

Will we still eat together?: COVID, confinement and the 'gastro-politics' of commensality

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inspiring achievement

Unesco Chair Conference
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2021







We are now on top!

• Capital • City, Town

Traditional World Maps are drawn from the perspective of the first European explorers and cartographers – with the Northern Hemisphere at the top. We think it's time to break with tradition and show the world from the perspective of all those people living in the Southern Hemisphere. After all, there is no ancient geographical feature saying "This way up".

Abbreviations:
B. HERZ. - BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
KO. - KOSOVO
UE. - LIECHTENSTEIN
LUX. - LUXEMBOURG
MAC. - MACEDONIA
MONT. - MONTENEGRO
RUS. FED. - RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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NORTHERN TERRITORY

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

QUEENSLAND

GREAT AUSTRALIAN DESERT

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

NEW SOUTH WALES

VICTORIA

Mt. Woodroffe

Oodnadatta

Coober Pedy

Lake Eyre

Leigh Creek

Woomera

St. Mary Peak

Ceduna

Whyalla

Port Augusta

Port Pirie

Wallaroo

Port Lincoln

ADELAIDE

Cape Catastrophe

Murray Bridge

Great Australian Bight

Murray

Indian Ocean

Kangaroo I.

Mount Gambier

Strong Indigenous cultures











COVID

confinement - lockdown

commensality

gastro-politics



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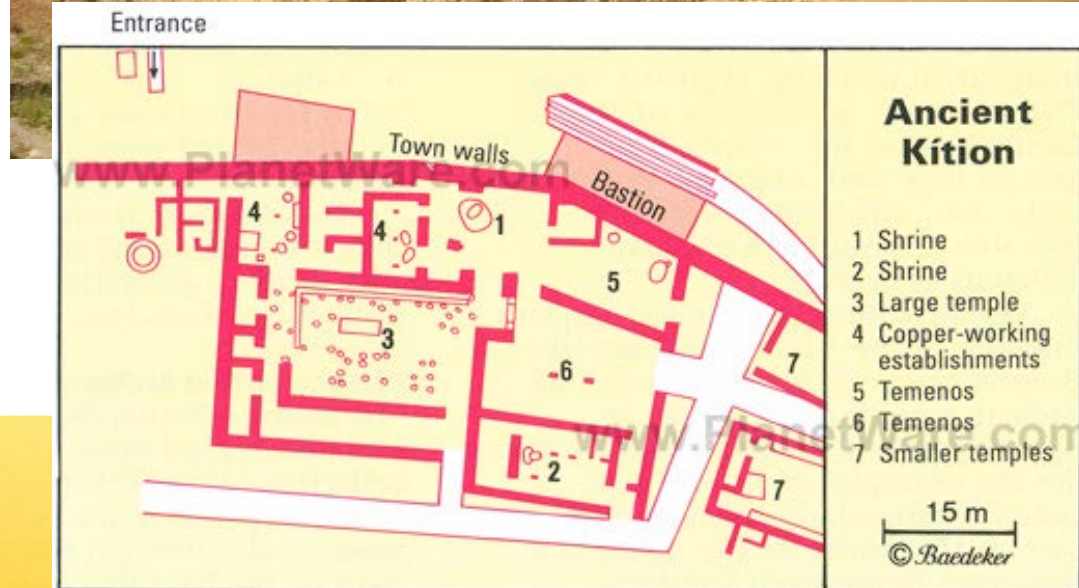
Cyprus







Kition, Larnaca



Papua New Guinea



Papua New Guinea



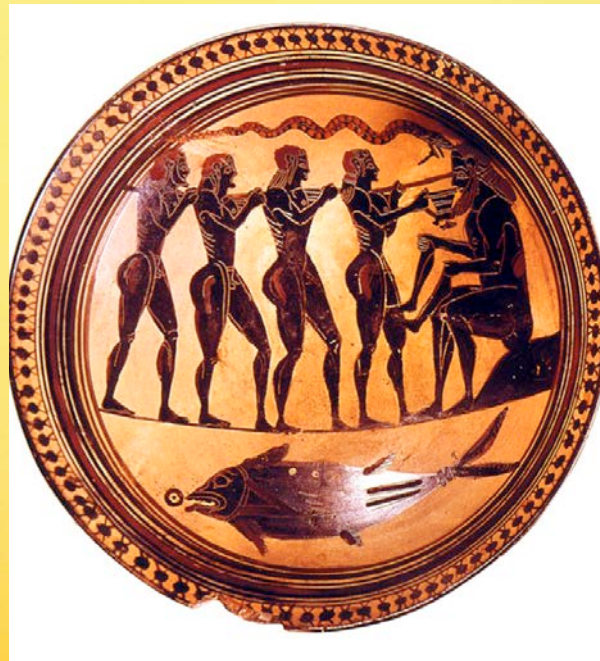




The dietetics

Foucault: History of Sexuality vol 2 and 3

diète - mode of everyday living



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The dietetics

- Moderation (sophrosyne)
- Self-mastery (enkrateia)
- Training and diligence (askesis)

