Foodwork as re-articulation of women’s in/visible work: a study of food allergy blogs

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Foodwork as re-articulation of women’s in/visible work:

A study of food allergy blogs

Piera Morlacchi
Department of Management
University of Sussex Business School
University of Sussex
Falmer, Brighton BN1 9RH, United Kingdom
Email: p.morlacchi@sussex.ac.uk

This article advances our understanding of foodwork as the organization of women’s work and racialized, gendered, and classed inequalities in the provisioning, preparation, and consumption of food. Drawing on notions of the in/visibility of women’s work, I conceptualize foodwork as the articulation of visible and invisible women’s work in the social organization of everyday food practices. The analysis of three blogs, written by women with, or mothers of children with, food allergies, provides a glimpse into the everyday living with food allergy. The investigation of the actual practices of allergy foodwork shows that they are interactive and intersectional patterns of work and make everyday life possible. The paper maps directions for research to explore how foodwork could be organized differently starting from the transformative potential of everyday food practices, blogs, and food allergy.

Keywords: foodwork, in/visible work, articulation work, women’s work, blogs, food allergy.

Forthcoming in Gender Work and Organization.
INTRODUCTION

What Allergy is designed to be a helpful source of hints and tips for leading a happy and stress-free life; coping with food and everyday intolerances and allergies. Please feel free to comment and share your experiences with me. I would love to hear from anyone who has found it hard coping. A problem shared is a problem aired. It really does help to chat as it can be very lonely and isolating. I wish you all happy and stress-free eating experiences. [‘Welcome to What Allergy’, 18/04/2009, What Allergy blog]

I’m Mum to a fully paid-up food allergic, EpiPen-toting tot. Current tally: egg, wheat, nuts, sesame, chickpeas, green peas and, yep, banana. Arrrggh. It’s early days and we’ve just started tiptoeing around this new, weird world of food allergy. Amazingly, while there are some great resources out there, there seems to be very little practical advice for day-to-day living with a food allergic child. This blog is an attempt to share my experiences and findings about everything from allergy-friendly recipes, products and places to go to the latest news and research. We live in London so it’ll be from a London perspective but I’ll try to chuck in any other info I find. One thing I promise is no handwringing here – it’s totally disorienting, of course, but the aim is not to let food allergy rule our lives. P.S.

In my other life I’m a former newspaper journalist turned freelance writer working from home (with baby underfoot). [‘What is all about?’, 22/01/2012, Yes No Bananas blog]

Hiya, thanks for stopping by! I am Kortney, and this is my Food Allergy blog. I’m anaphylactic to peanuts, tree nuts, and sesame seeds. We discovered my peanut allergy at the tender age of three months after a small taste of peanut butter ended in a trip to the hospital. As a kid, I would throw-up all the time and be cranky after eating. Now that we think back on it, this always happened after I ate something I am now allergic to. My complete food allergy list is extensive (at the bottom), but it has not stopped me from eating great food! I started this blog because I feel there aren’t enough adults talking about
how they deal with their food allergies. Allergy Girl Eats is about everyday life with food allergies, going out with allergies, and recipes that are allergy friendly. I hope to provide tips, tricks, and a sense of community to those who are dealing with food allergies. Disclaimer: I am not a trained chef or an allergy expert, but I want to share my experiences, so those with allergies know they aren’t alone. [‘Meet the Allergy Girl’, 2015, Allergy Girl Eats blog]

The quotations above are taken from three blogs that I study in this paper, which are written by women with, or mothers of children with, food allergies. They exemplify themes on what I call allergy foodwork. Every day we prepare food to eat and to feed others, but for some of us, those who are either born or became allergic, day-to-day living with food allergies means that ordinary activities like grocery shopping, eating at home and cooking, and eating out require additional time, effort, skills, and knowledge. The blogs draw attention to these overwhelmingly women’s activities that make everyday life and eating with food allergies possible, and the unequal consequences of not calling these activities work.

