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## The sociocultural aspects of takeaway food consumption in a low-socio-economic ward in Manchester: A grounded theory study.

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**Title:** The sociocultural aspects of takeaway food consumption in a low-socio-economic ward in Manchester: A grounded theory study.

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**Author contribution:** JB collected the data, performed the qualitative analysis and wrote the first draft of the paper, RG designed the methods, secured the funding and directed the qualitative research, SP contributed to the analysis of qualitative data and edited drafts and ID contributed to interpretation of the data.

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27 architecture

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acceptability. Young people were particularly vulnerable to peer influence, especially from establishments targeted towards this demographic.

## Conclusion

Findings here can inform targeted effective approaches. Although planning restrictions will reduce access to further establishments, working with takeaway establishments to implement covert and overt strategies may enable consumers to maintain the important convenient and social role that these foods provide.

## **Article summary**

Research into the socio-economic decisions around takeaway meal consumption is particularly scant. Previous research has focussed quantitatively on the nutritional content of takeaway meals, frequency of their consumption and metabolic risk. There is also increasing interest in the research literature on the food environment, access to takeaway meals and its relationship to health. Government guidance has been issued on the licensing of takeaway establishments however, policy that deals just with access to takeaways only deals with part of the problem.

## *Strengths and limitations of this study*

- The methods used here are ideally placed to understand the complexity of the interaction between food choices, geographical environment and socio-economic factors
- Very little is known about peoples' experiences of take away foods. Research in this area is essential to inform appropriate behaviour change interventions that address a growing need for takeaway meals.

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- The findings are specific to the people involved in this study however the use of grounded theory allows themes to transcend beyond basic description and to resonate with other similar situations and locations

## 80 **Introduction**

81 The UK has a well-recognised childhood and adult obesity epidemic, particularly  
82 amplified in lower socio-economic groups<sup>1</sup>. Recent research has investigated  
83 significant changes in modern UK society; the physical environment, sociocultural  
84 aspects of eating, gender roles, values/norms and economic factors having all been  
85 implicated in directing food choice<sup>1,2</sup>.

86 Takeaway and fast foods now make up approximately 21% of the UK diet<sup>3</sup>. A  
87 combination of a poor nutritional profile and frequent consumption is creating  
88 detrimental health outcomes for consumers<sup>4-6</sup>. Manchester has been ranked 8th of  
89 325 local authorities in England for the highest quantity of takeaway outlets per  
90 100,000 people by local authority, and contains a significantly higher number of  
91 outlets than the England average<sup>7</sup>. In 2012, a National Planning Policy Framework  
92 suggested that local authorities could use planning permission powers to control the  
93 proliferation of takeaway outlets<sup>8</sup>. Manchester City Council have therefore proposed  
94 to deny planning permission for new outlets in particular areas which are already  
95 densely concentrated with outlets or near to schools, as well as control opening  
96 hours<sup>7</sup>.

97 Altering the physical takeaway food environment is one method of taking control of  
98 the physical environmental influences on food choice. However, the wider  
99 sociocultural factors that affect individual choice to consume takeaway foods as well  
100 as particular local sensitivities are poorly understood. Consideration of these issues  
101 is essential for the implementation of effective, multi-dimensional intervention  
102 strategies. Therefore the aim of this research was to explore the sociocultural  
103 experiences of takeaway food consumers in Rusholme, Manchester, to gain a

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104 deeper understanding of the sociocultural factors involved in takeaway food  
105 consumption. This is part of a mixed methods research project that also aimed to  
106 geographically map the distribution of takeaways with the sociodemographic  
107 characteristics of the area.

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## 108 **Methods**

109 A qualitative perspective was used to explore the sociocultural experiences  
110 associated with takeaway food consumption, to investigate influences on takeaway  
111 food choice, along with the processes undertaken to enact such choices<sup>9</sup>. For a full  
112 description of the study area, definition and identification of takeaway outlets and  
113 population refer to [Patel et al jointly submitted with this manuscript].

114 A constructivist grounded theory (GT) approach was undertaken in order to inform  
115 theory in this less widely researched area. Constructivist GT emphasises  
116 participant's "views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions and ideologies"<sup>10</sup>, which  
117 are known to be involved in food choice<sup>11</sup>.

## 118 **Ethics and confidentiality**

119 The study obtained ethical approval from Manchester Metropolitan University,  
120 Hollings Department. All participant names used in this report are pseudonyms in  
121 order to protect participants' anonymity. Participants were fully informed of the  
122 purpose and nature of the study before consenting.

## 123 *Patient and Public Involvement*

124 Patients or the public were not involved in this aspect of the study however this is  
125 part of a mixed methods study that did involve participants. Ethical approval and  
126 procedures were followed in relation to both aspects of the investigation. The  
127 experiences and understanding of takeaway consumption put the public central to  
128 this research and their contribution acknowledged.

## 130 **Sampling and recruitment**

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131 Participants were included if they met the following criteria; aged 18 – 65, consumed  
132 takeaway foods at least once per month, and resided in the study area. Participants  
133 were recruited in two ways, either through a Facebook page (Facebook Inc.,  
134 California, USA) or via community centre information boards.

135 Recruitment was performed iteratively as per grounded theory, initially using the  
136 above selection criteria. Once a number of interviews had taken place, they were  
137 transcribed by hand verbatim and the data analysed (JB). A theoretical sampling  
138 strategy was employed based upon missing information within nascent categories in  
139 order to explore those categories in further depth and to narrow focus<sup>12</sup>.

140 A subjective judgement of theoretical saturation was employed. Data collection  
141 ceased when no new properties were emerging from interviews and were remaining  
142 within the scope of the research aims<sup>13</sup>.

143 **Data Collection**

144 *Interviews*

145 One-to-one semi-structured interviews were performed within the selected study  
146 area between June and October 2016 (JB). A semi-structured interview guide was  
147 used and treated as a flexible tool to follow up leads and develop theoretical  
148 categories<sup>12-14</sup>. The interview recordings were made anonymous by removing  
149 identifying details. Each participant was interviewed once, which was subsequently  
150 transcribed.

151 *Data sorting and analysis*

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3 152 Data sorting and analysis used the constant comparative method moving between  
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5 153 the four major processes of coding, memoing, developing categories, and theoretical  
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7 154 sorting<sup>12, 14, 15</sup>.

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10 155 Codes were derived from the data. Two-step coding was used; initial coding and  
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12 156 focused coding. The initial codes were applied to fragments of data, incident by  
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14 157 incident. A code was applied for more or less every sentence. A sample of the  
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16 158 focussed codes (approx. 50%) were cross-checked for transparency amongst the  
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18 159 research team to determine whether the codes could be interpreted in the same  
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20 160 way<sup>16</sup>.

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23 161 The final process was theoretical sorting where theoretical links were transferred into  
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25 162 NVivo 10 (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia). This involved describing  
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27 163 theoretical links between conceptual categories such as their relationships and  
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29 164 hierarchical order (subordinate then superordinate). These links had been identified  
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31 165 during the coding and memoing processes where participants had explicitly or  
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33 166 implicitly alluded to them. When a particular order made analytic sense and still  
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35 167 remained grounded within the data, a theoretical diagram was made (Figure 1)<sup>12,15,</sup>  
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38 168 <sup>17, 18</sup>.

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169     **Results and Discussion**

170     Thirteen participants were interviewed. Interviews were carried out in community  
171     centres (n=3), playgroups (n=5), and on a university campus (n=5). Participants  
172     mean age was 38 years (SD = 12.97) and 69% of participants were female (n=9).  
173     Six participants had children (under 18 years old) and 4 participants did not have  
174     children. All participants had been educated to secondary school level with 8 either  
175     studying for or attained an undergraduate degree or higher. With respect to  
176     consumption, 38% (n=5) participants ate takeaway food every month, 57% (n=7) 1-2  
177     times per week, and 1 participant 3-6 times per week.

178     Three superordinate themes were identified and labelled as follows: Resources,  
179     Social Factors and Personal Factors, each include subordinate themes (Figure 1).  
180     The findings within each superordinate categories are presented together with  
181     discussion drawing from empirical research in the field and theoretical perspectives,  
182     together with the implications of the findings from this study.

## 184 Resources

### 185 *Lacking or saving time*

186 The resource category included participants' perceived and not actual time  
187 availability that influenced their choice to purchase takeaway food. Takeaways were  
188 used as a way of making more time for both essential and non-essential activities.  
189 Some participants used takeaway food as a form of weekend respite from their usual  
190 weekday duties. These factors would suggest that there is a demand for quick, hot  
191 meals that are satisfying and filling.

192 This category is exemplified by Sonia, a 56-year-old housewife who cooks traditional  
193 Indian food every day. Sonia expressed her pleasure with the break from cooking  
194 and cleaning that her Saturday night takeaway provides:

195 It's a lot of work at home from scratch . . . First there's the cooking it, then  
196 there's the cleaning, then there's the smell in the house. There you've just  
197 ordered it and you've satisfied what you wanted to eat without the mess! So,  
198 I'm thinking takeaways are God-sends really. We even use plastic plates for  
199 convenience because a takeaway is just chuck everything in the bin, so  
200 there's nothing to wash. And that's great. You don't know how good that feels.  
201 When you just eat and just chuck everything in the bin and the kitchen's still  
202 tidy.

203 Participants also cited that they purchased takeaway food when they felt it was too  
204 late to cook. A female participant with no children spoke about the lack of regular or  
205 appropriate length breaks during her shift work, describing it as too late to cook after  
206 a shift:

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207 We rarely get breaks, so for a 6-hour shift, we get a 10-minute break and you  
208 can't really eat much then, so I don't usually end up eating at work at all. So then  
209 right after that shift, obviously you're hungry and you've just missed a meal so  
210 that's why I end up going to get takeaway . . . It's too late even bother to cook  
211 something.

212 This is also highlighted by Mason's report on shift workers<sup>19</sup> in that fast food outlets  
213 tend to be one of the few outlets open late at night and therefore shift workers may  
214 feel that this is the only option available to them. This may highlight a potential need  
215 for healthier options to be available late at night. Similarly, another major theme was  
216 the need for a meal after a night out with friends. One participant stated that she  
217 would purchase healthier takeaway foods if they were available late at night.  
218 Therefore, late at night was a key time for consumption where availability of and  
219 exposure to takeaway foods is highest and access to healthier, pre-prepared meals  
220 is restricted with the exception of 24-hour supermarkets which have led the way in  
221 24 hour retail<sup>20</sup>.

222 *Takeaway availability*

223 Participants discussed their exposure to takeaway outlets on travel routes and stated  
224 that they consumed more takeaway food as a result. Jack exemplified what many of  
225 the participants had spoken about during interview:

226 "there are just so many just competing with each other that they're just  
227 saturated . . . There's no diversity of any kind of health . . . Plus, you have 24-  
228 hour pizzas now".

229 The geographical environment in which individuals exist is proposed to play a pivotal  
230 role in shaping food choices, as in socioecological theory<sup>21-22</sup>. Recent attention has

specifically been given to the increased availability of takeaway and fast food outlets due to increasing evidence on proximity to takeaway establishments and the consumption of them<sup>23-25</sup>. Burgoine et al.<sup>21</sup> found that when including both home areas and commuting routes, exposure to outlets was positively associated with takeaway consumption, BMI and obesity risk, with evidence of a dose-response effect.

### *Financial resources*

When asked about financial resources and buying takeaway food, most participants referred to takeaway foods as expensive. The unprompted topic of getting 'value for money' emerged frequently, however, the participant's definitions of 'value for money' were diverse. This appeared to be dependent upon two interrelated factors: actual financial resource availability and values. The participants that expressed financial hardship tended to associate value for money with the quantity of food, whereas the participants that did not express financial hardship tended to associate value for money with the quality of food. As explored in the empirical work of Bourdieu<sup>26-27</sup>, basic needs are required to be fulfilled (quantity of food) before additional needs can be considered (quality of food).

### *Cooking skills vs variety*

Lastly in this category, nutritional knowledge and cooking skills were not absent in this group of participants, but the participants desired a variety of food that they could not or did not want to make at home, causing them to seek takeaway foods. This desire for a variety of foods outside the home is becoming increasingly common

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3 255 in place of home cooking either due to consumers inability to prepare unusual  
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5 256 ingredients or as a marker of social distinction<sup>28-29</sup>. Anthony explained that he often  
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7 257 cooks for himself and his wife, he comments;

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10 258 “I think it’s the variety with a Chinese. It’s the fact that you can get duck and  
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12 259 things like that – stuff you just wouldn’t normally eat and the MSG probably.

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18 261 **Social Factors**

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20 262 *Bonding with others*

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23 263 Participants demonstrated how takeaway food support social relationships,  
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25 264 particularly suitable for hedonistic acts of sharing food and as a marker of social  
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27 265 belonging and intimacy.

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30 266 Emma, 26, consumes takeaway food as a way of bonding with an old friend.

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33 267 “It’s about bringing people together. That’s what it’s about isn’t it. That’s what  
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35 268 pizza does for me and Julia”. Emma continued. . . “in terms of people coming  
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37 269 together, it’s a lot easier for people to be like, come on, let’s just chuck a fiver  
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39 270 in and get a load of food and share it, as opposed to somebody having to give  
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41 271 up a lot of time to cook for a load of people . . . there’s a lot more preparation  
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43 272 involved”

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47 273 Specifically, the act of physically sharing a single takeaway meal is used as a way to  
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49 274 bond and affirm relationships, and the large portion sizes generally associated with  
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51 275 takeaway foods are well-suited for sharing. Warde & Martens<sup>30</sup> found that social  
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53 276 events (meeting friends, birthdays, anniversaries etc.) were perceived as markers of

277 social belonging and intimacy and marks boundaries of inclusion and exclusion,  
278 indicating social distance.

279 They were also an important part of youth night-time drinking culture, used to  
280 support social bonding and symbolise hedonism and group identity. Similar findings  
281 of shared fast food consumption habits were previously reported<sup>31</sup>. This could be due  
282 to the influence of the media, commercial promotion and the increasing centrality of  
283 unhealthy foods in social contexts<sup>32</sup>, thus integrating such eating habits into youth  
284 culture<sup>33</sup>.

### 285 *Being part of a community*

286 Having positive relationships with local takeaway outlet owners was important to a  
287 number of participants from a community perspective. Emma recently moved away  
288 from her family home to study. She expressed that when she visits home there are  
289 local takeaway outlets that she and her mother regularly visit, with whom they have  
290 formed friendly relationships as local customers and local traders:

291 “in your family environment, there’s always that Chinese that you go to. You  
292 have your chippy or your Indian or whatever it is. You’re usually on first name  
293 terms with the people that work there . . . She [Emma’s mother] knows them,  
294 she’s on first name terms with them. She gave them a Christmas present....  
295 Because it’s your local environment and it’s your community”.

296 It is not only the residents of a neighbourhood that form the local community, but  
297 also the businesses including takeaways. Farahani<sup>34</sup> argues that a sense of  
298 community can enhance feelings of belonging and community identity. Furthermore,  
299 the local commercial areas represent a place for social interaction<sup>35</sup>. The findings of

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300 the present study build on this to include the outlet owners/employees within the  
301 definition of 'community'.

302 *Routines and traditions*

303 For many of the participants, consuming takeaway food socially formed an integral  
304 part of their regular routines and traditions. Participants discussed a continuation of  
305 such traditions from their childhood, others had formed newer routines with their  
306 social network. People develop eating routines<sup>36</sup> and scripts<sup>37</sup> in order to simplify  
307 daily food decisions. Wansik and Sobal<sup>38</sup> suggest that over 200 food decisions are  
308 made every day, most of which are made subconsciously to save time and energy.  
309 For many of the participants, weekend takeaway consumption has become  
310 engrained into routines.

311 Gabby, 55, recounted that eating fish and chips is an old tradition of her  
312 working-class family dating back to her childhood: "Fish and chips on a Friday  
313 because that was what you did".