Especially in relation to natural appetites
(eating, drinking, sex)

Food as central concern

As far as thinking [in ancient Greece] on *dietetics* was concerned, the question of foods – considered in terms of their peculiar qualities, and of the circumstances in which they were consumed (whether the seasons of the year or the particular state of the organism) – was a good deal more important than sexual activity.

(Foucault, 1992b: 114)

Christianity and commensality (1)

- Bonds, friendships and companionships in early Christianity were founded on sharing food.
- The word 'company' derives from *communis* meaning 'with' and *panis*, meaning 'bread'.
- Christian communion, therefore, begins with sharing, or breaking, bread (Barbotin, 1975: 329).

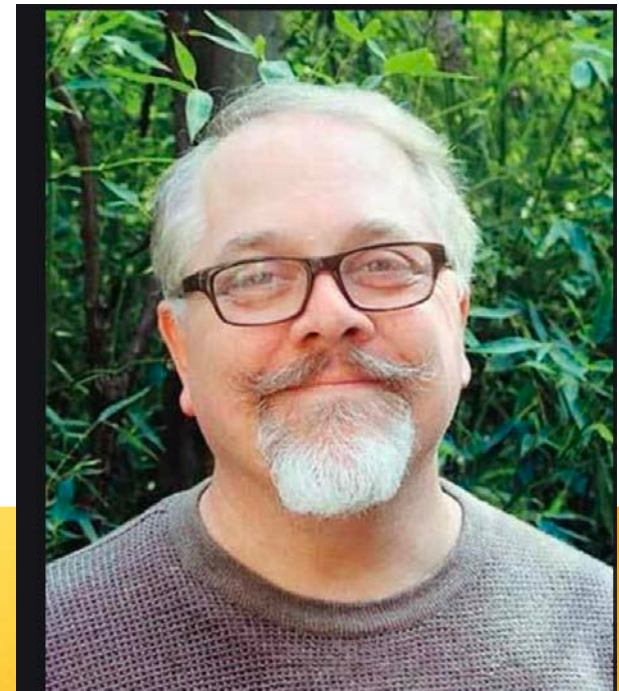
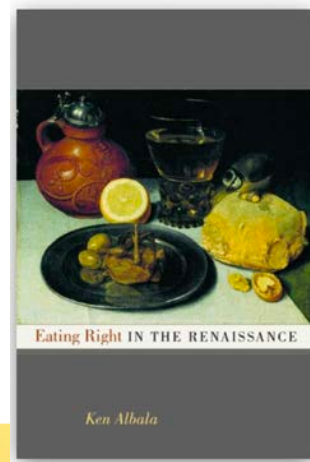
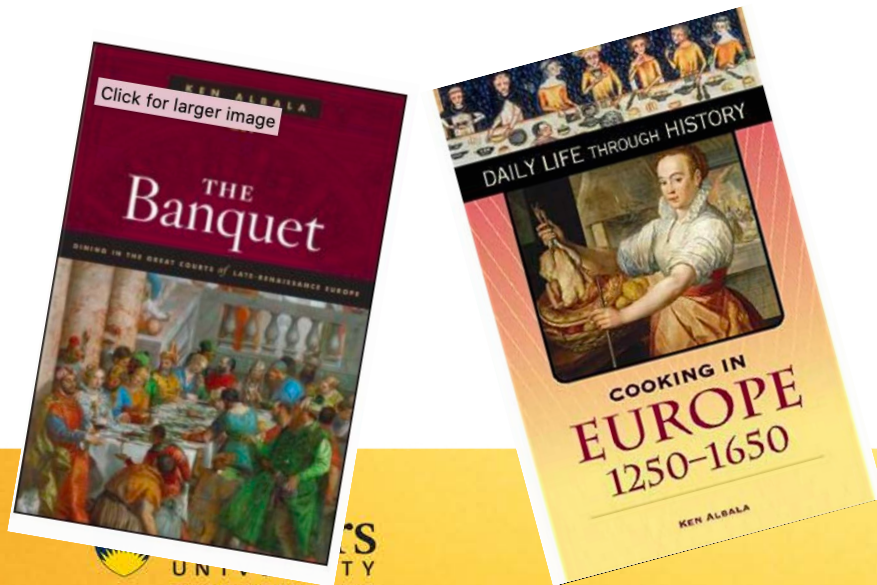
Christianity and commensality (2)

