



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Changing Families,
Changing Food.

Photograph: Frank Chen

My mother, myself

Principal Investigators

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Summary

This project explores the relationships between perceptions of family history in the context of lay understandings of 'new' genetics and the ways in which women manage their eating and identities in relation to both 'expert' advice and personal body image over the transition to motherhood. Motherhood is a pivotal time in a woman's life course (each time it happens) with implications for her identity, quality of life and

mental well-being, as well as rapid physical and bodily change. In this research we examine the increased 'medicalisation' of pregnancy and childbirth and changing cultural perceptions of pregnancy, diet, body image and motherhood through comparison of recent mothers with those of previous generations (possibly their own mothers).

Royal Holloway
University of London

The Leverhulme Trust

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Research questions

- How do women perceive the changes in their bodies both during and after pregnancy and how are these perceptions linked to cultural expectations of beauty and motherhood? Have such expectations changed over time?
- Do women feel that they have control over their eventual body size and shape following childbirth or is this linked to a sense of 'fatalism' based upon (mis)understandings of 'new genetics' and ideas of family inheritance?
- Has pregnancy become more 'medicalised' during the course of the twentieth century? How is this linked to the increased medicalisation of women's bodies and the types of 'treatment' and care given?
- What advice and medical care is given to women in the pre and post-natal periods. How has this advice changed over time and how does it affect women's 'lifestyle' and eating habits?
- Where do women gain advice about pregnancy/child rearing, particularly in relation to food (guidebooks, medical professionals, family and friends) and how do they make decisions about the validity of this advice?



Research design

The research will take the form of an email survey of approximately 100 new or recent mothers and 100 women of earlier generations (possibly their own mothers) relating to issues of diet, eating, pregnancy and healthcare. This will be followed by approximately 40 in-depth qualitative interviews (20 women of each generation) to further explore issues relating to family history and body size and perception.

The 'Changing Families, Changing Food' Programme

'*Changing Families, Changing Food*' is a major inter-disciplinary research programme, funded by The Leverhulme Trust. The Programme began in October 2005 and will run for just over three years.

It is organised into three research strands on: pregnancy and motherhood; childhood and family life; and family and community. Focusing on contemporary Britain, the Programme also includes some international comparisons and a 'time-line' to establish the quantitative and qualitative nature of social changes affecting families and food over the last century.

The Programme is coordinated by Peter Jackson (Director of Research for the Social Sciences at Sheffield University) and is based in ICoSS (the University's new social science facility). The Programme involves colleagues from Clinical Sciences, East Asian Studies, Geography, Nursing and Midwifery, the School for Health and Related Research and Sociological Studies at Sheffield in collaboration with colleagues in Health and Social Care at Royal Holloway, University of London.

The research takes food as the lens through which to observe recent changes in family life and examines how changes in family form have affected patterns of food consumption. The Programme's findings are expected to contribute to current debates about obesity and nutrition, media and consumption, food choice and deprivation.

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