday family mealtimes	410
4.	Strengths, perspectives and implications	411
4.1.	Strengths: being accepted into families' home and recording the observations	411
4.2.	Perspectives and implications	412
Résumé de la thèse		416
1.	Introduction	416
1.1.	Naviguer autour de la table	416
1.2.	Une boîte noire cachée à la vue de tous	418

2. Problématique : dévoiler la mise en œuvre de la commensalité quotidienne, à la lumière de la vie familiale, des rapports de genre, de la position sociale et des origines culturelles	421
3. Aperçu de la méthodologie : observer les repas de famille	422
4. Caractéristiques des familles et présentation des rythmes de leur vie sociale	422
5. Les conditions inégales de production des repas de famille : pression et plaisir en cuisine	425
6. Aux frontières des repas de famille	430
7. L'équation sanitaire de la commensalité	435
8. Echanger à table : unir et maintenir une famille en bonne santé	439
9. Le repas convivial, un impératif maternel	440
10. Conclusion	444
List of figures	446
List of tables	448
Appendices	450
1. Appendix 1. Social class categorisation according to household composition and income in France	450
2. Appendix 2. SEIFA categorisation of Tea Tree Gully: a middle class neighbourhood in Adelaide	451
3. Appendix 3. Recruitment flyers for households from Lyon	452
4. Appendix 4. Recruitment flyers for households from Adelaide	453
5. Appendix 5. The bias of a high participation burden: response to call for participation and loss of participants	454
6. Appendix 6. Blank information and consent forms for the participants from Lyon and Adelaide	455
7. Appendix 7. In-person visits during the COVID-19 pandemic	479
8. Appendix 8. Total amount and type of observations per household	480
9. Appendix 9. Duration of each visit, video conference and family produced video	481
10. Appendix 10. Mobilisation of the materials throughout the manuscript	482
References	484
Table of contents	496