- St Paul: "Those who share the meal are companions of Christ" (1 Corinthians 10: 16-22),

Food and commensality in early Modern Europe

Professor Ken Albala

- Food in early European history
- Cooking in Europe
- The role of the banquet
- Food and the renaissance



Sharing and bonding









The veneration of domestic commensality

- The Adelaide family food study – 25 year follow up
- 40 families 1994
- 22 families in 2020

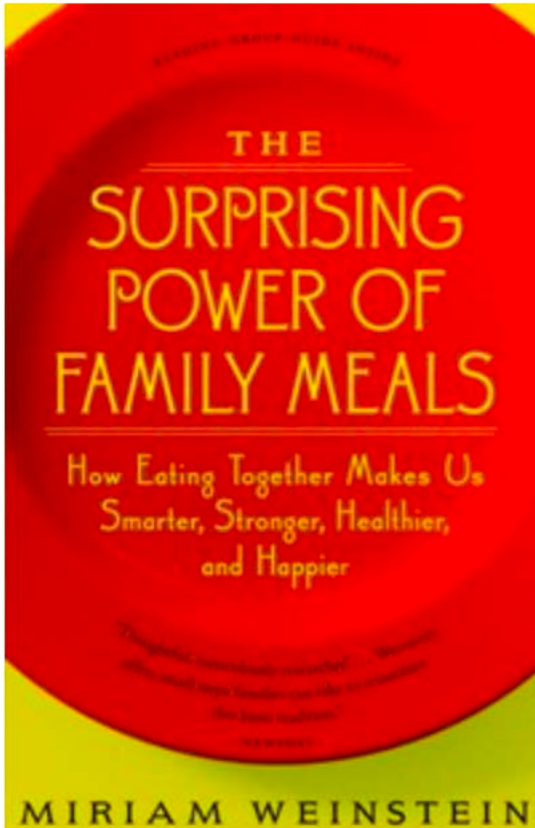
Families 1994

- Interviewer: Which of meals do you share as a family?
- Gemma: Every meal really, we sit down every meal. Breakfast, lunch and tea (Family F3)
- Gaye: 5 or 6 meals a week we would come into the main room for a proper sit-down meal (Family B2)
- Frances: I think probably because we still do hold the view that having a meal is a family event and that you know you need to be paying attention to family members, not watching TV (Family B6)

Families 2020

- Jennifer: Yeah, these things are very important and I think [family meals] are very pivotal, and also for learning how to be part of our family.
- Anastasia: I think [the family meal] is very important, yeah, it just, I suppose, it creates a bond and memories. (Family 20F1)
- Melanie: So we might not come to the table happy and we might not leave the table happy, but I think it's nice to make [the family meal] a priority no matter where our head is at. (Family 20F6)

The veneration of commensality: the benefits of family meals



BENEFITS OF FAMILY DINNERS

Our belief in the “magic” of family dinners is grounded in research on the physical, mental and emotional benefits of regular family meals. Some of the specific benefits of family dinners are:

- Better academic performance
- Higher self-esteem
- Greater sense of resilience
- Lower risk of substance abuse
- Lower risk of teen pregnancy
- Lower risk of depression
- Lower likelihood of developing eating disorders
- Lower rates of obesity

The demise in cooking

- De-skilling – cooking skills decline
- De-skilling - retreat from the kitchen
- Deskillling - greater reliance on pre-prepared food
- De-skilling - increase in take-out meal



On commensality...

- The end result of a process requiring:
- planning,
- procurement,
- prioritising,
- preparation, and
- putting into practice
- putting food on the table



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Foodwork
Everyday

De-skilling or Re-skilling?