314 The use of takeaways described in these circumstances stand to symbolise  
315 collective social belonging, class identity and national identity and by defining it as a  
316 tradition legitimises the consumption<sup>39</sup>.

317 *Influential others*

318 The findings above suggest that there are numerous ways that others can influence  
319 the consumption of takeaway food; Passively, where food is eaten in participation  
320 with others (either for practicality or to socialise). Obligation, where food is provided  
321 and it is socially unacceptable to refuse it. Lastly, there is peer pressure, which can  
322 either cause increased or decreased consumption, dependent on the beliefs of  
323 others.

324 Gabby discussed the peer-pressure that her stepdaughter and goddaughter  
325 experience to be seen by others eating in specific takeaway outlets that were  
326 endorsed by celebrities:

327 "I've got a stepdaughter and goddaughter and because they're brought up in  
328 the area, there's a lot of peer pressure...Archie's it's called. It's like a burger  
329 and shake bar. My goddaughter is 13 and she wants to go there, she doesn't  
330 even like burgers but she wants to go and have a shake and be seen in this  
331 place".

332 The present research observed that participants with established relationships  
333 participated with others eating practices perhaps due to established social norms<sup>40</sup>,  
334 whilst younger participants were more susceptible to peer pressure. In their study of  
335 school children in the deprived London borough of Tower Hamlets, Caraher et al.<sup>41</sup>  
336 found that many children were purchasing takeaways before and after school, stating  
337 hunger, the takeaway outlet being better value for money and importantly, that their  
338 friends were using them as their reasons. A geographical analysis of the study area  
339 has also discovered the clustering of takeaways around schools educational  
340 establishments demonstrating easy access to them. This is an important time of life  
341 where behaviours surrounding food are particularly vulnerable to the influence of  
342 peers and the physical environment.

### 343 **Personal factors**

#### 344 *Values*

345 The participants thus far have described a variety of values that they consider when  
346 making food-decisions, such as saving time, cooking skills, social norms and health.  
347 Other values were also identified during analysis such as quality, variety and portion

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size, all issues which have been identified elsewhere in relation to convenience foods<sup>42-44</sup>.

*Controlling damage*

Where participants valued healthy eating, a method discussed by participants was that of 'damage-control'. If the participants or their children wanted takeaway food, damage-control meant still consuming takeaway food but selecting a healthier option.

Jack described how he attempts to control the healthiness and portion size of takeaway food, as well as the frequency he consumes it:

“If I have to go, I'll go for the least-worst option, you know. . . if I can go without it for two months it's a bonus.”

Amira indicated that she accepts eating takeaway food twice per week as she mostly prepares food from scratch.

“Because five, six days a week I'm cooking at home, then I don't mind having a cheat twice a week.”

Laura, 34, stated that as long as takeaway food was of better quality, then she did not feel as guilty about eating it:

“If the food is better quality it seems at least more healthy and then I don't have to feel guilty about eating it.”

In their qualitative study of 11 mothers in New Zealand, Bava et al. (2008) found that the women mentally rationalised provision of fast food to their children<sup>45</sup>. This “compensatory health belief” indicates that people are aware of the negative health effects of eating takeaway meals and are able to indulge without feelings of guilt.

What this does show, however, is that there is a concern for health among consumers, yet there is no desire to eliminate takeaway foods from their diet all together.

### *Strengths and limitations*

A number of strengths of this research should be recognised. Firstly, there is very little existing qualitative literature available to explore how people experience eating takeaway foods, in the UK or elsewhere limiting the comparison with others. Qualitative research is essential in order to understand culturally specific meanings and perceptions that individuals give to their situations<sup>9</sup>. Specifically, the use of grounded theory methodology to analyse the qualitative data collected in this study has allowed the analysis to remain 'grounded' within the data, yet it transcends descriptive accounts and instead accounts for social processes that are happening in the data<sup>12</sup>. The findings are therefore useful in other food choice contexts. However, these findings are specific to the people involved in this study, in particular participants who consumed takeaway food regularly were more likely to relay unsubstantiated opinion and speak for others as such the inherent limitations of qualitative research in wider impact is acknowledge although these findings will resonate with other similar situations and locations.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the research show that time that was once allocated for food preparation is now being replaced by other activities (work, family or recreation) and consequently there is an increasing demand for hot, bulky meals on-the-go, available at all times of the day. Large portion sizes and low price points were key factors for those on reduced incomes.

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395 Numerous other local sensitivities have been identified here to add to the evidence  
396 base. For example, takeaway meals fostering family bonds, providing respite for  
397 mothers, for a sense of familiarity and maintaining cultural norms in an ethnically  
398 diverse area of Manchester. These novel findings show that there is both a demand  
399 for and a lack of healthier options that satisfy all of these criteria. However, the role  
400 of takeaway food as a treat or hedonistic indulgence will mean that the provision of  
401 healthier alternatives will not be entirely effective in reducing their consumption.  
402 Public health strategies may need to be flexible and covert in order to address the  
403 cultural phenomena found in the present study.

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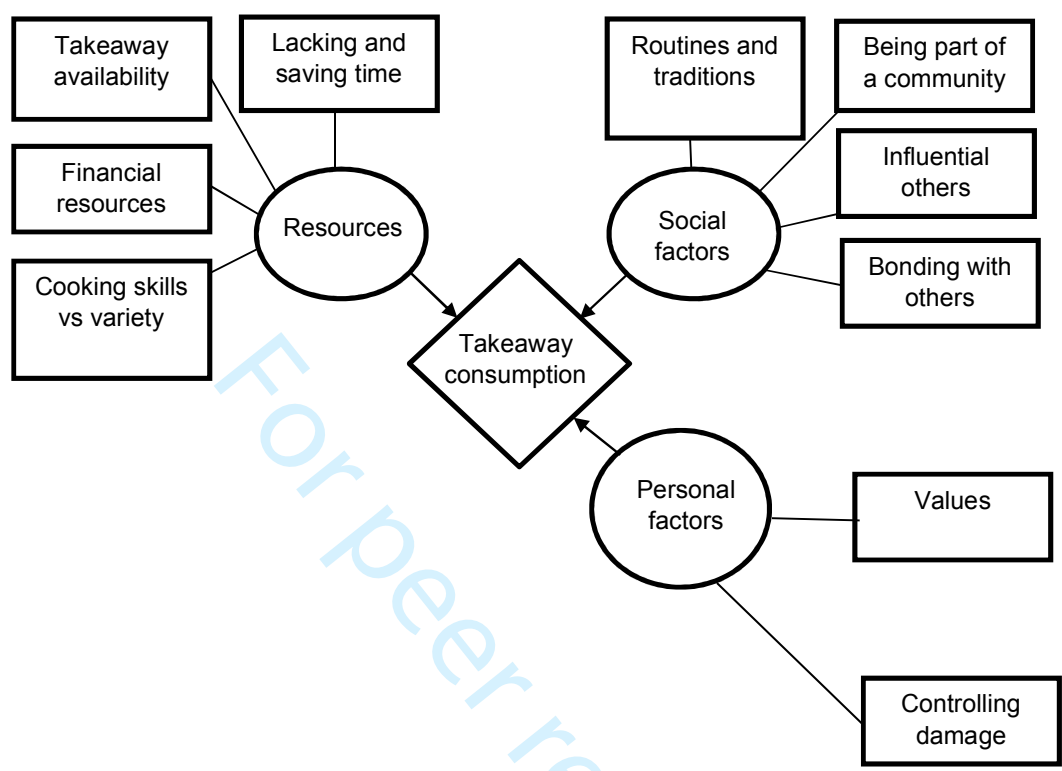
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**Figure.** Thematic map of takeaway meal consumption influences

# BMJ Open

## The sociocultural aspects of takeaway food consumption in a low-socio-economic ward in Manchester: A grounded theory study.

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**Title:** The sociocultural aspects of takeaway food consumption in a low-socio-economic ward in Manchester: A grounded theory study.

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**Author contribution:** JB collected the data, performed the qualitative analysis and wrote the first draft of the paper, RG designed the methods, secured the funding and directed the qualitative research, SP contributed to the analysis of qualitative data and edited drafts and ID contributed to interpretation of the data.

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in the paper are that of the authors and not of any institution or funding body

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24 **Number of figures and tables:** Tables 0, figures 1

25 **Abbreviation list:** Grounded Theory (GT)

26 **Keywords:** qualitative research, food choice, takeaway outlets, environment, choice  
27 architecture

For peer review only

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28     **Abstract**

29     Objectives

30     Takeaway foods form a growing proportion of the UK diet. This consumption is link  
31     with poor health outcomes due to their adverse nutritional profile. However, there is  
32     little research regarding the sociocultural context surrounding the consumption of  
33     takeaway meals. This research aimed to explore the sociocultural factors that  
34     influence the consumption of takeaway foods.

35     Design

36     The study employed constructivist grounded theory (GT) methodology. Data were  
37     collected using one-to-one semi-structured interviews from an inner-city area of  
38     Manchester (Rusholme). Data sorting and analysis was implemented using the GT  
39     constant comparative method.

40     Setting

41     Rusholme, Manchester, UK

42     Participants

43     Adult participants (aged 18 to 65 years) consuming take away meals at least  
44     once/month were recruited using social media and community settings.

45     Results

46     Thirteen participants were interviewed (female 69%, mean age=38 years). Three  
47     superordinate themes were derived from the data: Social Factors, Personal Factors  
48     and Resources. Social factors included the influence of routines and traditions,  
49     influential others and a sense of community in the bonding and affirming of  
50     relationships. Personal factors explored the subordinate themes of controlling  
51     damage and values relating to food choice. The third theme resources included time,  
52     availability, cost and quality.

## 53 Conclusion

54 This study shows the sociocultural influences on food choice decisions are complex  
55 and may go beyond access and availability. Any policy change to limit takeaway  
56 consumption should acknowledge these vital processes in food choice to inform  
57 targeted effective approaches.

## 58 59 **Strengths and limitations of this study**

- 60 • The methods used here are ideally placed to understand the complexity of the  
61 interaction between food choices, geographical environment and socio-economic  
62 factors
- 63 • Very little is known about peoples' experiences of take away foods. Research in  
64 this area is essential to inform appropriate behaviour change interventions that  
65 address a growing need for takeaway meals.
- 66 • The findings are specific to the people involved in this study however the use of  
67 grounded theory allows themes to transcend beyond basic description and to  
68 resonate with other similar situations and locations

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70     **Introduction**

71     The UK has a well-recognised childhood and adult obesity epidemic, amplified in  
72     lower socio-economic groups<sup>(1)</sup>. Of particular concern is the availability and access  
73     to takeaway meals which are known to contain an adverse nutritional profile <sup>(2, 3)</sup>.  
74     Within disadvantaged areas they have been linked with increased consumption <sup>(4)</sup>  
75     and a rise in obesity <sup>(5, 6)</sup>. Takeaway and fast foods now make up approximately 21%  
76     of the UK diet with adults aged under 30 and children being the most frequent  
77     consumers <sup>(7)</sup>.  
  
78     Manchester City Council (MCC) has been ranked 8th of 325 local authorities in  
79     England for the highest quantity of takeaway outlets per 100,000 people by local  
80     authority, and contains a significantly higher number of outlets than the England  
81     average<sup>(8)</sup>. The Rusholme ward of Manchester is a densely populated residential  
82     area, with a large proportion of young students and South Asian residents.  
83     Rusholme is comprised of many restaurants and takeaway establishments known  
84     locally as the ‘Curry Mile’. The National Planning Policy Framework<sup>(9)</sup> suggested that  
85     local authorities could use planning permission to control the proliferation of  
86     takeaway outlets. MCC have therefore proposed to deny planning permission for  
87     new takeaway outlets in particular where they are already densely concentrated near  
88     to schools, as well as controlling opening hours<sup>(8)</sup>.  
  
89     Altering the physical takeaway food environment is one method of taking control of  
90     the physical environmental influences on food choice yet research from Australia and  
91     the USA show that presence of fast-food and or takeaway outlets are not always  
92     associated with their consumption <sup>(10-13)</sup>. Although a Canadian study showed fast  
93     food consumption was attributable to proximity of outlets <sup>(14)</sup>, two recent systematic

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3 94 reviews show that the presence of grocery outlets does not correlate presence or  
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5 95 widening food access with long-term changes in food choices <sup>(15, 16)</sup>. Therefore this  
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7 96 suggest wider sociocultural (such as cultural identity, social norms, attitudes and  
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9 97 beliefs) and economic influences need to be explored <sup>(7, 17, 18)</sup>. Qualitative methods  
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11 98 are aptly suited to consider this, whilst there has been a study considering takeaway  
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13 99 owners' and managers' opinions to consumer demand in a low income  
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15 100 neighbourhood of Scotland, there is limited evidence exploring the reasons behind  
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17 101 takeaway consumption from consumers <sup>(19)</sup>. Consideration of sociocultural issues is  
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19 102 essential for the implementation of effective, multi-dimensional intervention  
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21 103 strategies.  
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25 104 Therefore, the aim of this research was to explore the sociocultural experiences of  
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27 105 takeaway food consumers in Rusholme, Manchester, to gain a deeper  
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29 106 understanding of the sociocultural factors involved in takeaway food consumption.  
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of 23% and 19.1%, respectively<sup>(24)</sup>. Rusholme has a high prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity, with 42.5% of year 6 children estimated to be obese<sup>(25)</sup>. Rusholme is predominantly residential with a large number of takeaway and restaurant establishments. The population profile comprises of predominantly students and a large mixed ethnic profile of South Asian, Iranian, Kurdish, Lebanese and other Middle Eastern immigrants<sup>(26)</sup>.

136

### 137 **Sampling and recruitment**

Participants were included if they met the following criteria; aged 18 – 65, consumed takeaway foods at least once per month, and resided in Rusholme. Participants were recruited in two ways. Firstly, the study was advertised using a dedicated Facebook page (Facebook Inc., California, USA) and the page was posted into various Facebook groups known to be based in Manchester, including two sports club groups (for all ages) and five university-based societies. Secondly, a community centre within Rusholme was visited three times during adult social group meetings and children's playgroups, and a poster was attached to the community centre board, between June 2016 and October 2016. Members of the Facebook groups (n = 2760), and 27 people were directly approached at the community centres. This combined strategy was used to target both students and local residents within Rusholme. Participants were previously not known to the researcher and steps were taken to ensure reciprocity and to address any "power-imbalance" agreed interview times and simplified but not patronising language was used. Detailed research logs were kept that evidenced theoretical discussions and personal reflections.

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Theoretical (purposive) sampling was used as per grounded theory<sup>(21)</sup>, initially using the above selection criteria. Once a number of interviews had taken place, they were transcribed by hand verbatim and the data analysed (JB). A theoretical sampling strategy was used based upon missing information within nascent categories in order to explore those categories in further depth and to narrow focus<sup>(27)</sup>.

A subjective judgement of theoretical saturation was employed. Data collection ceased when no new properties were emerging from interviews and were remaining within the scope of the research aims<sup>(28)</sup>.

**Data Collection**

*Interviews*

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were performed in Rusholme between June and October 2016, carried out by JB, each lasting 30-60 minutes. A semi-structured interview guide was used and treated as a flexible tool to follow up leads and develop theoretical categories<sup>(27-29)</sup>. The first interview guide was designed by JB, encompassing topics considered as important, including examples of follow-up questions. Follow up questions were designed to avoid being direct and intrusive questions such as “why do you do that?”. Instead, follow-up questions were designed to allude to the ‘why’, but imply the interviewer’s acceptance, such as “can you tell me more about that?” and “how does that affect you?”. Other follow-up questions were designed to elicit participant’s meanings of their terms and feelings about events and situations that they described, as in constructivism<sup>(27)</sup>. Finally, questions were designed to elicit information about process and sequence, an important part of GT methodology<sup>(29)</sup>, such as “when...” and “what happens before and after?”.