Feminist scholars have argued for an expansion of the concept of work as a crucial step toward social justice, starting from bringing women’s work more fully into view (Daniels, 1987; Smith, 1987). Redefining what counts as work remains central to critical theory and social change to tackle deeply entrenched inequalities (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016), and has been a key aim in this journal (Acker, 1998; Holvino, 2010; Rodriguez, Holvino, Fletcher, & Nkomo, 2016). As Elaine Swan, Maud Perrier, and Janet Sayers make clear in the call for the special issue, foodwork could extend our understanding of the organization of women’s work and racialized, gendered, and classed inequalities in the provisioning, preparation, and consumption of food. Drawing on feminist and intersectional scholars in food studies, who have developed a robust body of work on inequalities in women’s labour and organizing, as well as work on how gender, class, and race are done through doing food (Avakian & Haber,
they also point out that what has received less attention is the conceptualization of foodwork as a ‘separate form of work’ and how it can be studied through intersectional research (Swan, 2020; Swan, Perrier, & Sayers, 2018).

My approach to expand our conceptualization of foodwork is a variation on the feminist tradition of making women’s hidden work visible and shifts the focus onto how women’s work is still made invisible and deleted. The point of departure for many feminist food scholars to study foodwork as women’s work is Marjorie DeVault’s (1991) landmark study on feeding the family. I re-read her study with the aim of showing how she made feeding the family visible as work, and to highlight how women’s work runs the risk of becoming invisible in representations of foodwork. In order to do so, I bring DeVault into conversation with the feminist STS scholar Susan Leigh Star. Star’s work is best known in organization studies through her concept of boundary objects, but it is her understanding of work – as the link between the visible and the invisible – and conceptualization of articulation work (Star, 1991a, 1991b, 1994) that I wish to put in dialogue with DeVault’s (1991) understanding of feeding work. Drawing on DeVault’s and Star’s conceptualizations of the visibility and invisibility of women’s work, I reconceptualize foodwork as the multiple articulation of visible and invisible women’s work in the social organization of everyday foodwork practices, and I then develop a feminist lens to study foodwork as articulation work and intersecting inequalities.

The analysis of the three food allergy blogs introduced above demonstrates the usefulness of the conceptualization of foodwork I propose and provides a glimpse into the everyday living of women with food allergy. The investigation of the actual practices of allergy foodwork shows that they are interactive and intersectional patterns of invisible work and make everyday life possible. I conclude by mapping directions for research exploring how foodwork could be
organized differently, starting from the transformative potential of everyday food practices, blogs, and food allergy.

**FOODWORK AS ARTICULATION WORK AND IN/VISIBILITY**

In ground-breaking research, DeVault (1991) studied the everyday activities of making family meals. Articulating feeding the family as caring work – ‘doing for others’ – she explained why feeding the family is organized as women’s work and made feeding visible as work. DeVault argued that women do not choose or wish to care for others because it is supposedly an essential part of womanly character or identity. Rather, caring is socially organized as women’s work by family discourses, viewed as shared understandings and larger social relations of power that order women’s everyday activities (e.g. discourses like mothering that organize women’s responsibilities and norms for childcare). She elaborated the classed consequences of feeding as gendered work that results in women’s empowerment or oppression. What’s key to DeVault’s study is that she conceptualized family feeding work as skilful, complex, and multifaceted domestic care work that she viewed both as ‘doing work’ and as ‘doing gender and class’.

Many feminist food scholars who have grounded their work on DeVault’s (1991) study have focused on studying foodwork as ‘doing gender and/or doing class’, but, importantly for this article and as pointed out by the call for this special issue (Swan et al., 2018), they provided only limited attention to foodwork as ‘doing work’ or as a ‘separate form of work’, with its resulting oppressions, hierarchies, and inequalities (for instance, Cairns & Johnston, 2015; Parsons, 2015). I would like to contribute to opening up this space and to respond to the call by shifting our focus of studying foodwork towards a better understanding of how women’s work is made invisible and deleted from representations of foodwork.
To do so, I put DeVault in dialogue with Susan Leigh Star. DeVault and Star can be mobilized together because as feminist scholars they have started from the perspectives of everyday women’s lived experiences to problematize the systems of power that control women and other subordinated groups and produce intersecting inequalities, and to theorize the development of knowledge and epistemic resistance, social change, and justice (Code, 2014; DeVault, 1999, 2014; Star, 1994, 2007).