In Australia:

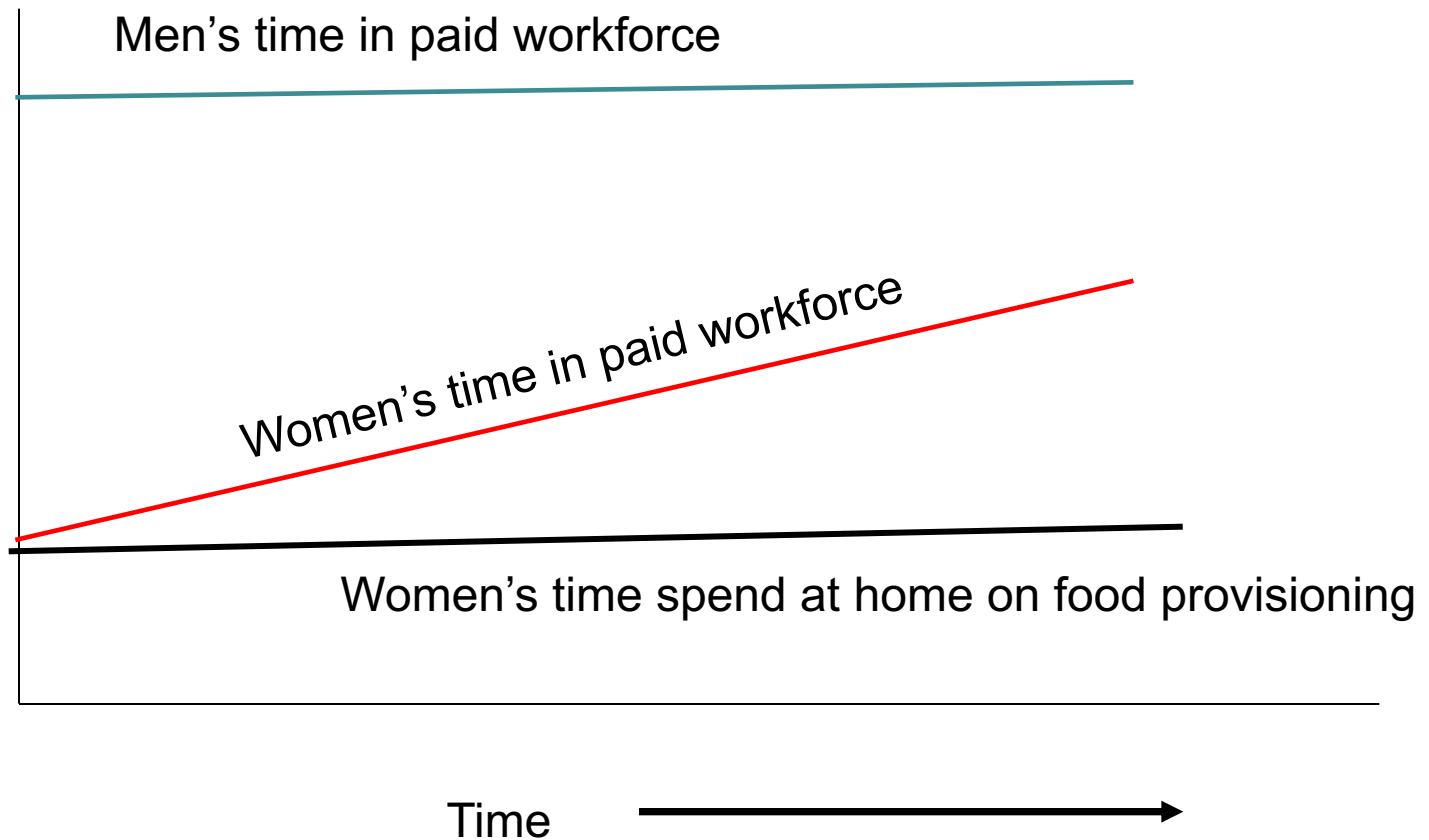
- Women's participation in the (paid) workforce has continued to rise from 50% in 1980, to 70% in 2020
- Women's time on household tasks (e.g., food provisioning) remains same from 1980 to 2016

(OECD 2017)

Mean working time men and women and earning arrangements

2015-2017 Mean working time of males and females in couples, by earnings arrangement (hours per week)						
	<i>Male-breadwinner</i>		<i>Approximately-even</i>		<i>Female-breadwinner</i>	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Housework	15.3	29.4	16.1	23.1	19.1	24.1

Time dedicated to unpaid work (including food provisioning) by males and females in couples with different relative earnings. Adapted from The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey, 2018, by Applied Economic & Social Research, University of Melbourne.