177 The interview recordings were anonymised by removing identifying details. Each  
178 participant was interviewed once, which was subsequently transcribed.

### 179 *Data sorting and analysis*

180 Data sorting and analysis used the GT constant comparative method moving  
181 between the four major processes of coding, memoing, developing categories, and  
182 theoretical sorting<sup>(27, 29, 30)</sup>.

183 Codes were derived from the data. Two-step coding was used; initial coding and  
184 focused coding. The initial codes were applied to fragments of data, incident by  
185 incident. A code was applied for more or less every sentence. The codes were  
186 applied by summarising elements such as the actions and processes, feelings,  
187 meanings and relationships described by the participant. The coding process also  
188 provided an opportunity to indicate questions about the data and identify missing  
189 information, which were explored in further interviews i.e the iterative process.

190 The final process was theoretical sorting where theoretical links were transferred into  
191 NVivo 10 (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia). The most significant or frequent  
192 codes or groups of codes, were then identified and either raised to focused codes or  
193 recoded individually. Application of the 'constant comparative' method aided the  
194 identification of theoretical links between conceptual categories, their relationships  
195 and hierarchical order. These links had been identified during the coding and  
196 memoing processes where participants had explicitly or implicitly alluded to them.  
197 When a particular order made analytic sense and still remained grounded within the  
198 data, a theoretical diagram was made<sup>(27, 30-32)</sup>.

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199 A sample of the analysis (approx. 50%) were cross-checked for transparency  
200 amongst the research team to determine whether the codes could be interpreted in  
201 the same way<sup>(33)</sup>.

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## Results

Thirteen participants were interviewed. Interviews were carried out in community centres (n=3), playgroups (n=5), and on a university campus (n=5). Participants mean age was 38 years (SD = 13.0) and 69% of participants were female (n=9). Six participants had children (under 18 years old) and 4 participants did not have children. All participants had been educated to secondary school level with 8 either studying for or attained an undergraduate degree or higher. With respect to consumption, 38% (n=5) participants ate takeaway food every month, 57% (n=7) 1-2 times per week, and 1 participant 3-6 times per week.

Following the analysis using the constant comparative methods and identifying theoretical links three superordinate themes were identified and labelled as follows: Resources, Social Factors and Personal Factors, based on the subordinate themes which is visually represented in Figure 1.

### Social Factors

#### *Bonding with others*

Participants demonstrated how takeaway food supports social relationships, particularly suitable for hedonistic acts of sharing food and as a marker of social belonging and intimacy. They were also an important part of youth night-time drinking culture, used to support social bonding and symbolise hedonism and group identity.

Emma, 26, consumes takeaway food as a way of bonding with an old friend.

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3 224 “It’s about bringing people together. That’s what it’s about isn’t it. That’s what  
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5 225 pizza does for me and Julia”. Emma continued. . . “in terms of people coming  
6  
7 226 together, it’s a lot easier for people to be like, come on, let’s just chuck a fiver  
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9 227 in and get a load of food and share it, as opposed to somebody having to give  
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11 228 up a lot of time to cook for a load of people . . . there’s a lot more preparation  
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13 229 involved”

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16 230 *Being part of a community*

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19 231 Having positive relationships with local takeaway outlet owners was important to a  
20  
21 232 number of participants from a community perspective. Emma recently moved away  
22  
23 233 from her family home to study. She expressed that when she visits home there are  
24  
25 234 local takeaway outlets that she and her mother regularly visit, with whom they have  
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27 235 formed friendly relationships as local customers and local traders:

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30 236 “in your family environment, there’s always that Chinese that you go to. You  
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32 237 have your chippy or your Indian or whatever it is. You’re usually on first name  
33  
34 238 terms with the people that work there . . . She [Emma’s mother] knows them,  
35  
36 239 she’s on first name terms with them. She gave them a Christmas present....  
37  
38 240 Because it’s your local environment and it’s your community”.

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41 241 *Routines and traditions*

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44 242 Consuming takeaway food socially formed an integral part of their regular routines  
45  
46 243 and traditions. Many participants discussed a continuation of such traditions from  
47  
48 244 their childhood, others had formed newer routines with their social network.

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51 245 Gabby, 55, recounted that eating fish and chips is a longstanding tradition of  
52  
53 246 her working-class family dating back to her childhood: “Fish and chips on a  
54  
55 247 Friday because that was what you did”.

248

249 *Influential others*

250 Gabby discussed the pressure that her stepdaughter and goddaughter experience to  
251 be seen by others eating in specific takeaway outlets that were endorsed by  
252 celebrities:

253 "I've got a stepdaughter and goddaughter and because they're brought up in  
254 the area, there's a lot of peer pressure...Archie's it's called. It's like a burger  
255 and shake bar. My goddaughter is 13 and she wants to go there, she doesn't  
256 even like burgers but she wants to go and have a shake and be seen in this  
257 place".

258 Emma described that she sometimes feels obliged to eat a takeaway with her  
259 mother as she suspects her mother would be offended if she refuses, even though  
260 Emma wishes to eat more healthily:

261 . . . I don't want to step on my mum's toes and be like 'oh, I'm just going to  
262 buy my own food and eat what I like to eat' because she'll get a bit offended  
263 by that as well, so.

264 **Personal factors**265 *Values and Controlling damage*

266 Participants described considering a variety of values when making food-decisions  
267 which were linked with the healthiness and guilt of consuming a takeaway such as  
268 the quality of the food, variety of ingredients and portion size. Where participants  
269 valued healthy eating, they discussed a method of 'damage-control'. If the

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participants or their children wanted takeaway food, damage-control meant still consuming takeaway food but selecting a healthier option.

Jack described how he attempts to control the healthiness and portion size of takeaway food, as well as the frequency he consumes it:

“If I have to go, I'll go for the least-worst option, you know. . . if I can go without it for two months it's a bonus.”

Amira indicated she accepts eating takeaway food twice per week as she mostly prepares food from scratch.

“Because five, six days a week I'm cooking at home, then I don't mind having a cheat twice a week.”

Laura, 34, stated that as long as takeaway food was of better quality, then she did not feel as guilty about eating it:

“If the food is better quality it seems at least more healthy and then I don't have to feel guilty about eating it.”

**Resources**

*Lacking or saving time*

The resource category included participants' perceived and not actual time availability that influenced their choice to purchase takeaway food.

This is exemplified by Sonia, a 56-year-old housewife who cooks Indian food daily. Sonia expressed her pleasure with the break from cooking and cleaning that Saturday night takeaway provides:

291 It's a lot of work at home from scratch . . . First there's the cooking it, then  
292 there's the cleaning, then there's the smell in the house. There you've just  
293 ordered it and you've satisfied what you wanted to eat without the mess! So,  
294 I'm thinking takeaways are God-sends really. We even use plastic plates for  
295 convenience because a takeaway is just chuck everything in the bin, so  
296 there's nothing to wash. And that's great. You don't know how good that feels.  
297 When you just eat and just chuck everything in the bin and the kitchen's still  
298 tidy.

299 Participants also cited that they purchased takeaway food when they felt it was too  
300 late to cook. A female participant with no children spoke about the lack of regular or  
301 appropriate length breaks during her shift work, describing it as too late to cook after  
302 a shift:

303 We rarely get breaks, so for a 6-hour shift, we get a 10-minute break and you  
304 can't really eat much then, so I don't usually end up eating at work at all. So then  
305 right after that shift, obviously you're hungry and you've just missed a meal so  
306 that's why I end up going to get takeaway . . . It's too late even bother to cook  
307 something.

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### 309 *Takeaway availability*

310 Participants discussed their exposure to takeaway outlets on travel routes and stated  
311 they consumed more takeaway food as a result. Jack exemplified what many of the  
312 participants had spoken about during interview:

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313 “there are just so many just competing with each other that they're just  
314 saturated . . . There's no diversity of any kind of health . . . Plus, you have 24-  
315 hour pizzas now”.

316 *Financial resources*

317 When asked about buying takeaway food, most participants referred to takeaway  
318 foods as expensive. The unprompted topic of getting ‘value for money’ emerged  
319 frequently, however, the definitions of ‘value for money’ were diverse amongst the  
320 sample.

321 Gabby referred to her strategy of obtaining the full value of her takeaway by  
322 consuming the entire portion, even though she perceives it as too large: “. . . a  
323 portion size should be no bigger than your palm, like your fist . . . but if my take away  
324 comes and I paid for it, I'm going to eat it all.”

325 Charles, did not express any financial hardship. When asked about his thoughts on  
326 the price of takeaway food, he associated value for money with food quality:

327 I just can compare it to where I'm actually from, I think here it is a bit more  
328 expensive but I think the quality is bit better. It's not just the food you can buy  
329 everywhere, so I think the value for money here is actually quite good.

330

331 *Cooking skills vs variety*

332 Nutritional knowledge and cooking skills were mentioned, but the participants  
333 desired a variety of food that they could not or did not want to make at home,  
334 causing them to seek takeaway foods. Anthony explained that he often cooks for  
335 himself and his wife, he comments;

“I think it’s the variety with a Chinese. It’s the fact that you can get duck and things like that – stuff you just wouldn’t normally eat and the MSG probably.

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**Discussion**

This qualitative study of consumers' sociocultural attitudes towards takeaway food consumption revealed several aspects influencing their consumption; similar to other research convenience, time-saving and on-demand access were important themes however, experiences of social norms, bonding, sharing and a sense of community were also described. To our knowledge, this is the first study in the UK that has uniquely described these sociocultural concepts and the complex interplay of the decision making process when it comes to takeaway foods.

This study showed that sharing a single takeaway meal was used as a way to bond and affirm relationships, and the large portion sizes generally associated with takeaway foods were well-suited for sharing. Take away meals appeared to mark boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in social events such as meeting friends, birthdays, anniversaries etc. and were observed to be markers of social belonging and intimacy<sup>(34)</sup>. This is supported by findings previously showing shared fast food consumption habits amongst social groups<sup>(35)</sup>. The notion of social sharing could be due to the influence of advertisements (consider HungryHouse™, JustEat™) or the increasing centrality of unhealthy foods in social contexts thus integrating such eating habits into youth culture<sup>(36)</sup>.

Local commercial areas can represent a place for social interaction<sup>(37)</sup> and findings of the present study show outlet owners/employees were considered within this definition of 'community'. The local takeaway provided a sense of belonging and an opportunity for social interaction. Previous research is in support of these findings suggesting that the sense of community as a result of urban space and neighbourhood layout can enhance feelings of belonging and community identity<sup>(38)</sup>.

Therefore, residents feel it is not only they that form the local community, but also local businesses including takeaways.

For many of the participants in the study, weekend takeaway consumption had become engrained into routines and traditions, for example a meal after a night out with friends, fish and chips on a Friday or pizza nights. People develop eating routines<sup>(39)</sup> and scripts<sup>(40)</sup> in order to simplify daily food decisions. This was described by participants who had traditions dating back to their childhood but also newer traditions within present social settings. It is important to be aware that these routines and traditions form a social function and by doing so legitimises their consumption<sup>(41)</sup>.

The present research observed that participants took on others eating practices due to established social norms, the influence of others or because of a sense of obligation<sup>(42)</sup>. One participant articulated this explaining the perceived pressure from peers to be seen in certain establishments specifically for younger people. Similar reports were found in the study of school children in Tower Hamlets<sup>(43)</sup> which stated not only hunger and value for money but more importantly that their friends were using the fast-food outlets. Adopted social norms and fashions are important influences on food choices and this needs to be considered in terms of why people consume takeaway foods<sup>(44)</sup>. Thus any policies and interventions aimed at reducing children's fast food consumption would need to consider this key influencer.

Values such as health linked with food quality, variety and portion size, were all identified as important in this research as shown elsewhere in relation to convenience foods<sup>(45-47)</sup>. Our research reported the compensatory behaviours either to limit the "damage" by making healthier choices at the takeaway or mentally

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388 rationalising their behaviour, a finding that is supported by a previous qualitative  
389 study<sup>(48)</sup>. This “compensatory health belief” indicates that people are aware of the  
390 negative health effects of takeaway meals. What this does show is that although  
391 there is a concern for health among consumers, there is no desire to eliminate  
392 takeaway foods from their diet. This contradiction between knowledge and behaviour  
393 in relation to fast food intake has been reported by an Australian qualitative study<sup>(49)</sup>.  
394 Once again highlighting that health education in itself is not sufficient to change  
395 behaviours<sup>(50)</sup>.

396 A key subordinate theme emerged around perceived time available for preparing  
397 meals. Takeaways were relied upon by shift-workers, also highlighted by a report<sup>(51)</sup>,  
398 in that fast food outlets tend to be one of the few outlets open late at night.  
399 Takeaways were used to make more time available for both essential and non-  
400 essential activities and interestingly also as a form of weekend respite from usual  
401 weekday duties for those most burdened by household tasks. Although fast food  
402 outlets and the workforce have been considered from a feminist perspective, this  
403 shows the role they may also place in reducing women’s domestic labour<sup>(52)</sup>.

404 In the present study, late at night was a key time for consumption where availability  
405 of and exposure to takeaway foods is highest and access to healthier, pre-prepared  
406 meals is restricted as shown by others investigating proximity of takeaway  
407 establishments<sup>(53-55)</sup>. Further evidence shows exposure to outlets is positively  
408 associated with takeaway consumption, BMI and obesity risk, with evidence of a  
409 dose-response effect<sup>(56)</sup>. The geographical environment in which individuals exist is  
410 proposed to play a pivotal role in shaping food choices however the link is not  
411 direct<sup>(57)</sup>.

Participants financial motivations to buy takeaways appeared to be dependent upon two interrelated factors: actual financial resource availability and value for money. The participants that expressed financial hardship tended to associate value for money with the quantity of food, whereas the participants that did not express financial hardship tended to associate value for money with the quality and variety of food. This supports the notion that, basic needs are required to be fulfilled (quantity of food) before additional needs can be considered (quality of food)<sup>(58, 59)</sup>.

### *Strengths and limitations*

A number of strengths of this research should be recognised. Firstly, this is the first study to consider specifically the socio-cultural aspects of takeaway consumption. This study uses a very clear definition of takeaway food as opposed to others who have considered either only fast-food or a combination of both. This is particularly important due to the proliferation and abundance of takeaway establishments in the UK. The use of GT methodology in this study has allowed the analysis to remain 'grounded' within the data, yet it transcends descriptive accounts and instead accounts for social processes that are happening in the data<sup>(27)</sup>. The findings are therefore useful in other food choice contexts. However, these findings are specific to the people involved in this study, in particular participants who consumed takeaway food regularly were more likely to relay unsubstantiated opinion and speak for others as such the inherent limitations of qualitative research in wider impact is acknowledge although these findings will resonate with other similar situations and locations.

### **Conclusion**

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436 Numerous local sensitivities have been identified in this study, adding to the  
437 evidence base. For example, takeaway meals fostering family bonds, providing  
438 respite for mothers, for a sense of familiarity and maintaining cultural norms in an  
439 ethnically diverse area of Manchester. These novel findings could suggest that  
440 healthier options may satisfy all of these criteria. However, the role of takeaway food  
441 as a treat or hedonistic indulgence could mean that healthier alternatives may not  
442 reduce their consumption. Public health strategies, including changes to planning  
443 applications, need to be flexible and consider the cultural phenomena found in the  
444 present study to devise effective and acceptable policies.