The in/visibility of work and articulation work

Star (1991a, 1991b, 1994) elaborates a feminist perspective that puts articulation work at the centre of understanding work and its invisibility in everyday life. She argues that work can be viewed as the link between the visible and the invisible (Star, 1991a). While we make work visible by defining some activities as work, and others as non-work, what counts as work is a matter of definition and varies a lot, with resulting tensions, negotiations, and consequences (Star & Strauss, 1999). There are different ways in which work can be in/visible or made in/visible, and it is important to understand how this happens.

As shown by Star, the invisibility of work can be used in two ways – the invisibility of ordinary work and workers and the invisibility of reified and abstracted work – and shows how those two types are interrelated. With Strauss (1999), she wrote a paper entitled ‘Layers of Silence, Arenas of Voices: The Ecology of Visible and Invisible Work’, which is a passioned call for making the skills and concerns of ordinary workers respected and taken into account in academia and in public discourse (Schmidt, 2015). In this paper they explore the concepts of the visibility and invisibility of work and extend these in three main directions: some work is invisible because it is not actually seen; it is ignored, kept secret, not defined or valued as work. Some workers are made invisible and become nonpersons by their perceived low social status (e.g. domestic workers), and others become background workers by virtue of routine and support services for others (e.g. nurses); both work and workers can become invisible through
the abstraction and manipulation of indicators of work (e.g. formal definitions of work and productivity indicators). A key theme across Star’s agenda is developing a special concern and respect for the deleted work and skills of ordinary workers, starting from the recovery of women’s work.

She builds on the concept of articulation work that was initially developed by Anselm Strauss and colleagues in studies of the social organization of medical work (Strauss, 1985; Strauss, Fagerhaugh, Suczek, & Wiener, 1985). They pointed to invisible work not captured in formal accounts and rationalized models of work that normally focus on routinized tasks and devalue certain categories of work (e.g. work that involves touching the bodies of others), for instance chronically ill patients and their families undertaking care work in their homes, which is invisible to the formal models of health care. Adding extra layers to the definitions, Strauss (1988) suggests that articulation work may be more accurately named ‘the articulation of work’. By this he means that articulation work is a constituent of the overarching process of ‘putting all the work elements together and keeping them together’.

With Elihu Gerson, Star framed articulation work as ‘the local adjustments that [make] work possible in practice … articulation consists of all the tasks needed to coordinate a particular task … no matter how detailed the requirements are, they must be aligned with or tailored to a set of implementation conditions that cannot be fully specified ahead of time’ and argued that the common thread in articulation work is making visible those activities that are not conceived as work but still require skill and knowledge (Gerson & Star, 1986, p. 258). Articulation practices are key in many jobs and work settings where the coordination and alignment of heterogeneous tasks are essential to get work done, e.g. nurses, technicians, project managers, and academics. Hence, the concept of articulation work has been used in different fields, such as computer-supported cooperative work and studies of service work and occupations, to study
invisible work done in real time to manage unanticipated contingencies in situated action (Hampson & Junor, 2005; Schmidt & Bannon, 1992).

However, Star augments this canonical understanding by reconceptualizing articulation work and its relationship with the invisibility of work from a feminist perspective in a series of related contributions (Star, 1991a, 1991b, 1994, 2007). She explains (1991b) how the invisibility of reified and abstracted work is related to articulation work in the organization of our socio-technological system. Working arrangements like standards, discourses, and other institutions are normally taken for granted and become reified and abstracted, i.e. ‘invisibles’. She problematizes standards and their relationships with power in technological systems to illustrate how the deletion of the work from our abstractions and formal models leads to the permanent need for articulation work, and the iterative and processual relationship between articulation work and other types of invisible work.

To do this, she uses her personal experience of being allergic to onions and eating out in restaurants like McDonald’s.¹ The standardization of food processing makes eating fast food challenging for people with an allergy to onions, like Star, who not only needs to explain the condition to waiters but also has to wait longer for her food and in many situations still has to unpick the onions from the served plate. For her, these practices lead to a certain experience of being marginalized, the need for in/visible work that is done by people who differ from the standard to be included in existing food systems, and the pain involved. In this explanation, Star views marginality as a state of existing in the spaces-in-between. A person with an allergy to onions coming into the McDonalds is not totally excluded, but she finds herself in the

¹ The subtitle of Star’s (1991b) article is ‘On being allergic to onions’, and it is referred to in the STS community as ‘the onion paper’ (Bowker, Timmermans, Clarke, & Balka, 2015).
unstable position of both being and not being served, and is often forced to deal with her problems by her own means (i.e. scraping the onions from her food). Moreover, she uses the term ‘marginality’ to refer to a wide range of groups, and not just to those marginalized by gender, race, class, and heteronormative systems. Finally, being allergic to onions is constructed as an anomaly in standardized food systems.