Feeding the Australian family: challenges for mothers, nutrition and equity *

*Mehta, Booth, Coveney, Strazdins,
Health Promotion International, 2019

Feeding the Australian family: challenges for mothers, nutrition and equity *

- Interviews with mothers in the paid workforce and major responsibility for household food provision
- How is time managed?
- How are family food priorities considered?
- How are family obligations addressed?

*Mehta, Booth, Coveney, Strazdins, Health Promotion International 2019

Summary of findings

- Shared family meals achieved, but at the expense of...
 - Time poverty
 - Mental load
 - Frustration and exasperation
 - Self-recrimination and guilt
 - Gastro-politics

Findings – guilt and frustration

- I think the hardest part of the food preparation is just thinking of what to cook; that's thinking about something that everybody will eat, that's the nightmare (p9)
- You still feel guilty that you don't do it enough, that you don't live up to that like everybody sitting down together with lovely meals (p20)

Findings - conflict

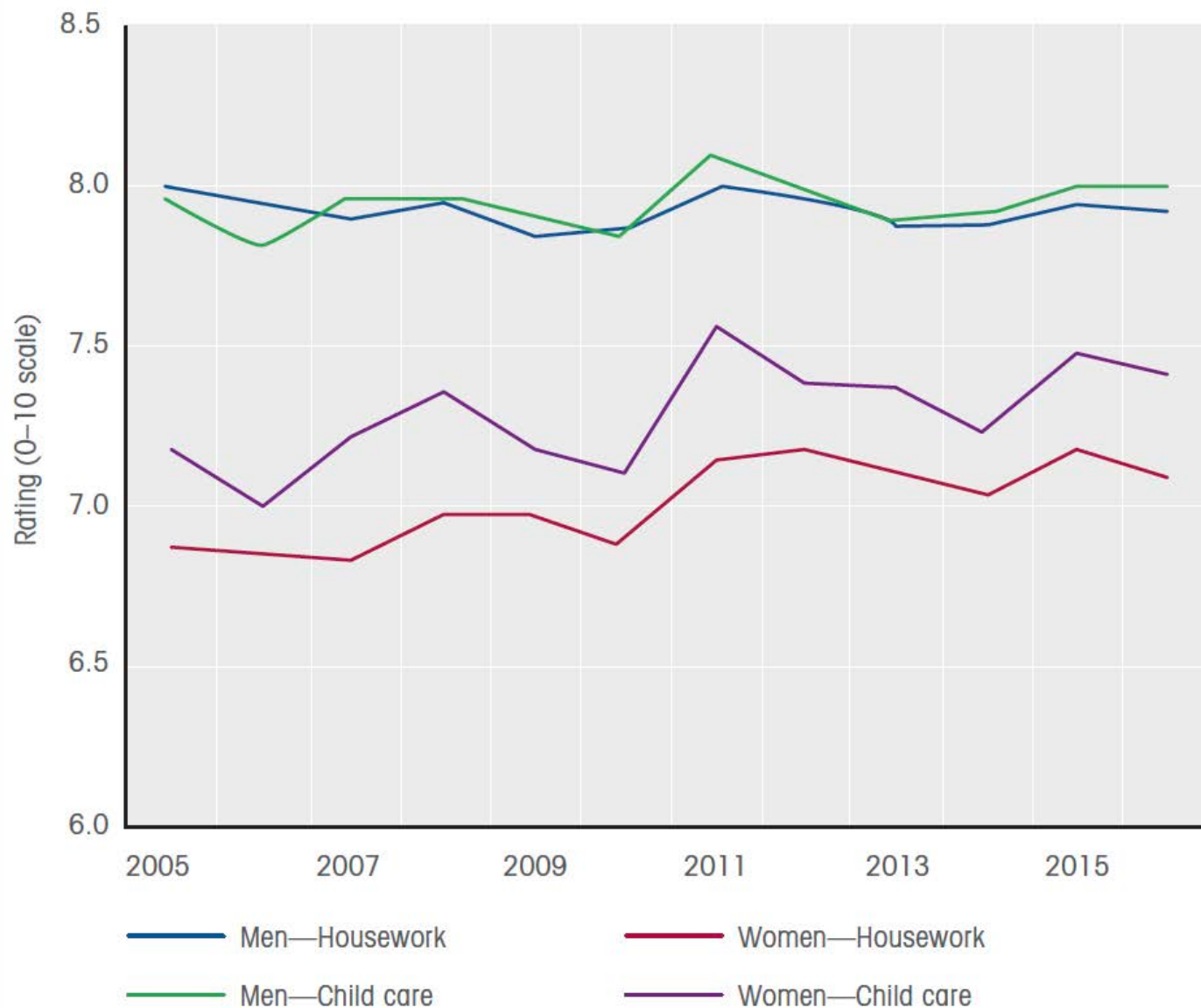
- Oh, I'm angry at my husband because he, like, when I was working full time and he was actually working part time, he didn't take much of responsibility at home. . . I'm doing everything around the house, and he's telling me that I can be more efficient. . .I'm like it's just not fair.(p22)