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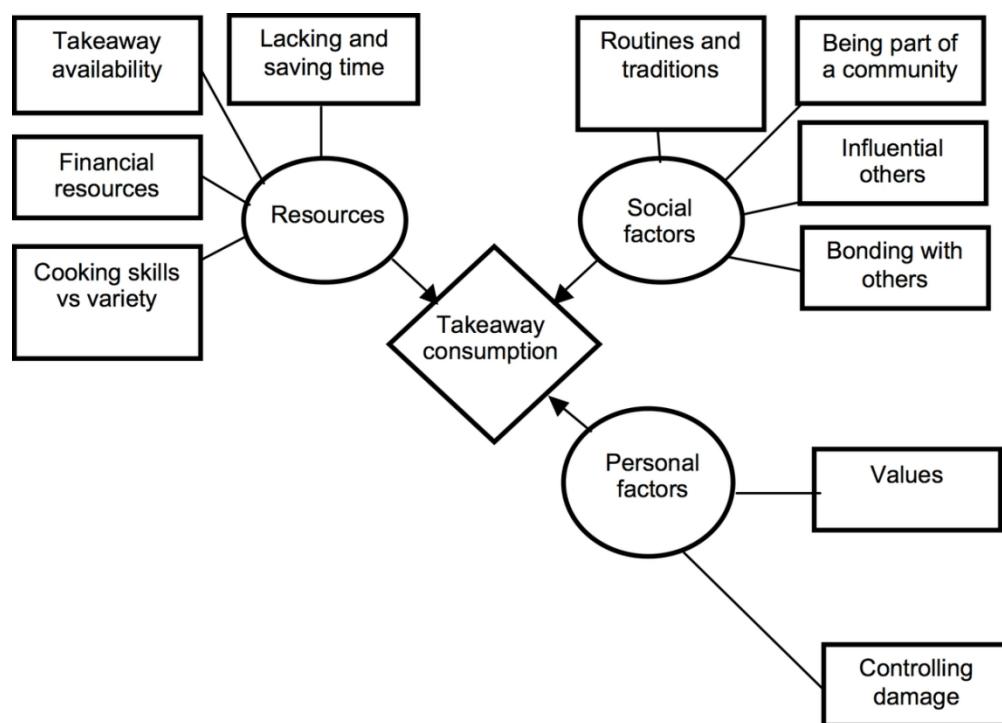
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602 **Figure 1.** Thematic map of takeaway meal consumption influences

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Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR)\*

<http://www.equator-network.org/reporting-guidelines/srqr/>

Page/line no(s).

Title and abstract

<b>Title</b> - Concise description of the nature and topic of the study Identifying the study as qualitative or indicating the approach (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory) or data collection methods (e.g., interview, focus group) is recommended	Page 1/ Line 1 & 2
<b>Abstract</b> - Summary of key elements of the study using the abstract format of the intended publication; typically includes background, purpose, methods, results, and conclusions	Page 3/ Line 30-108

Introduction

<b>Problem formulation</b> - Description and significance of the problem/phenomenon studied; review of relevant theory and empirical work; problem statement	Page 5 – 6/ Line 143-212
<b>Purpose or research question</b> - Purpose of the study and specific objectives or questions	Page 6/ Line 213-215

Methods

<b>Qualitative approach and research paradigm</b> - Qualitative approach (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory, case study, phenomenology, narrative research) and guiding theory if appropriate; identifying the research paradigm (e.g., postpositivist, constructivist/ interpretivist) is also recommended; rationale**	Page 7/ Line 234-239
<b>Researcher characteristics and reflexivity</b> - Researchers’ characteristics that may influence the research, including personal attributes, qualifications/experience, relationship with participants, assumptions, and/or presuppositions; potential or actual interaction between researchers’ characteristics and the research questions, approach, methods, results, and/or transferability	Page 8/ Line 297-301
<b>Context</b> - Setting/site and salient contextual factors; rationale**	Page 7-8/ Line 252-288
<b>Sampling strategy</b> - How and why research participants, documents, or events were selected; criteria for deciding when no further sampling was necessary (e.g., sampling saturation); rationale**	Pages 7-8/ Line 290-337
<b>Ethical issues pertaining to human subjects</b> - Documentation of approval by an appropriate ethics review board and participant consent, or explanation for lack thereof; other confidentiality and data security issues	Page 7/ Line 240-244
<b>Data collection methods</b> - Types of data collected; details of data collection procedures including (as appropriate) start and stop dates of data collection and analysis, iterative process, triangulation of sources/methods, and modification of procedures in response to evolving study findings; rationale**	Pages 9 - 10/ Line 332-356

<b>Data collection instruments and technologies</b> - Description of instruments (e.g., interview guides, questionnaires) and devices (e.g., audio recorders) used for data collection; if/how the instrument(s) changed over the course of the study	Pages 9 - 10/ Line 332-356
<b>Units of study</b> - Number and relevant characteristics of participants, documents, or events included in the study; level of participation (could be reported in results)	Page 11-12 /Line 394-402
<b>Data processing</b> - Methods for processing data prior to and during analysis, including transcription, data entry, data management and security, verification of data integrity, data coding, and anonymization/de-identification of excerpts	Pages 10 -11/ Line 357-392
<b>Data analysis</b> - Process by which inferences, themes, etc., were identified and developed, including the researchers involved in data analysis; usually references a specific paradigm or approach; rationale**	Pages 10 -11/ Line 357-392
<b>Techniques to enhance trustworthiness</b> - Techniques to enhance trustworthiness and credibility of data analysis (e.g., member checking, audit trail, triangulation); rationale**	Page 11/ Line 390-392

## Results/findings

<b>Synthesis and interpretation</b> - Main findings (e.g., interpretations, inferences, and themes); might include development of a theory or model, or integration with prior research or theory	Pages 12-17/ Lines 403-743
<b>Links to empirical data</b> - Evidence (e.g., quotes, field notes, text excerpts, photographs) to substantiate analytic findings	Pages 12-17/ Lines 403-743

## Discussion

<b>Integration with prior work, implications, transferability, and contribution(s) to the field</b> - Short summary of main findings; explanation of how findings and conclusions connect to, support, elaborate on, or challenge conclusions of earlier scholarship; discussion of scope of application/generalizability; identification of unique contribution(s) to scholarship in a discipline or field	Page 18 - 21/ Lines 755-834
<b>Limitations</b> - Trustworthiness and limitations of findings	Page 21/ Lines 836-849

## Other

<b>Conflicts of interest</b> - Potential sources of influence or perceived influence on study conduct and conclusions; how these were managed	Page 1/Line 20
<b>Funding</b> - Sources of funding and other support; role of funders in data collection, interpretation, and reporting	Page 1/ Line 17-19

\*The authors created the SRQR by searching the literature to identify guidelines, reporting standards, and critical appraisal criteria for qualitative research; reviewing the reference lists of retrieved sources; and contacting experts to gain feedback. The SRQR aims to improve the transparency of all aspects of qualitative research by providing clear standards for reporting qualitative research.

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\*\*The rationale should briefly discuss the justification for choosing that theory, approach, method, or technique rather than other options available, the assumptions and limitations implicit in those choices, and how those choices influence study conclusions and transferability. As appropriate, the rationale for several items might be discussed together.

**Reference:**  
O'Brien BC, Harris IB, Beckman TJ, Reed DA, Cook DA. **Standards for reporting qualitative research: a synthesis of recommendations.** *Academic Medicine*, Vol. 89, No. 9 / Sept 2014  
DOI: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000000388

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# BMJ Open

## The sociocultural aspects of takeaway food consumption in a low-socio-economic ward in Manchester: A grounded theory study.

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<b>Primary Subject Heading</b>:	Public health
Secondary Subject Heading:	Qualitative research
Keywords:	PUBLIC HEALTH, Health policy < HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION & MANAGEMENT, QUALITATIVE RESEARCH, NUTRITION & DIETETICS

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**Title:** The sociocultural aspects of takeaway food consumption in a low-socio-economic ward in Manchester: A grounded theory study.

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**Author contribution:** JB collected the data, performed the qualitative analysis and wrote the first draft of the paper, RG designed the methods, secured the funding and directed the qualitative research, SP contributed to the analysis of qualitative data and edited drafts and ID contributed to interpretation of the data.

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in the paper are that of the authors and not of any institution or funding body

**Data Sharing:** Extra data is available by emailing [jennyblow1@outlook.com](mailto:jennyblow1@outlook.com)

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**Acknowledgements:** The authors wish to thank the participants who contributed their time to this research.

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24 **Number of figures and tables:** Tables 0, figures 1

25 **Abbreviation list:** Grounded Theory (GT)

26 **Keywords:** qualitative research, food choice, takeaway outlets, environment, choice

27 architecture

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**Abstract**

Objectives

Takeaway foods form a growing proportion of the UK diet. This consumption is linked with poor health outcomes due to their adverse nutritional profile. However, there is little research regarding the sociocultural context surrounding the consumption of takeaway meals. This research aimed to explore the sociocultural factors that influence the consumption of takeaway foods.

Design

The study employed constructivist grounded theory (GT) methodology. Data were collected using one-to-one semi-structured interviews from an inner-city area of Manchester (Rusholme). Data sorting and analysis was implemented using the GT constant comparative method.

Setting

Rusholme, Manchester, UK

Participants

Adult participants (aged 18 to 65 years) consuming takeaway meals at least once/month were recruited using social media and community settings.

Results

Thirteen participants were interviewed (female 69%, mean age=38 years). Three superordinate themes were derived from the data: Social Factors, Personal Factors and Resources. Social Factors included the influence of routines and traditions, influential others and a sense of community in the bonding and affirming of relationships. Personal Factors explored the subordinate themes of controlling damage and values relating to food choice. The third theme Resources included time, availability, cost and quality.

## 53 Conclusion

54 This study shows the sociocultural influences on food choice decisions are complex  
55 and may go beyond access and availability. Any policy change to limit takeaway  
56 consumption should acknowledge these vital processes in food choice to inform  
57 targeted effective approaches.

## 59 **Strengths and limitations of this study**

- 60 • The methods used here are ideally placed to understand the complexity of the  
61 interaction between food choices, geographical environment and socio-economic  
62 factors
- 63 • Very little is known about peoples' experiences of take away foods. Research in  
64 this area is essential to inform appropriate behaviour change interventions that  
65 address a growing need for takeaway meals.
- 66 • The findings are specific to the people involved in this study, however the use of  
67 grounded theory allows themes to transcend beyond basic description and to  
68 resonate with other similar situations and locations

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**Introduction**

The UK has a well-recognised childhood and adult obesity epidemic, amplified in lower socio-economic groups<sup>(1)</sup>. Of particular concern is the availability and access to takeaway meals, which are known to contain an adverse nutritional profile <sup>(2, 3)</sup>. Within disadvantaged areas they have been linked with increased consumption <sup>(4)</sup> and a rise in obesity <sup>(5, 6)</sup>. Takeaway and fast-foods now make up approximately 21% of the UK diet with adults aged under 30 and children being the most frequent consumers <sup>(7)</sup>.

Manchester City Council (MCC) has been ranked 8th of 325 local authorities in England for the highest quantity of takeaway outlets per 100,000 people by local authority, and contains a significantly higher number of outlets than the England average<sup>(8)</sup>. The Rusholme ward of Manchester is a densely populated residential area, with a large proportion of young students and South Asian residents. Rusholme is comprised of many restaurants and takeaway establishments known locally as the ‘Curry Mile’. The National Planning Policy Framework<sup>(9)</sup> suggested that local authorities could use planning permission to control the proliferation of takeaway outlets. MCC have therefore proposed to deny planning permission for new takeaway outlets in particular where they are already densely concentrated near to schools, as well as controlling opening hours<sup>(8)</sup>.

Altering the physical takeaway food environment is one method of taking control of the physical environmental influences on food choice yet research from Australia and the USA show that presence of fast-food and or takeaway outlets are not always associated with their consumption <sup>(10-13)</sup>. Although a Canadian study showed fast-food consumption was attributable to proximity of outlets <sup>(14)</sup>, two recent systematic reviews show that the presence of additional grocery outlets and thus widening food access

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3 94 does not necessarily correlate with long-term changes in food choices <sup>(15, 16)</sup>.  
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5 95 Therefore, this suggest wider sociocultural (such as cultural identity, social norms,  
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7 96 attitudes and beliefs) and economic influences need to be explored <sup>(7, 17, 18)</sup>. Qualitative  
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9 97 methods are aptly suited to consider this, whilst there has been a study considering  
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11 98 takeaway owners' and managers' opinions to consumer demand in a low income  
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13 99 neighbourhood of Scotland, there is limited evidence exploring the reasons behind  
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15 100 takeaway consumption from consumers <sup>(19)</sup>. Consideration of sociocultural issues is  
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17 101 essential for the implementation of effective, multi-dimensional intervention strategies.  
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22 102 Therefore, the aim of this research was to explore the sociocultural experiences of  
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24 103 takeaway food consumers in Rusholme, Manchester, to gain a deeper understanding  
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27 104 of the sociocultural factors involved in takeaway food consumption.  
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**Methods**

A qualitative perspective was used to explore influences on takeaway food choice<sup>(20)</sup>. A constructivist grounded theory (GT) approach was undertaken in order to inform theory in this less widely researched area. Grounded theory (GT) is a systematic research method that guides the collection and analysis of qualitative data in order to form a theory which is not preconceived by existing theories within the literature, but is ‘grounded’ within the data<sup>(21)</sup>. Taking a constructivist methodological perspective to GT allows the investigation of the symbolic meanings that influences the choice to eat takeaway food, along with the processes participants undertake to enact such choices<sup>(21)</sup>. In essence constructivist GT is used to explore social phenomena<sup>(22)</sup> which are known to be involved in the context of food choice<sup>(23)</sup>.

**Ethics and confidentiality**

The study obtained ethical approval from Manchester Metropolitan University, Hollings Department. All participant names used in this report are pseudonyms in order to protect anonymity. Participants were informed of the purpose and nature of the study before consenting.

**Patient and Public Involvement**

No patients were involved in this study and participants were free-living individuals. Participants were not involved in the development of the research question however, they were central to the inductive nature of this GT research and were involved in the evolution of the interview questions. These results will be disseminated during a community engagement event.

## 128 **Research setting**

129 This research conducted in the electoral ward of Rusholme, located two miles south  
130 of Manchester City Centre. The majority of Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOA)  
131 within Rusholme are in the top 31 - 40% most deprived in England<sup>(24)</sup>. In Manchester  
132 26% of adults and children are classed as obese; higher than the England averages  
133 of 23% and 19.1%, respectively<sup>(25)</sup>. Rusholme has a high prevalence of childhood  
134 overweight and obesity, with 42.5% of year 6 children estimated to be obese<sup>(26)</sup>.  
135 Rusholme is predominantly residential with a large number of takeaway and restaurant  
136 establishments. The population profile comprises of predominantly students and a  
137 large mixed ethnic profile of South Asian, Iranian, Kurdish, Lebanese and other Middle  
138 Eastern immigrants<sup>(27)</sup>.

## 140 **Sampling and recruitment**

141 Participants were included if they met the following criteria; aged 18 – 65, consumed  
142 takeaway foods at least once per month, and resided in Rusholme. Participants were  
143 recruited in two ways. Firstly, the study was advertised using a dedicated Facebook  
144 page (Facebook Inc., California, USA) and the page was posted into various Facebook  
145 groups known to be based in Manchester, including two sports club groups (for all  
146 ages) and five university-based societies. Secondly, a community centre within  
147 Rusholme was visited three times during adult social group meetings and children's  
148 playgroups, and a poster was attached to the community centre board, between June  
149 2016 and October 2016. Members of the Facebook groups (n = 2760), and 27 people  
150 were directly approached at the community centre. This combined strategy was used  
151 to target both students and local residents within Rusholme. Participants were

previously not known to the researcher and steps were taken to ensure reciprocity and to address any “power-imbalance” with agreed interview times and use of simplified but not patronising language. Detailed research logs were kept that evidenced theoretical discussions and personal reflections.

Theoretical (purposive) sampling was used as per grounded theory<sup>(22)</sup>, initially using the above selection criteria. Once a number of interviews had taken place, they were transcribed by hand verbatim and the data analysed (JB). A theoretical sampling strategy was used based upon missing information within nascent categories in order to explore those categories in further depth and to narrow focus<sup>(21)</sup>.