Star conceptualizes articulation work, marginalities, and anomalies and their relations processually and iteratively. Marginalities are viewed not only as pregiven positions but also as processes and consequences of socio-technical arrangements and their dynamics that create fluid forms of exclusion, where their relevance needs to be defined contextually and based on consequences, not antecedents (Timmermans, 2015). Differences such as gender, race, and class are not only abstract categories but also lived, experienced differences (Star, 2007). For Star, marginality and anomaly are dynamically linked. As she sharply put it, ‘you know that you don’t belong when what seems like an anomaly to you is natural for everyone else’ (Star, 1994/2015, p. 158). We can understand anomalies as interruptions of experiences and ways to trace articulation work and to explore the processes and consequences of being marginalized, i.e. of simply ‘not fitting in’.

Furthermore, Star offers an intersectional lens to recover and study the articulation work that is needed to manage the inequalities of our food systems from the perspectives of people who do this work. Starting from their concrete situations, experiences, and interpretations of anomalies, she challenges and denaturalizes the narratives of standardization and universality that pervade food systems and capture the multiplicity of people’s lived experiences. Star demonstrates how personal stories – like being allergic to onions and eating at McDonalds – can be re-stored as theoretical narratives and alternative ways to understand marginalization and intersecting inequalities.
In sum, Star elaborates an argument for what we can call a study of the ‘social organization of deleted work’, where articulation work is central to understanding the invisibility of work not only because it is mostly invisible but because the relationship between articulation work and other types of work (e.g. coordination work and abstraction work) is iterative and processual. The concept of articulation work focuses our attention on the perspectives, processes, consequences, and conditions under which certain forms of work and workers are made visible and invisible, and on power dynamics and inequalities. Star’s conceptualization of articulation work is intentionally multiple and multivocal because concepts ‘must be dynamic and reconfigurable (verbs, not nouns), yet not so indefinitely plastic that they lose individuation’ (Star, 1991a, p. 278). She understands and uses concepts like work, invisible work, and articulation work as sensitizing concepts to suggest directions along which to look, and not to provide prescriptions of what to see and to freeze their meanings and definitions into reified categories and abstractions.

**DeVault’s feeding the family as articulation work**

I now use articulation work as a lens to re-read DeVault’s study (1991) of feeding the family and to show how she makes work visible, and to highlight how women’s work can become invisible in representations of foodwork. DeVault explains that:

> Fully representing the work of ‘feeding the family’ then requires a kind of double vision: it means seeing the activity itself, and also the way the activity is constructed in public discourse. I have opened the book with an idealized, public image of feeding work … that image pointed to the complex continuing effort and skill to produce it. In the pages that followed, I introduced the reader to a group of actual women and men whose accounts, together, produce a much more complex view. [DeVault, 1991, p. 230]
This quote summarizes the purpose of her study, which is to ‘fully represent’ family feeding as work and to explain why feeding the family is organized as women’s work, and ‘the double vision’ is DeVault’s method to make the family feeding work visible.

DeVault provides feeding work as a theoretical image grounded in the lived experiences of a group of actual women who were doing feeding work and the family discourses that ordered their feeding activities as follows. Starting from a generous concept of work and seeing ‘everyday activities’ as problematic (Smith, 1987), central to her approach are the concepts of ‘caring as work’ and ‘social organization’. Viewing feeding the family as caring work, she studies the social organization of women’s caring work through texts in order to trace how gendered and classed family ideologies become part of everyday activities (e.g. family discourses). She directly examines these activities and how women experience them based on a series of interviews in which women provide accounts of their everyday activities. She conceptualizes three bundles of activities – doing family meals, provisioning, and constructing the family – as everyday practices and represents them as the work of feeding the family. She also makes visible the resulting classed inequalities and the maintenance of dominant family discourses through everyday food practices.