Conflict

- “...he [father] can cook but it just doesn’t happen that often...it’s easier to just not have that expectation because I just found it’s not a priority for him” (Mother 4)
- “...unless we were going to have big arguments all the time, no, I think it’s probably better if [...] I just get on with doing it” (Mother 3)

Figure 5.4: Mean satisfaction with the division of household and child-care tasks—Partnered persons aged 15 to 64

HILDA study
2018



COVID and confinement

- Total lockdown in most Australian cities
- But more in Melbourne
 - first wave = 50 days,
 - second wave = 120 days

Central Melbourne
Flinders Street Station

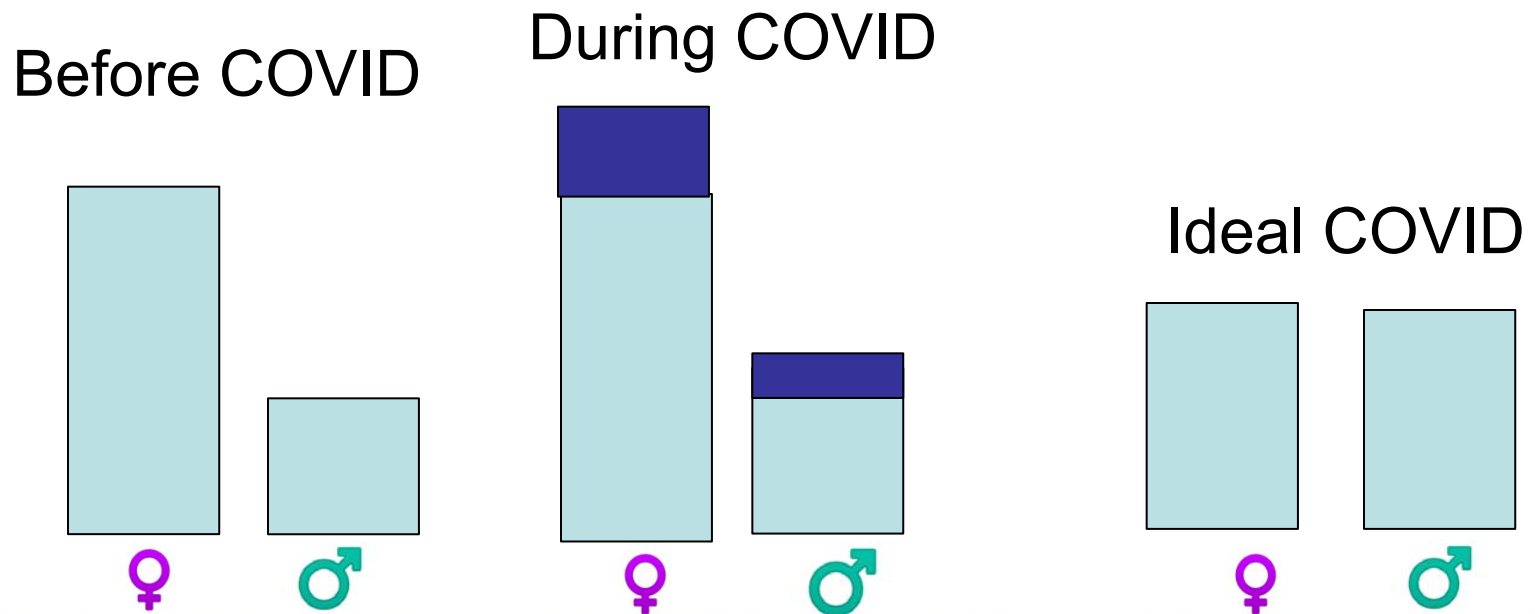


Confinement for families with children

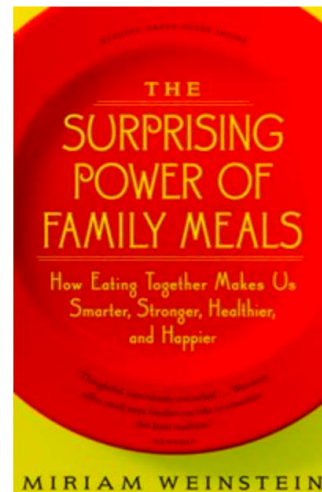
- Home confinement
- Home schooling
- Paid work priorities
- Unpaid work priorities (eg housework)
- Extended family obligations