A subjective judgement of theoretical saturation was employed. Data collection ceased when no new properties were emerging from interviews and were remaining within the scope of the research aims<sup>(28)</sup>.

**Data Collection**

*Interviews*

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were performed in Rusholme between June and October 2016, carried out by JB, each lasting 30-60 minutes. A semi-structured interview guide was used and treated as a flexible tool to follow up leads and develop theoretical categories<sup>(28-30)</sup>. The first interview guide was designed by JB (see supplementary data file), encompassing topics considered as important, including examples of follow-up questions. Follow up questions were designed to avoid being direct and intrusive questions such as “why do you do that?”. Instead, follow-up questions were designed to allude to the ‘why’, but imply the interviewer’s acceptance, such as “can you tell me more about that?” and “how does that affect you?”. Other follow-up questions were designed to elicit participant’s meanings of their terms and

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3 176 feelings about events and situations that they described, as in constructivism<sup>(21)</sup>.  
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5 177 Finally, questions were designed to elicit information about process and sequence, an  
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8 178 important part of GT methodology<sup>(29)</sup>, such as “when...” and “what happens before  
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10 179 and after?”.

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13 180 The interview recordings were anonymised by removing identifying details. Each  
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15 181 participant was interviewed once, which was subsequently transcribed.

### 182 *Data sorting and analysis*

183 Data sorting and analysis used the GT constant comparative method, moving between  
184 the four major processes of coding: memoing, developing categories, and theoretical  
185 sorting<sup>(21, 29, 30)</sup>.

186 Codes were derived from the data. Two-step coding was used; initial coding and  
187 focused coding. The initial codes were applied to fragments of data, incident by  
188 incident. A code was applied for more or less every sentence. The codes were applied  
189 by summarising elements such as the actions and processes, feelings, meanings and  
190 relationships described by the participant. The coding process also provided an  
191 opportunity to indicate questions about the data and identify missing information,  
192 which were explored in further interviews i.e the iterative process.

193 The final process was theoretical sorting where theoretical links were transferred into  
194 NVivo 10 (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia). The most significant or frequent  
195 codes or groups of codes, were then identified and either raised to focused codes or  
196 recoded individually. Application of the ‘constant comparative’ method aided the  
197 identification of theoretical links between conceptual categories, their relationships  
198 and hierarchical order. These links had been identified during the coding and memoing  
199 processes where participants had explicitly or implicitly alluded to them. When a

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200 particular order made analytic sense and still remained grounded within the data, a  
201 theoretical diagram was made<sup>(21, 30-32)</sup>.  
202 A sample of the analysis (approx. 50%) were cross-checked for transparency amongst  
203 the research team to determine whether the codes could be interpreted in the same  
204 way<sup>(33)</sup>.

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## Results

Thirteen participants were interviewed. Interviews were carried out in community centres (n=3), playgroups (n=5), and on a university campus (n=5). Participants mean age was 38 years (SD=13.0) and 69% of participants were female (n=9). Six participants had children (under 18 years old) and 4 participants did not have children. All participants had been educated to secondary school level with 8 either studying for or attained an undergraduate degree or higher. With respect to consumption, 38% (n=5) participants ate takeaway food every month, 57% (n=7) 1-2 times per week, and 1 participant 3-6 times per week.

Following the analysis, using the constant comparative methods and identifying theoretical links, three superordinate themes were identified and labelled as follows: Social Factors, Personal Factors and Resources, based on the subordinate themes which is visually represented in Figure 1.

### Social Factors

#### *Bonding with others*

Participants demonstrated how takeaway food supports social relationships, particularly suitable for hedonistic acts of sharing food and as a marker of social belonging and intimacy. They were also an important part of youth night-time drinking culture, used to support social bonding and symbolise hedonism and group identity.

Emma, 26, consumes takeaway food as a way of bonding with an old friend.

“It’s about bringing people together. That’s what it’s about isn’t it. That’s what pizza does for me and Julia”. Emma continued. . . “in terms of people coming

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228           together, it's a lot easier for people to be like, come on, let's just chuck a fiver  
229           in and get a load of food and share it, as opposed to somebody having to give  
230           up a lot of time to cook for a load of people . . . there's a lot more preparation  
231           involved."

232   *Being part of a community*

233   Having positive relationships with local takeaway outlet owners was important to a  
234   number of participants from a community perspective. Emma recently moved away  
235   from her family home to study. She expressed that when she visits home there are  
236   local takeaway outlets that she and her mother regularly visit, with whom they have  
237   formed friendly relationships as local customers and local traders:

238           "in your family environment, there's always that Chinese that you go to. You  
239           have your chippy or your Indian or whatever it is. You're usually on first name  
240           terms with the people that work there . . . She [Emma's mother] knows them,  
241           she's on first name terms with them. She gave them a Christmas present....  
242           Because it's your local environment and it's your community."

243   *Routines and traditions*

244   Consuming takeaway food socially formed an integral part of their regular routines and  
245   traditions. Many participants discussed a continuation of such traditions from their  
246   childhood, others had formed newer routines with their social network.

247           Gabby, 55, recounted that eating fish and chips is a longstanding tradition of  
248           her working-class family dating back to her childhood: "Fish and chips on a  
249           Friday because that was what you did."

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## 251 *Influential others*

252 Gabby discussed the pressure that her stepdaughter and goddaughter experience to  
253 be seen by others eating in specific takeaway outlets that were endorsed by  
254 celebrities:

255 “I've got a stepdaughter and goddaughter and because they're brought up in  
256 the area, there's a lot of peer pressure...Archie's it's called. It's like a burger  
257 and shake bar. My goddaughter is 13 and she wants to go there, she doesn't  
258 even like burgers but she wants to go and have a shake and be seen in this  
259 place.”

260 Emma described that she sometimes feels obliged to eat a takeaway with her mother  
261 as she suspects her mother would be offended if she refuses, even though Emma  
262 wishes to eat more healthily:

263 “. . . I don't want to step on my mum's toes and be like 'oh, I'm just going to buy  
264 my own food and eat what I like to eat' because she'll get a bit offended by that  
265 as well, so.”

## 266 **Personal Factors**

### 267 *Values and Controlling damage*

268 Participants described considering a variety of values when making food-decisions,  
269 which were linked with the healthiness and guilt of consuming a takeaway such as the  
270 quality of the food, variety of ingredients and managing/reducing portion size. Where  
271 participants valued healthy eating, they discussed a method of 'damage-control'. If the  
272 participants or their children wanted takeaway food, damage-control meant still  
273 consuming takeaway food but selecting a healthier option.

274 Robert, a father of two young girls, described his struggle with the dynamics of family  
275 food provision. Similarly, he expressed concern for eating healthily and used damage-  
276 control methods when getting takeaway food for him and his family:

277 “ . . . about quantity and quality control . . . sometimes you're never quite sure  
278 how much is going to turn up when you order something, and so we'll say  
279 *"Right, well, there's four of us, let's order for three and see how we get on"* . . .  
280 We choose our takeaways. Some, we know we get perhaps a nice salad that  
281 comes with it.”

283 Jack described how he attempts to control the healthiness and portion size of  
284 takeaway food, as well as the frequency he consumes it; “If I have to go, I'll go for the  
285 least-worst option that I can,. . . if I can go without it for two months it's a bonus...”.  
286 Jack goes on to describe how he orders dishes that are smaller to limit the amount he  
287 consumes; “I eat the whole thing if I have a take away. I try to [order] small portions  
288 as well.”

290 Amira indicated she accepts eating takeaway food twice per week as she mostly  
291 prepares food from scratch.

292 “Because five, six days a week I'm cooking at home, then I don't mind having a  
293 cheat twice a week.”

294 Laura, 34, stated that as long as takeaway food was of better quality, then she did not  
295 feel as guilty about eating it:

296 "If the food is better quality it seems at least more healthy and then I don't have  
297 to feel guilty about eating it."

## 298 **Resources**

### 299 *Lacking or saving time*

300 The resource category included participants' perceived and not actual time availability  
301 that influenced their choice to purchase takeaway food.

302 This is exemplified by Sonia, a 56-year-old housewife who cooks Indian food daily.  
303 Sonia expressed her pleasure with the break from cooking and cleaning that Saturday  
304 night takeaway provides:

305 "It's a lot of work at home from scratch . . . First there's the cooking it, then  
306 there's the cleaning, then there's the smell in the house. There you've just  
307 ordered it and you've satisfied what you wanted to eat without the mess! So,  
308 I'm thinking takeaways are God-sends really. We even use plastic plates for  
309 convenience because a takeaway is just chuck everything in the bin, so there's  
310 nothing to wash. And that's great. You don't know how good that feels. When  
311 you just eat and just chuck everything in the bin and the kitchen's still tidy."

312 Participants also cited that they purchased takeaway food when they felt it was too  
313 late to cook. A female participant with no children spoke about the lack of regular or  
314 appropriate length breaks during her shift work, describing it as too late to cook after  
315 a shift:

316 "We rarely get breaks, so for a 6-hour shift, we get a 10-minute break and you can't  
317 really eat much then, so I don't usually end up eating at work at all. So then right

after that shift, obviously you're hungry and you've just missed a meal so that's why I end up going to get takeaway . . . It's too late even bother to cook something."

*Takeaway availability*

Participants discussed their exposure to takeaway outlets on travel routes and stated they consumed more takeaway food as a result. Jack exemplified what many of the participants had spoken about during interview:

"there are just so many just competing with each other that they're just saturated . . . There's no diversity of any kind of health . . . Plus, you have 24-hour pizzas now."

*Financial resources*

When asked about buying takeaway food, most participants referred to takeaway foods as expensive. The unprompted topic of getting 'value for money' emerged frequently, however, the definitions of 'value for money' were diverse amongst the sample.

Gabby talks about "training" her family in portions sizes however this is sometimes over-ridden in the case of a takeaway. Gabby referred to her strategy of obtaining the full value of her takeaway by consuming the entire portion, even though she perceives it as too large: ". . . a portion size should be no bigger than your palm, like your fist . . . but if my takeaway comes and I paid for it, I'm going to eat it all". Gabby goes on to describe that her son will save any leftovers for another time if the portion size is too much "and he will do the same or he'll put it away and later on he'll go and warm it up again".

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342 Charles, did not express any financial hardship. When asked about his thoughts on  
343 the price of takeaway food, he associated value for money with food quality:

344 “I just can compare it to where I'm actually from, I think here it is a bit more  
345 expensive but I think the quality is bit better. It's not just the food you can buy  
346 everywhere, so I think the value for money here is actually quite good.”

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### 348 *Cooking skills vs variety*

349 Nutritional knowledge and cooking skills were mentioned, but the participants desired  
350 a variety of food that they could not or did not want to make at home, causing them to  
351 seek takeaway foods. Anthony explained that he often cooks for himself and his wife,  
352 he comments;

353 “I think it's the variety with a Chinese. It's the fact that you can get duck and  
354 things like that – stuff you just wouldn't normally eat and the MSG probably.”

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## 356 **Discussion**

357 This qualitative study of consumers' sociocultural attitudes towards takeaway food  
358 consumption revealed several aspects influencing their consumption; similar to other  
359 research convenience, time-saving and on-demand access were important themes  
360 however, experiences of social norms, bonding, sharing and a sense of community  
361 were also described. To our knowledge, this is the first study in the UK that has  
362 uniquely described these sociocultural concepts and the complex interplay of the  
363 decision making process when it comes to takeaway foods.

364 This study showed that sharing a single takeaway meal was used as a way to bond  
365 and affirm relationships, and the large portion sizes generally associated with  
366 takeaway foods were well-suited for sharing. Takeaway meals appeared to mark  
367 boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in social events such as meeting friends,  
368 birthdays, anniversaries etc. and were observed to be markers of social belonging and  
369 intimacy<sup>(34)</sup>. This is supported by findings previously showing shared fast-food  
370 consumption habits amongst social groups<sup>(35)</sup>. The notion of social sharing could be  
371 due to the influence of advertisements (consider HungryHouse™, JustEat™) or the  
372 increasing centrality of unhealthy foods in social contexts thus integrating such eating  
373 habits into youth culture<sup>(36)</sup>.

374 Local commercial areas can represent a place for social interaction<sup>(37)</sup> and findings of  
375 the present study show outlet owners/employees were considered within this definition  
376 of 'community'. The local takeaway provided a sense of belonging and an opportunity  
377 for social interaction. Previous research is in support of these findings suggesting that  
378 the sense of community as a result of urban space and neighbourhood layout can  
379 enhance feelings of belonging and community identity<sup>(38)</sup>. Therefore, residents feel it

380 is not only that they form the local community, but also local businesses including  
381 takeaways.

382 For many of the participants in the study, weekend takeaway consumption had  
383 become engrained into routines and traditions, for example a meal after a night out  
384 with friends, fish and chips on a Friday or pizza nights. People develop eating  
385 routines<sup>(39)</sup> and scripts<sup>(40)</sup> in order to simplify daily food decisions. This was described  
386 by participants who had traditions dating back to their childhood but also newer  
387 traditions within present social settings. It is important to be aware that these routines  
388 and traditions form a social function and by doing so legitimises their consumption<sup>(41)</sup>.

389 The present research observed that participants took on others eating practices due  
390 to established social norms, the influence of others or because of a sense of  
391 obligation<sup>(42)</sup>. One participant articulated this explaining the perceived pressure from  
392 peers to be seen in certain establishments specifically for younger people. Similar  
393 reports were found in the study of school children in Tower Hamlets<sup>(43)</sup> which stated  
394 not only hunger and value for money but more importantly that their friends were using  
395 the fast-food outlets. Adopted social norms and fashions are important influences on  
396 food choices and this needs to be considered in terms of why people consume  
397 takeaway foods<sup>(44)</sup>. Thus any policies and interventions aimed at reducing children's  
398 fast-food consumption would need to consider this key influencer.

399 Values such as health linked with food quality, variety and portion size, were all  
400 identified as important in this research, as shown elsewhere in relation to convenience  
401 foods<sup>(45-47)</sup>. Our research reported the compensatory behaviours, both for themselves  
402 and their children, either to limit the "damage" by making healthier choices at the  
403 takeaway or mentally rationalising their behaviour, a finding that is supported by a

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3 404 previous qualitative study<sup>(48)</sup>. This enabled participants to partake in indulgent  
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5 405 behaviour without experiencing the feelings of guilt associated with such behaviour.  
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7 406 This “compensatory health belief” indicates that people are aware of the negative  
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9 407 health effects of takeaway meals. What this does show is that although there is a  
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11 408 concern for health among consumers, there is no desire to eliminate takeaway foods  
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13 409 from their diet. This contradiction between knowledge and behaviour in relation to fast-  
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15 410 food intake has been reported by an Australian qualitative study<sup>(49)</sup>. Once again  
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17 411 highlighting that health education in itself is not sufficient to change behaviours<sup>(50)</sup>.  
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22 412 A key subordinate theme emerged around perceived time available for preparing  
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24 413 meals. Takeaways were relied upon by shift-workers, also highlighted by a report<sup>(51)</sup>,  
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26 414 in that fast-food outlets tend to be one of the few outlets open late at night. Takeaways  
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28 415 were used to make more time available for both essential and non-essential activities  
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30 416 and, interestingly, also as a form of weekend respite from usual weekday duties for  
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32 417 those most burdened by household tasks. Although fast-food outlets and the workforce  
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34 418 have been considered from a feminist perspective, this shows the role they may also  
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36 419 place in reducing women’s domestic labour<sup>(52)</sup>.  
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41 420 In the present study, late at night was a key time for consumption where availability of  
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43 421 and exposure to takeaway foods is highest and access to healthier, pre-prepared  
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45 422 meals is restricted as shown by others investigating proximity of takeaway  
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47 423 establishments<sup>(53-55)</sup>. Further evidence shows exposure to outlets is positively  
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49 424 associated with takeaway consumption, BMI and obesity risk, with evidence of a dose-  
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51 425 response effect<sup>(56)</sup>. The geographical environment in which individuals exist is  
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53 426 proposed to play a pivotal role in shaping food choices however the link is not direct<sup>(57)</sup>.  
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Participants financial motivations to buy takeaways appeared to be dependent upon two interrelated factors: actual financial resource availability and value for money. The participants that expressed financial hardship tended to associate value for money with the quantity of food, whereas the participants that did not express financial hardship tended to associate value for money with the quality and variety of food. This supports the notion that, basic needs are required to be fulfilled (quantity of food) before additional needs can be considered (quality of food)<sup>(58, 59)</sup>.