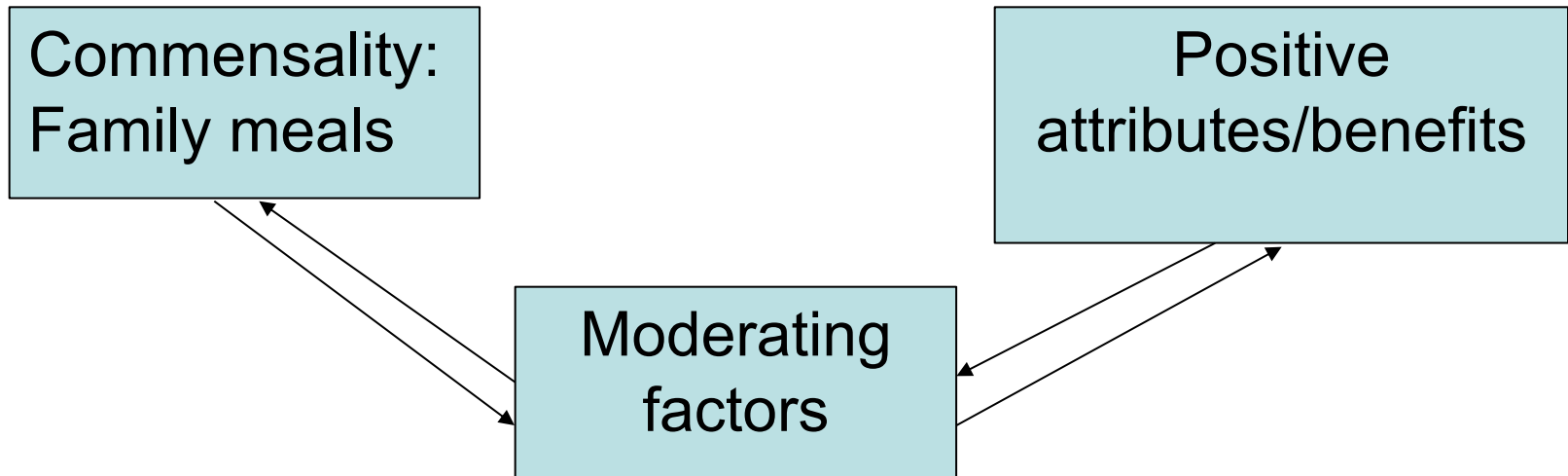


- Housework (including food provisioning) increased by 1 hour 10mins every day for women
- Less than half an hour for men



Veneration of the family meal





Do family meals deliver?

Family Meals and Health

Numerous studies demonstrate positive associations between family meals and health:

 Dietary and weight benefits (Fulkerson et al. 2014, Dallacker et al. 2017)

 Reduced risk-taking behaviours (Goldfarb et al. 2015)

 Fewer disordered eating behaviours (Harrison et al. 2015)

 Improvements in wellbeing (Goldfarb et al. 2015)

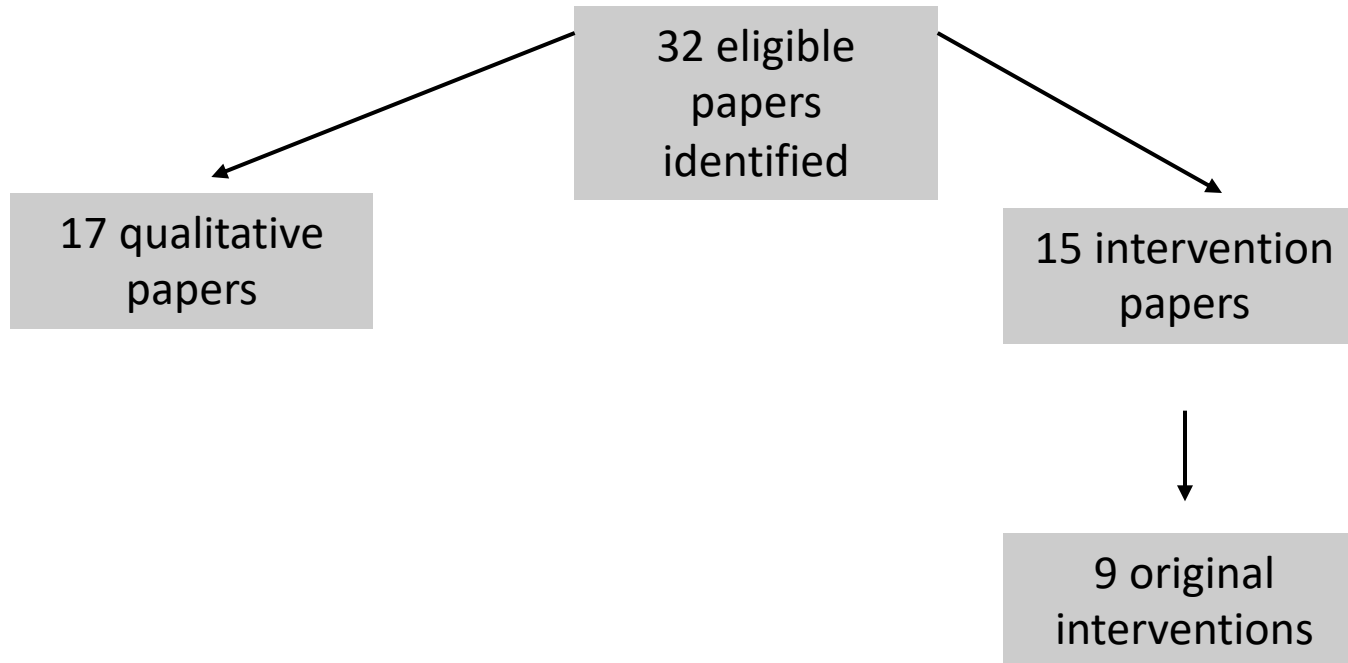
Largely observational research ≠ cannot determine causality

Systematic Literature Review

To determine the health and wellbeing
benefits families can expect to gain from
participating in family meals

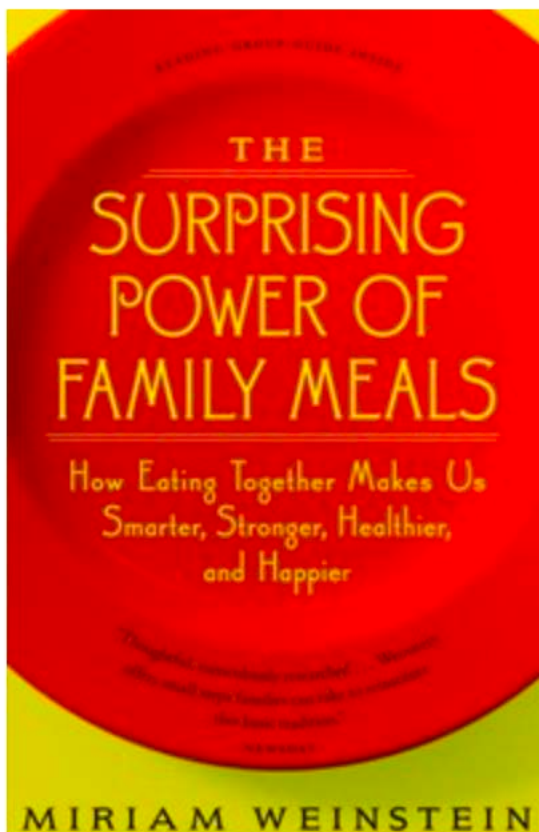
Middleton, G. Coveney, J. Patterson, K. Golley, R, Le Moal, F. What can families gain from the family meal? A mixed-papers systematic review. *Appetite*. October, 2020.

Findings



Only two of the nine interventions reported significant difference between intervention and control group

The benefits of family meals



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Everyday

PRESSURE COOKER

Why Home Cooking Won't
Solve Our Problems and
What We Can Do About It

SARAH BOWEN
JOSLYN BRENTON
SINIKKA ELLIOTT



Commensality
under threat?

Will we still eat together?

- Do commensal family meals deliver, and what are the costs?
- Are we ready to talk about post-commensal family meals? What would they look like?
- What alternatives may promote positive attributes?
- Are we interested in constructing family meals, or family meal times?
- Conviviality vs commensality?

<https://www.foodculturehealth.com/>