This study highlights the sociocultural aspects of takeaway food consumption, which need consideration to develop acceptable and effective interventions and policies. Although planning restrictions will reduce the proliferation of these outlets, that alone may not reduce the consumption. The key features in terms of time-saving, large portion sizes and cost, along with fostering bonds and forming traditions suggest that habits have already been made. Yet one aspect that did not surface in our research was the desire to eat unhealthy food and the omission of this raises the possibility of public health interventions, which encourage the availability of healthier alternatives within the takeaway food sector, through food development, menu planning, menu analysis and training. In order for such intervention to be effective the views and attitudes of takeaway outlet owners and staff would need to be evaluated. Nonetheless, public health interventions should be such to observe the sociocultural aspects of takeaway food consumption.

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#### 448 *Strengths and limitations*

A number of strengths of this research should be recognised. Firstly, this is the first study to consider specifically the socio-cultural aspects of takeaway consumption.

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This study uses a very clear definition of takeaway food as opposed to others who have considered either only fast-food or a combination of both. This is particularly important due to the proliferation and abundance of takeaway establishments in the UK. The use of GT methodology in this study has allowed the analysis to remain ‘grounded’ within the data, yet it transcends descriptive accounts and instead accounts for social processes that are happening in the data<sup>(21)</sup>. The findings are therefore useful in other food choice contexts. However, these findings are specific to the people involved in this study, in particular participants who consumed takeaway food regularly were more likely to relay unsubstantiated opinion and speak for others as such the inherent limitations of qualitative research in wider impact is acknowledge although these findings will resonate with other similar situations and locations.

**Conclusion**

Numerous local sensitivities have been identified in this study, adding to the evidence base. For example, takeaway meals fostering family bonds, providing respite for mothers, for a sense of familiarity and maintaining cultural norms in an ethnically diverse area of Manchester. These novel findings could suggest that healthier options may satisfy all of these criteria. However, the role of takeaway food as a treat or hedonistic indulgence could mean that healthier alternatives may not reduce their consumption. Public health strategies, including changes to planning applications, need to be flexible and consider the sociocultural phenomena found in the present study to devise effective and acceptable policies.

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**Figure 1.** Thematic map of takeaway meal consumption influences

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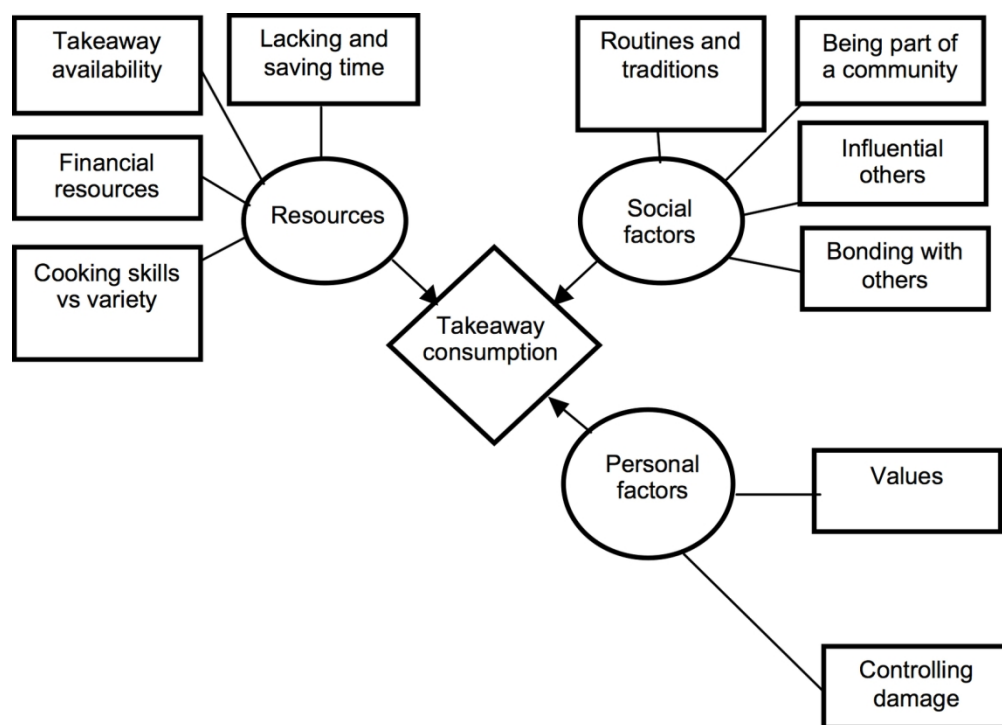


Figure 1. Thematic map of takeaway meal consumption influences

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**Interview Guide**

- Investigator to introduce participant to the research topic and talk through participant information sheet and informed consent

**Question topics**

**Behaviour:**

- General meal/snack consumption patterns
- Cooking habits
- Type of takeaway meals consumed (cuisine and specific meals) and why
- Context (when/where/who with/how much consumed/what for i.e. meal/snack)
- Reasons for takeaway food consumption
- Visits to particular outlets and why
- How obtain takeaway foods e.g. travel to outlet (if so, how), home delivery
- Social role in household

**Beliefs and feelings:**

- Food and health
- Nutritional value of takeaway foods
- Attitudes towards healthier options
- Mood and feelings before/whilst/after takeaway food consumption
- Facilitating/impeding factors of takeaway food consumption
- Availability i.e. density of outlets in neighbourhood
- Acceptability of takeaway foods
- Affordability of takeaways foods and healthy foods

**Probe examples:**

Tell me about...  
How...  
What...  
When...  
Could you describe X further?  
What is that like?  
How does that affect you?  
When do you most...  
How does that compare with...  
How do you feel when...  
What does that mean to you?

# Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR)\*

<http://www.equator-network.org/reporting-guidelines/srqr/>

Page/line no(s).

## Title and abstract

<b>Title</b> - Concise description of the nature and topic of the study Identifying the study as qualitative or indicating the approach (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory) or data collection methods (e.g., interview, focus group) is recommended	Page 1/ Line 1 & 2
<b>Abstract</b> - Summary of key elements of the study using the abstract format of the intended publication; typically includes background, purpose, methods, results, and conclusions	Page 3/ Line 28-57

## Introduction

<b>Problem formulation</b> - Description and significance of the problem/phenomenon studied; review of relevant theory and empirical work; problem statement	Page 5 – 6/ Line 70-101
<b>Purpose or research question</b> - Purpose of the study and specific objectives or questions	Page 6/ Line 102-104

## Methods

<b>Qualitative approach and research paradigm</b> - Qualitative approach (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory, case study, phenomenology, narrative research) and guiding theory if appropriate; identifying the research paradigm (e.g., postpositivist, constructivist/ interpretivist) is also recommended; rationale**	Page 7/ Line 106-115
<b>Researcher characteristics and reflexivity</b> - Researchers' characteristics that may influence the research, including personal attributes, qualifications/experience, relationship with participants, assumptions, and/or presuppositions; potential or actual interaction between researchers' characteristics and the research questions, approach, methods, results, and/or transferability	Page 8-9/ Line 151-155
<b>Context</b> - Setting/site and salient contextual factors; rationale**	Page 7-8/ Line 106-138
<b>Sampling strategy</b> - How and why research participants, documents, or events were selected; criteria for deciding when no further sampling was necessary (e.g., sampling saturation); rationale**	Pages 8-9/ Line 140-163
<b>Ethical issues pertaining to human subjects</b> - Documentation of approval by an appropriate ethics review board and participant consent, or explanation for lack thereof; other confidentiality and data security issues	Page 7/ Line 116-120
<b>Data collection methods</b> - Types of data collected; details of data collection procedures including (as appropriate) start and stop dates of data collection and analysis, iterative process, triangulation of sources/methods, and modification of procedures in response to evolving study findings; rationale**	Pages 9 / Line 166-179,

<b>Data collection instruments and technologies</b> - Description of instruments (e.g., interview guides, questionnaires) and devices (e.g., audio recorders) used for data collection; if/how the instrument(s) changed over the course of the study	Pages 9, 10 / Line 167-170, 180-181
<b>Units of study</b> - Number and relevant characteristics of participants, documents, or events included in the study; level of participation (could be reported in results)	Page 12 /Line 206-213
<b>Data processing</b> - Methods for processing data prior to and during analysis, including transcription, data entry, data management and security, verification of data integrity, data coding, and anonymization/de-identification of excerpts	Pages 10/ Line 183-192
<b>Data analysis</b> - Process by which inferences, themes, etc., were identified and developed, including the researchers involved in data analysis; usually references a specific paradigm or approach; rationale**	Pages 10 -11/ Line 193-201
<b>Techniques to enhance trustworthiness</b> - Techniques to enhance trustworthiness and credibility of data analysis (e.g., member checking, audit trail, triangulation); rationale**	Page 11/ Line 202-204

Results/findings

<b>Synthesis and interpretation</b> - Main findings (e.g., interpretations, inferences, and themes); might include development of a theory or model, or integration with prior research or theory	Pages 12/ Lines 214-217
<b>Links to empirical data</b> - Evidence (e.g., quotes, field notes, text excerpts, photographs) to substantiate analytic findings	Pages 12-18/ Lines 219-354

Discussion

<b>Integration with prior work, implications, transferability, and contribution(s) to the field</b> - Short summary of main findings; explanation of how findings and conclusions connect to, support, elaborate on, or challenge conclusions of earlier scholarship; discussion of scope of application/generalizability; identification of unique contribution(s) to scholarship in a discipline or field	Page 19 - 22/ Lines 357-447
<b>Limitations</b> - Trustworthiness and limitations of findings	Page 22-23/ Lines 449-462

Other

<b>Conflicts of interest</b> - Potential sources of influence or perceived influence on study conduct and conclusions; how these were managed	Page 1/Line 20
<b>Funding</b> - Sources of funding and other support; role of funders in data collection, interpretation, and reporting	Page 1/ Line 17-19

\*The authors created the SRQR by searching the literature to identify guidelines, reporting standards, and critical appraisal criteria for qualitative research; reviewing the reference lists of retrieved sources; and contacting experts to gain feedback. The SRQR aims to improve the transparency of all aspects of qualitative research by providing clear standards for reporting qualitative research.

\*\*The rationale should briefly discuss the justification for choosing that theory, approach, method, or technique rather than other options available, the assumptions and limitations implicit in those choices, and how those choices influence study conclusions and transferability. As appropriate, the rationale for several items might be discussed together.

**Reference:**

O'Brien BC, Harris IB, Beckman TJ, Reed DA, Cook DA. **Standards for reporting qualitative research: a synthesis of recommendations.** *Academic Medicine*, Vol. 89, No. 9 / Sept 2014  
DOI: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000000388

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# BMJ Open

## The sociocultural aspects of takeaway food consumption in a low-socio-economic ward in Manchester: A grounded theory study.

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Date Submitted by the Author:	02-Jan-2019
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<b>Primary Subject Heading</b>:	Public health
Secondary Subject Heading:	Qualitative research
Keywords:	PUBLIC HEALTH, Health policy < HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION & MANAGEMENT, QUALITATIVE RESEARCH, NUTRITION & DIETETICS

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**Title:** The sociocultural aspects of takeaway food consumption in a low-socio-economic ward in Manchester: A grounded theory study.

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**Author contribution:** JB collected data, performed the qualitative analysis and wrote the first draft of the paper, RG designed the methods, secured the funding and directed the qualitative research, SP contributed to the analysis of qualitative data and edited drafts and IGD contributed to interpretation of data.

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in the paper are that of the authors and not of any institution or funding body

**Data Sharing:** Deidentified transcript data are available by email from [jennyblow1@outlook.com](mailto:jennyblow1@outlook.com)

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25 **Number of figures and tables:** Tables 0, figures 1

26 **Abbreviation list:** Grounded Theory (GT)

27 **Keywords:** qualitative research, food choice, takeaway outlets, environment, choice

28 architecture

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**Abstract**

**Objectives**

Takeaway foods form a growing proportion of the UK diet. This consumption is linked with poor health outcomes due to their adverse nutritional profile. However, there is little research regarding the sociocultural context surrounding the consumption of takeaway meals. This research aimed to explore the sociocultural factors that influence the consumption of takeaway foods.

**Design**

The study employed constructivist grounded theory (GT) methodology. Data were collected using one-to-one semi-structured interviews from an inner-city area of Manchester (Rusholme). Data sorting and analysis was implemented using the GT constant comparative method.

**Setting**

Rusholme, Manchester, UK

**Participants**

Adult participants (aged 18 to 65 years) consuming takeaway meals at least once/month were recruited using social media and community settings.

**Results**

Thirteen participants were interviewed (female 69%, mean age=38 years). Three superordinate themes were derived from data: Social Factors, Personal Factors and Resources. Social Factors included the influence of routines and traditions, influential others and a sense of community in the bonding and affirming of relationships. Personal Factors explored the subordinate themes of controlling damage and values relating to food choice. The third theme Resources included time, availability, cost and quality.

## 54 Conclusion

55 This study shows the sociocultural influences on food choice decisions are complex  
56 and may go beyond access and availability. Any policy change to limit takeaway  
57 consumption should acknowledge these vital processes in food choice to inform  
58 targeted effective approaches.

## 60 **Strengths and limitations of this study**

- 61 • The methods used here are ideally placed to understand the complexity of the  
62 interaction between food choices, geographical environment and socio-economic  
63 factors
- 64 • Very little is known about peoples' experiences of take away foods. Research in  
65 this area is essential to inform appropriate behaviour change interventions that  
66 address a growing need for takeaway meals.
- 67 • The findings are specific to the people involved in this study, however the use of  
68 grounded theory allows themes to transcend beyond basic description and to  
69 resonate with other similar situations and locations

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**Introduction**

The UK has a well-recognised childhood and adult obesity epidemic, amplified in lower socio-economic groups<sup>(1)</sup>. Of particular concern is the availability and access to takeaway meals, which are known to contain an adverse nutritional profile <sup>(2, 3)</sup>. Within disadvantaged areas they have been linked with increased consumption <sup>(4)</sup> and a rise in obesity <sup>(5, 6)</sup>. Takeaway and fast-foods now make up approximately 21% of the UK diet with adults aged under 30 and children being the most frequent consumers <sup>(7)</sup>.

Manchester City Council (MCC) has been ranked 8th of 325 local authorities in England for the highest quantity of takeaway outlets per 100,000 people by local authority, and contains a significantly higher number of outlets than the England average<sup>(8)</sup>. The Rusholme ward of Manchester is a densely populated residential area, with a large proportion of young students and South Asian residents. Rusholme is comprised of many restaurants and takeaway establishments known locally as the ‘Curry Mile’. The National Planning Policy Framework<sup>(9)</sup> suggested that local authorities could use planning permission to control the proliferation of takeaway outlets. MCC have therefore proposed to deny planning permission for new takeaway outlets in particular where they are already densely concentrated near to schools, as well as controlling opening hours<sup>(8)</sup>.

Altering the physical takeaway food environment is one method of taking control of the physical environmental influences on food choice yet research from Australia and the USA show that presence of fast-food and or takeaway outlets are not always associated with their consumption <sup>(10-13)</sup>. Although a Canadian study showed fast-food consumption was attributable to proximity of outlets <sup>(14)</sup>, two recent systematic reviews show that the presence of additional grocery outlets and thus widening food access

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3 95 does not necessarily correlate with long-term changes in food choices <sup>(15, 16)</sup>.  
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5 96 Therefore, this suggest wider sociocultural (such as cultural identity, social norms,  
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7 97 attitudes and beliefs) and economic influences need to be explored <sup>(7, 17, 18)</sup>. Qualitative  
8  
9 98 methods are aptly suited to consider this, whilst there has been a study considering  
10  
11 99 takeaway owners' and managers' opinions to consumer demand in a low income  
12  
13 100 neighbourhood of Scotland, there is limited evidence exploring the reasons behind  
14  
15 101 takeaway consumption from consumers <sup>(19)</sup>. Consideration of sociocultural issues is  
16  
17 102 essential for the implementation of effective, multi-dimensional intervention strategies.  
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22 103 Therefore, the aim of this research was to explore the sociocultural experiences of  
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24 104 takeaway food consumers in Rusholme, Manchester, to gain a deeper understanding  
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27 105 of the sociocultural factors involved in takeaway food consumption.  
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**Methods**

A qualitative perspective was used to explore influences on takeaway food choice<sup>(20)</sup>. A constructivist grounded theory (GT) approach was undertaken in order to inform theory in this less widely researched area. Grounded theory (GT) is a systematic research method that guides the collection and analysis of qualitative data in order to form a theory which is not preconceived by existing theories within the literature, but is ‘grounded’ within data<sup>(21)</sup>. Taking a constructivist methodological perspective to GT allows the investigation of the symbolic meanings that influences the choice to eat takeaway food, along with the processes participants undertake to enact such choices<sup>(21)</sup>. In essence constructivist GT is used to explore social phenomena<sup>(22)</sup> which are known to be involved in the context of food choice<sup>(23)</sup>.

**Ethics and confidentiality**

The study obtained ethical approval from Manchester Metropolitan University, Hollings Department. All participant names used in this report are pseudonyms in order to protect anonymity. Participants were informed of the purpose and nature of the study before consenting.

**Patient and Public Involvement**

No patients were involved in this study and participants were free-living individuals. Participants were not involved in the development of the research question however, they were central to the inductive nature of this GT research and were involved in the evolution of the interview questions. These results will be disseminated during a community engagement event.

## 129 **Research setting**

130 This research conducted in the electoral ward of Rusholme, located two miles south  
131 of Manchester City Centre. The majority of Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOA)  
132 within Rusholme are in the top 31 - 40% most deprived in England<sup>(24)</sup>. In Manchester  
133 26% of adults and children are classed as obese; higher than the England averages  
134 of 23% and 19.1%, respectively<sup>(25)</sup>. Rusholme has a high prevalence of childhood  
135 overweight and obesity, with 42.5% of year 6 children estimated to be obese<sup>(26)</sup>.  
136 Rusholme is predominantly residential with a large number of takeaway and restaurant  
137 establishments. The population profile comprises of predominantly students and a  
138 large mixed ethnic profile of South Asian, Iranian, Kurdish, Lebanese and other Middle  
139 Eastern immigrants<sup>(27)</sup>.

## 141 **Sampling and recruitment**

142 Participants were included if they met the following criteria; aged 18 – 65, consumed  
143 takeaway foods at least once per month, and resided in Rusholme. Participants were  
144 recruited in two ways. Firstly, the study was advertised using a dedicated Facebook  
145 page (Facebook Inc., California, USA) and the page was posted into various Facebook  
146 groups known to be based in Manchester, including two sports club groups (for all  
147 ages) and five university-based societies. Secondly, a community centre within  
148 Rusholme was visited three times during adult social group meetings and children's  
149 playgroups, and a poster was attached to the community centre board, between June  
150 2016 and October 2016. Members of the Facebook groups (n = 2760), and 27 people  
151 were directly approached at the community centre. This combined strategy was used  
152 to target both students and local residents within Rusholme. Participants were

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previously not known to the researcher and steps were taken to ensure reciprocity and to address any “power-imbalance” with agreed interview times and use of simplified but not patronising language. Detailed research logs were kept that evidenced theoretical discussions and personal reflections.

Theoretical (purposive) sampling was used as per grounded theory<sup>(22)</sup>, initially using the above selection criteria. Once a number of interviews had taken place, they were transcribed by hand verbatim and data analysed (JB). A theoretical sampling strategy was used based upon missing information within nascent categories in order to explore those categories in further depth and to narrow focus<sup>(21)</sup>.

A subjective judgement of theoretical saturation was employed. Data collection ceased when no new properties were emerging from interviews and were remaining within the scope of the research aims<sup>(28)</sup>.

**Data Collection**

*Interviews*

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were performed in Rusholme between June and October 2016, carried out by JB, each lasting 30-60 minutes. A semi-structured interview guide was used and treated as a flexible tool to follow up leads and develop theoretical categories<sup>(21, 28, 29)</sup>. The first interview guide was designed by JB (see supplementary data file), encompassing topics considered as important, including examples of follow-up questions. Follow up questions were designed to avoid being direct and intrusive questions such as “why do you do that?”. Instead, follow-up questions were designed to allude to the ‘why’, but imply the interviewer’s acceptance, such as “can you tell me more about that?” and “how does that affect you?”. Other follow-up questions were designed to elicit participant’s meanings of their terms and

177 feelings about events and situations that they described, as in constructivism<sup>(21)</sup>.  
178 Finally, questions were designed to elicit information about process and sequence, an  
179 important part of GT methodology<sup>(29)</sup>, such as “when...” and “what happens before  
180 and after?”.

181 The interview recordings were anonymised by removing identifying details. Each  
182 participant was interviewed once, which was subsequently transcribed.

### 183 *Data sorting and analysis*

184 Data sorting and analysis used the GT constant comparative method, moving between  
185 the four major processes of coding: memoing, developing categories, and theoretical  
186 sorting<sup>(21, 29, 30)</sup>.

187 Codes were derived from data. Two-step coding was used; initial coding and focused  
188 coding. The initial codes were applied to fragments of data, incident by incident. A  
189 code was applied for more or less every sentence. The codes were applied by  
190 summarising elements such as the actions and processes, feelings, meanings and  
191 relationships described by the participant. The coding process also provided an  
192 opportunity to indicate questions about data and identify missing information, which  
193 were explored in further interviews i.e the iterative process.

194 The final process was theoretical sorting where theoretical links were transferred into  
195 NVivo 10 (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia). The most significant or frequent  
196 codes or groups of codes, were then identified and either raised to focused codes or  
197 recoded individually. Application of the ‘constant comparative’ method aided the  
198 identification of theoretical links between conceptual categories, their relationships  
199 and hierarchical order. These links had been identified during the coding and memoing  
200 processes where participants had explicitly or implicitly alluded to them. When a

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201 particular order made analytic sense and still remained grounded within data, a  
202 theoretical diagram was made<sup>(21, 30-32)</sup>.  
203 A sample of the analysis (approx. 50%) were cross-checked for transparency amongst  
204 the research team to determine whether the codes could be interpreted in the same  
205 way<sup>(33)</sup>.

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## 206 **Results**

207 Thirteen participants were interviewed. Interviews were carried out in community  
208 centres (n=3), playgroups (n=5), and on a university campus (n=5). Participants mean  
209 age was 38 years (SD=13.0) and 69% of participants were female (n=9). Six  
210 participants had children (under 18 years old) and 4 participants did not have children.  
211 All participants had been educated to secondary school level with 8 either studying for  
212 or attained an undergraduate degree or higher. With respect to consumption, 38%  
213 (n=5) participants ate takeaway food every month, 57% (n=7) 1-2 times per week, and  
214 1 participant 3-6 times per week.

215 Following the analysis, using the constant comparative methods and identifying  
216 theoretical links, three superordinate themes were identified and labelled as follows:  
217 Social Factors, Personal Factors and Resources, based on the subordinate themes  
218 which is visually represented in Figure 1.

### 220 **Social Factors**

#### 221 *Bonding with others*

222 Participants demonstrated how takeaway food supports social relationships,  
223 particularly suitable for hedonistic acts of sharing food and as a marker of social  
224 belonging and intimacy. They were also an important part of youth night-time drinking  
225 culture, used to support social bonding and symbolise hedonism and group identity.

226 Emma, 26, consumes takeaway food as a way of bonding with an old friend.

227 "It's about bringing people together. That's what it's about isn't it. That's what  
228 pizza does for me and Julia". Emma continued. . . "in terms of people coming

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3 229 together, it's a lot easier for people to be like, come on, let's just chuck a fiver  
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5 230 in and get a load of food and share it, as opposed to somebody having to give  
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8 231 up a lot of time to cook for a load of people . . . there's a lot more preparation  
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10 232 involved."

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13 233 *Being part of a community*

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16 234 Having positive relationships with local takeaway outlet owners was important to a  
17  
18 235 number of participants from a community perspective. Emma recently moved away  
19  
20 236 from her family home to study. She expressed that when she visits home there are  
21  
22 237 local takeaway outlets that she and her mother regularly visit, with whom they have  
23  
24 238 formed friendly relationships as local customers and local traders:

25  
26  
27  
28 239 "in your family environment, there's always that Chinese that you go to. You  
29  
30 240 have your chippy or your Indian or whatever it is. You're usually on first name  
31  
32 241 terms with the people that work there . . . She [Emma's mother] knows them,  
33  
34 242 she's on first name terms with them. She gave them a Christmas present....  
35  
36 243 Because it's your local environment and it's your community."

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40 244 *Routines and traditions*

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43 245 Consuming takeaway food socially formed an integral part of their regular routines and  
44  
45 246 traditions. Many participants discussed a continuation of such traditions from their  
46  
47 247 childhood, others had formed newer routines with their social network.

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51 248 Gabby, 55, recounted that eating fish and chips is a longstanding tradition of  
52  
53 249 her working-class family dating back to her childhood: "Fish and chips on a  
54  
55 250 Friday because that was what you did."

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## 252 *Influential others*

253 Gabby discussed the pressure that her stepdaughter and goddaughter experience to  
254 be seen by others eating in specific takeaway outlets that were endorsed by  
255 celebrities:

256 "I've got a stepdaughter and goddaughter and because they're brought up in  
257 the area, there's a lot of peer pressure...Archie's it's called. It's like a burger  
258 and shake bar. My goddaughter is 13 and she wants to go there, she doesn't  
259 even like burgers but she wants to go and have a shake and be seen in this  
260 place."

261 Emma described that she sometimes feels obliged to eat a takeaway with her mother  
262 as she suspects her mother would be offended if she refuses, even though Emma  
263 wishes to eat more healthily:

264 "... I don't want to step on my mum's toes and be like 'oh, I'm just going to buy  
265 my own food and eat what I like to eat' because she'll get a bit offended by that  
266 as well, so."

## 267 **Personal Factors**

### 268 *Values and Controlling damage*

269 Participants described considering a variety of values when making food-decisions,  
270 which were linked with the healthiness and guilt of consuming a takeaway such as the  
271 quality of the food, variety of ingredients and managing/reducing portion size. Where  
272 participants valued healthy eating, they discussed a method of 'damage-control'. If the  
273 participants or their children wanted takeaway food, damage-control meant still  
274 consuming takeaway food but selecting a healthier option.

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275 Robert, a father of two young girls, described his struggle with the dynamics of family  
276 food provision. Similarly, he expressed concern for eating healthily and used damage-  
277 control methods when getting takeaway food for him and his family:

278 “ . . . about quantity and quality control . . . sometimes you're never quite sure  
279 how much is going to turn up when you order something, and so we'll say  
280 *"Right, well, there's four of us, let's order for three and see how we get on"* . . .  
281 We choose our takeaways. Some, we know we get perhaps a nice salad that  
282 comes with it.”

283  
284 Jack described how he attempts to control the healthiness and portion size of  
285 takeaway food, as well as the frequency he consumes it; “If I have to go, I'll go for the  
286 least-worst option that I can,. . . if I can go without it for two months it's a bonus...”.  
287 Jack goes on to describe how he orders dishes that are smaller to limit the amount he  
288 consumes; “I eat the whole thing if I have a take away. I try to [order] small portions  
289 as well.”

290  
291 Amira indicated she accepts eating takeaway food twice per week as she mostly  
292 prepares food from scratch.

293 “Because five, six days a week I'm cooking at home, then I don't mind having a  
294 cheat twice a week.”

295 Laura, 34, stated that as long as takeaway food was of better quality, then she did not  
296 feel as guilty about eating it:

297 “If the food is better quality it seems at least more healthy and then I don't have  
298 to feel guilty about eating it.”

## 299 **Resources**

### 300 *Lacking or saving time*

301 The resource category included participants' perceived and not actual time availability  
302 that influenced their choice to purchase takeaway food.

303 This is exemplified by Sonia, a 56-year-old housewife who cooks Indian food daily.  
304 Sonia expressed her pleasure with the break from cooking and cleaning that Saturday  
305 night takeaway provides:

306 “It's a lot of work at home from scratch . . . First there's the cooking it, then  
307 there's the cleaning, then there's the smell in the house. There you've just  
308 ordered it and you've satisfied what you wanted to eat without the mess! So,  
309 I'm thinking takeaways are God-sends really. We even use plastic plates for  
310 convenience because a takeaway is just chuck everything in the bin, so there's  
311 nothing to wash. And that's great. You don't know how good that feels. When  
312 you just eat and just chuck everything in the bin and the kitchen's still tidy.”

313 Participants also cited that they purchased takeaway food when they felt it was too  
314 late to cook. A female participant with no children spoke about the lack of regular or  
315 appropriate length breaks during her shift work, describing it as too late to cook after  
316 a shift:

317 “We rarely get breaks, so for a 6-hour shift, we get a 10-minute break and you can't  
318 really eat much then, so I don't usually end up eating at work at all. So then right

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319 after that shift, obviously you're hungry and you've just missed a meal so that's why  
320 I end up going to get takeaway . . . It's too late even bother to cook something."

321

322 *Takeaway availability*

323 Participants discussed their exposure to takeaway outlets on travel routes and stated  
324 they consumed more takeaway food as a result. Jack exemplified what many of the  
325 participants had spoken about during interview:

326 "there are just so many just competing with each other that they're just saturated  
327 . . . There's no diversity of any kind of health . . . Plus, you have 24-hour pizzas  
328 now."

329 *Financial resources*

330 When asked about buying takeaway food, most participants referred to takeaway  
331 foods as expensive. The unprompted topic of getting 'value for money' emerged  
332 frequently, however, the definitions of 'value for money' were diverse amongst the  
333 sample.

334 Gabby talks about "training" her family in portions sizes however this is sometimes  
335 over-ridden in the case of a takeaway. Gabby referred to her strategy of obtaining the  
336 full value of her takeaway by consuming the entire portion, even though she perceives  
337 it as too large: ". . . a portion size should be no bigger than your palm, like your fist . .  
338 . but if my takeaway comes and I paid for it, I'm going to eat it all". Gabby goes on to  
339 describe that her son will save any leftovers for another time if the portion size is too  
340 much "and he will do the same or he'll put it away and later on he'll go and warm it up  
341 again".

342

343 Charles, did not express any financial hardship. When asked about his thoughts on  
344 the price of takeaway food, he associated value for money with food quality:

345 “I just can compare it to where I'm actually from, I think here it is a bit more  
346 expensive but I think the quality is bit better. It's not just the food you can buy  
347 everywhere, so I think the value for money here is actually quite good.”

348

### 349 *Cooking skills vs variety*

350 Nutritional knowledge and cooking skills were mentioned, but the participants desired  
351 a variety of food that they could not or did not want to make at home, causing them to  
352 seek takeaway foods. Anthony explained that he often cooks for himself and his wife,  
353 he comments;

354 “I think it's the variety with a Chinese. It's the fact that you can get duck and  
355 things like that – stuff you just wouldn't normally eat and the MSG probably.”

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**Discussion**

This qualitative study of consumers’ sociocultural attitudes towards takeaway food consumption revealed several aspects influencing their consumption; similar to other research convenience, time-saving and on-demand access were important themes however, experiences of social norms, bonding, sharing and a sense of community were also described. To our knowledge, this is the first study in the UK that has uniquely described these sociocultural concepts and the complex interplay of the decision making process when it comes to takeaway foods.

This study showed that sharing a single takeaway meal was used as a way to bond and affirm relationships, and the large portion sizes generally associated with takeaway foods were well-suited for sharing. Takeaway meals appeared to mark boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in social events such as meeting friends, birthdays, anniversaries etc. and were observed to be markers of social belonging and intimacy<sup>(34)</sup>. This is supported by findings previously showing shared fast-food consumption habits amongst social groups <sup>(35)</sup>. The notion of social sharing could be due to the influence of advertisements (consider HungryHouse™, JustEat™) or the increasing centrality of unhealthy foods in social contexts thus integrating such eating habits into youth culture<sup>(36)</sup>.

Local commercial areas can represent a place for social interaction<sup>(37)</sup> and findings of the present study show outlet owners/employees were considered within this definition of ‘community’. The local takeaway provided a sense of belonging and an opportunity for social interaction. Previous research is in support of these findings suggesting that the sense of community as a result of urban space and neighbourhood layout can enhance feelings of belonging and community identity<sup>(38)</sup>. Therefore, residents feel it

381 is not only that they form the local community, but also local businesses including  
382 takeaways.

383 For many of the participants in the study, weekend takeaway consumption had  
384 become engrained into routines and traditions, for example a meal after a night out  
385 with friends, fish and chips on a Friday or pizza nights. People develop eating  
386 routines<sup>(39)</sup> and scripts<sup>(40)</sup> in order to simplify daily food decisions. This was described  
387 by participants who had traditions dating back to their childhood but also newer  
388 traditions within present social settings. It is important to be aware that these routines  
389 and traditions form a social function and by doing so legitimises their consumption<sup>(41)</sup>.

390 The present research observed that participants took on others eating practices due  
391 to established social norms, the influence of others or because of a sense of  
392 obligation<sup>(42)</sup>. One participant articulated this explaining the perceived pressure from  
393 peers to be seen in certain establishments specifically for younger people. Similar  
394 reports were found in the study of school children in Tower Hamlets<sup>(43)</sup> which stated  
395 not only hunger and value for money but more importantly that their friends were using  
396 the fast-food outlets. Adopted social norms and fashions are important influences on  
397 food choices and this needs to be considered in terms of why people consume  
398 takeaway foods<sup>(44)</sup>. Thus any policies and interventions aimed at reducing children's  
399 fast-food consumption would need to consider this key influencer.

400 Values such as health linked with food quality, variety and portion size, were all  
401 identified as important in this research, as shown elsewhere in relation to convenience  
402 foods<sup>(45-47)</sup>. Our research reported the compensatory behaviours, both for themselves  
403 and their children, either to limit the "damage" by making healthier choices at the  
404 takeaway or mentally rationalising their behaviour, a finding that is supported by a

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previous qualitative study<sup>(48)</sup>. This enabled participants to partake in indulgent behaviour without experiencing the feelings of guilt associated with such behaviour. This “compensatory health belief” indicates that people are aware of the negative health effects of takeaway meals. What this does show is that although there is a concern for health among consumers, there is no desire to eliminate takeaway foods from their diet. This contradiction between knowledge and behaviour in relation to fast-food intake has been reported by an Australian qualitative study<sup>(49)</sup>. Once again highlighting that health education in itself is not sufficient to change behaviours<sup>(50)</sup>.

A key subordinate theme emerged around perceived time available for preparing meals. Takeaways were relied upon by shift-workers, also highlighted by a report<sup>(51)</sup>, in that fast-food outlets tend to be one of the few outlets open late at night. Takeaways were used to make more time available for both essential and non-essential activities and, interestingly, also as a form of weekend respite from usual weekday duties for those most burdened by household tasks. Although fast-food outlets and the workforce have been considered from a feminist perspective, this shows the role they may also place in reducing women’s domestic labour<sup>(52)</sup>.

In the present study, late at night was a key time for consumption where availability of and exposure to takeaway foods is highest and access to healthier, pre-prepared meals is restricted as shown by others investigating proximity of takeaway establishments<sup>(53-55)</sup>. Further evidence shows exposure to outlets is positively associated with takeaway consumption, BMI and obesity risk, with evidence of a dose-response effect<sup>(56)</sup>. The geographical environment in which individuals exist is proposed to play a pivotal role in shaping food choices however the link is not direct<sup>(57)</sup>.

Participants financial motivations to buy takeaways appeared to be dependent upon two interrelated factors: actual financial resource availability and value for money. The participants that expressed financial hardship tended to associate value for money with the quantity of food, whereas the participants that did not express financial hardship tended to associate value for money with the quality and variety of food. This supports the notion that, basic needs are required to be fulfilled (quantity of food) before additional needs can be considered (quality of food)<sup>(58, 59)</sup>.

This study highlights the sociocultural aspects of takeaway food consumption, which need consideration to develop acceptable and effective interventions and policies. Although planning restrictions will reduce the proliferation of these outlets, that alone may not reduce the consumption. The key features in terms of time-saving, large portion sizes and cost, along with fostering bonds and forming traditions suggest that habits have already been made. Yet one aspect that did not surface in our research was the desire to eat unhealthy food and the omission of this raises the possibility of public health interventions, which encourage the availability of healthier alternatives within the takeaway food sector, through food development, menu planning, menu analysis and training. In order for such intervention to be effective the views and attitudes of takeaway outlet owners and staff would need to be evaluated. Nonetheless, public health interventions should be such to observe the sociocultural aspects of takeaway food consumption.

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### 449 *Strengths and limitations*

A number of strengths of this research should be recognised. Firstly, this is the first study to consider specifically the socio-cultural aspects of takeaway consumption.

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This study uses a very clear definition of takeaway food as opposed to others who have considered either only fast-food or a combination of both. This is particularly important due to the proliferation and abundance of takeaway establishments in the UK. The use of GT methodology in this study has allowed the analysis to remain ‘grounded’ within data, yet it transcends descriptive accounts and instead accounts for social processes that are happening in data<sup>(21)</sup>. The findings are therefore useful in other food choice contexts. However, these findings are specific to the people involved in this study, in particular participants who consumed takeaway food regularly were more likely to relay unsubstantiated opinion and speak for others as such the inherent limitations of qualitative research in wider impact is acknowledge although these findings will resonate with other similar situations and locations.

**Conclusion**

Numerous local sensitivities have been identified in this study, adding to the evidence base. For example, takeaway meals fostering family bonds, providing respite for mothers, for a sense of familiarity and maintaining cultural norms in an ethnically diverse area of Manchester. These novel findings could suggest that healthier options may satisfy all of these criteria. However, the role of takeaway food as a treat or hedonistic indulgence could mean that healthier alternatives may not reduce their consumption. Public health strategies, including changes to planning applications, need to be flexible and consider the sociocultural phenomena found in the present study to devise effective and acceptable policies.

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633 **Figure 1.** Thematic map of takeaway meal consumption influences

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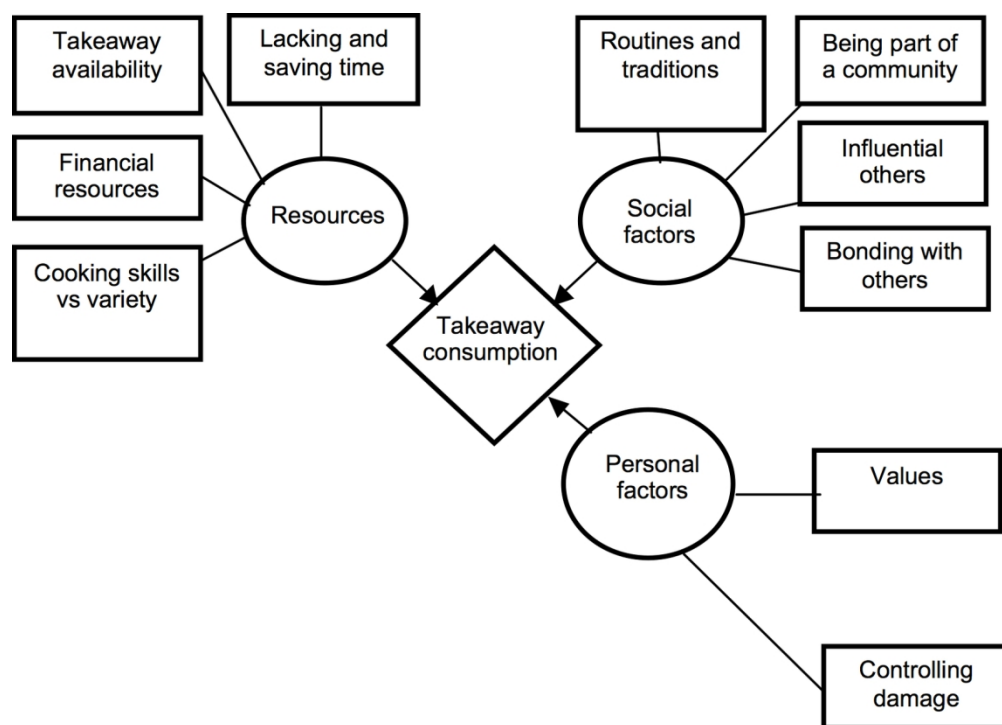


Figure 1. Thematic map of takeaway meal consumption influences

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**Interview Guide**

- Investigator to introduce participant to the research topic and talk through participant information sheet and informed consent

**Question topics**

**Behaviour:**

- General meal/snack consumption patterns
- Cooking habits
- Type of takeaway meals consumed (cuisine and specific meals) and why
- Context (when/where/who with/how much consumed/what for i.e. meal/snack)
- Reasons for takeaway food consumption
- Visits to particular outlets and why
- How obtain takeaway foods e.g. travel to outlet (if so, how), home delivery
- Social role in household

**Beliefs and feelings:**

- Food and health
- Nutritional value of takeaway foods
- Attitudes towards healthier options
- Mood and feelings before/whilst/after takeaway food consumption
- Facilitating/impeding factors of takeaway food consumption
- Availability i.e. density of outlets in neighbourhood
- Acceptability of takeaway foods
- Affordability of takeaways foods and healthy foods

**Probe examples:**

Tell me about...  
How...  
What...  
When...  
Could you describe X further?  
What is that like?  
How does that affect you?  
When do you most...  
How does that compare with...  
How do you feel when...  
What does that mean to you?

# Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR)\*

<http://www.equator-network.org/reporting-guidelines/srqr/>

Page/line no(s).

## Title and abstract

<b>Title</b> - Concise description of the nature and topic of the study Identifying the study as qualitative or indicating the approach (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory) or data collection methods (e.g., interview, focus group) is recommended	Page 1/ Line 1 & 2
<b>Abstract</b> - Summary of key elements of the study using the abstract format of the intended publication; typically includes background, purpose, methods, results, and conclusions	Page 3/ Line 28-57

## Introduction

<b>Problem formulation</b> - Description and significance of the problem/phenomenon studied; review of relevant theory and empirical work; problem statement	Page 5 – 6/ Line 70-101
<b>Purpose or research question</b> - Purpose of the study and specific objectives or questions	Page 6/ Line 102-104

## Methods

<b>Qualitative approach and research paradigm</b> - Qualitative approach (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory, case study, phenomenology, narrative research) and guiding theory if appropriate; identifying the research paradigm (e.g., postpositivist, constructivist/ interpretivist) is also recommended; rationale**	Page 7/ Line 106-115
<b>Researcher characteristics and reflexivity</b> - Researchers' characteristics that may influence the research, including personal attributes, qualifications/experience, relationship with participants, assumptions, and/or presuppositions; potential or actual interaction between researchers' characteristics and the research questions, approach, methods, results, and/or transferability	Page 8-9/ Line 151-155
<b>Context</b> - Setting/site and salient contextual factors; rationale**	Page 7-8/ Line 106-138
<b>Sampling strategy</b> - How and why research participants, documents, or events were selected; criteria for deciding when no further sampling was necessary (e.g., sampling saturation); rationale**	Pages 8-9/ Line 140-163
<b>Ethical issues pertaining to human subjects</b> - Documentation of approval by an appropriate ethics review board and participant consent, or explanation for lack thereof; other confidentiality and data security issues	Page 7/ Line 116-120
<b>Data collection methods</b> - Types of data collected; details of data collection procedures including (as appropriate) start and stop dates of data collection and analysis, iterative process, triangulation of sources/methods, and modification of procedures in response to evolving study findings; rationale**	Pages 9 / Line 166-179,

<b>Data collection instruments and technologies</b> - Description of instruments (e.g., interview guides, questionnaires) and devices (e.g., audio recorders) used for data collection; if/how the instrument(s) changed over the course of the study	Pages 9, 10 / Line 167-170, 180-181
<b>Units of study</b> - Number and relevant characteristics of participants, documents, or events included in the study; level of participation (could be reported in results)	Page 12 /Line 206-213
<b>Data processing</b> - Methods for processing data prior to and during analysis, including transcription, data entry, data management and security, verification of data integrity, data coding, and anonymization/de-identification of excerpts	Pages 10/ Line 183-192
<b>Data analysis</b> - Process by which inferences, themes, etc., were identified and developed, including the researchers involved in data analysis; usually references a specific paradigm or approach; rationale**	Pages 10 -11/ Line 193-201
<b>Techniques to enhance trustworthiness</b> - Techniques to enhance trustworthiness and credibility of data analysis (e.g., member checking, audit trail, triangulation); rationale**	Page 11/ Line 202-204

Results/findings

<b>Synthesis and interpretation</b> - Main findings (e.g., interpretations, inferences, and themes); might include development of a theory or model, or integration with prior research or theory	Pages 12/ Lines 214-217
<b>Links to empirical data</b> - Evidence (e.g., quotes, field notes, text excerpts, photographs) to substantiate analytic findings	Pages 12-18/ Lines 219-354

Discussion

<b>Integration with prior work, implications, transferability, and contribution(s) to the field</b> - Short summary of main findings; explanation of how findings and conclusions connect to, support, elaborate on, or challenge conclusions of earlier scholarship; discussion of scope of application/generalizability; identification of unique contribution(s) to scholarship in a discipline or field	Page 19 - 22/ Lines 357-447
<b>Limitations</b> - Trustworthiness and limitations of findings	Page 22-23/ Lines 449-462

Other

<b>Conflicts of interest</b> - Potential sources of influence or perceived influence on study conduct and conclusions; how these were managed	Page 1/Line 20
<b>Funding</b> - Sources of funding and other support; role of funders in data collection, interpretation, and reporting	Page 1/ Line 17-19

\*The authors created the SRQR by searching the literature to identify guidelines, reporting standards, and critical appraisal criteria for qualitative research; reviewing the reference lists of retrieved sources; and contacting experts to gain feedback. The SRQR aims to improve the transparency of all aspects of qualitative research by providing clear standards for reporting qualitative research.

\*\*The rationale should briefly discuss the justification for choosing that theory, approach, method, or technique rather than other options available, the assumptions and limitations implicit in those choices, and how those choices influence study conclusions and transferability. As appropriate, the rationale for several items might be discussed together.

**Reference:**

O'Brien BC, Harris IB, Beckman TJ, Reed DA, Cook DA. **Standards for reporting qualitative research: a synthesis of recommendations.** *Academic Medicine*, Vol. 89, No. 9 / Sept 2014  
DOI: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000000388

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