Furthermore, DeVault observes that feeding work is a form of invisible work because activities involved in meal preparation are rendered ‘invisible’. They are physical but mundane, familiar, and ordinary; they are mixed with other activities; they disappear when done well; and most of them are based on mental effort and interpersonal work that goes into planning, coordinating, and juggling to prepare a meal. Moreover, feeding work is articulated by family discourses as women’s responsibilities and made invisible using meaning work (i.e. discourses are viewed as shared understandings and abstractions).

DeVault generates a definition of feeding work as skilful, complex, and multifaceted domestic care work that captures and represents simultaneously ‘doing food’, ‘doing (care)work’, ‘doing
family’, and ‘doing gender and class’. By simply extending her definition of feeding work to conceptualizing foodwork or selectively focusing on elements of her definition (e.g. feeding work as doing gender), we run the risk that the gap between the concept and the lived experiences that it is supposed to reflect is becoming bigger than it should be, i.e. our conceptualization of foodwork becomes an abstraction that makes some forms of work and their workers visible and others invisible. My re-reading of DeVault’s (1991) feeding the family is that she instead proposed feeding work as a sensitizing concept and a feminist method to develop theoretical images that are grounded in and reflect actual experiences of foodwork.

**Reconceptualizing and studying foodwork**

Drawing on DeVault’s and Star’s understandings of the visibility and invisibility of women’s work, I conceptualize foodwork as the articulation of visible and invisible women’s work. I define the social organization of foodwork as discourses, standards, and other work arrangements that constitute and are constituted by everyday food practices (Bechky, 2011; DeVault, 1991; Gherardi, 2012; Star, 1991b). Depending on contexts and situations, work arrangements and practices can be viewed as static or dynamic (e.g. work arrangements as ongoing accomplishments that result from patterns of work), and their meanings can be shared or considered to be an ongoing negotiation among groups of people. Shared meanings can be theorized as the residues of previous interactions (Leibel, Hallett, & Bechky, 2018).

I take a processual and contextual approach to empirically study foodwork as articulation work and the social organization of everyday food practices. I employ articulation work as a sensitizing concept to direct attention to different forms in/visible work and their iterative and processual dynamics, and to the power embedded in the articulation of the visibility and invisibility of work. My focus is on anomalies in food systems and marginalities by conceptualizing them as experiences, processes, and consequences (Star, 1991b, 1994) and on studying food practices, anomalies, and marginalities from the perspectives of the ordinary
women who do the work involved. Food allergy is a suitable and convenient anomaly and research site to do so, as I explain next, together with the rest of the methodology.

**METHODOLOGY**

Food allergy has become a public problem in Western countries and is emerging as one in some developing countries (Atiim, Elliott, & Clarke, 2018; Page-Reeves, 2015). Some people are born with one or more food allergies, and some allergies can be overcome, but new ones can also be developed at any point in life, and we still do not know how this occurs. Food allergy is managed mostly through a food avoidance diet that, depending on the level of severity, can require significant changes in food habits.

The social organization of food allergy includes multiple stakeholders like people with food allergies, their families, health professionals, the food industry, health and food standard agencies, and many others. Standardization and normalization processes have sorted food allergies into categories of disease (e.g. food allergies, hypersensitivities, and intolerances), people (e.g. adults, children, and carers), and lists of allergens. Food allergy regulation has translated allergy risks into new label standards, restaurant codes of practice, and a new market opportunity for the food industry that, with the development of ‘free-from food’ products and related areas such as nutritional and testing services, has captured and commodified food allergies. In the UK, as in Europe and the US, industrialized food systems are organized by market capitalism and neoliberal ideologies and characterized by large social and economic inequalities where patriarchy, whiteness, and affluence are the default positions (Slocum & Saldanha, 2016). Food allergy reproduces and heightens these inequalities, which remain unexamined, especially from the perspective of people’s lived experiences (Nettleton, Woods, Burrows, & Kerr, 2010; Page-Reeves, 2015).
My positioning as a researcher in relation to the people involved in this study is shaped by being a white woman with an academic job and by my own experiences with food allergies. I was born with some minor allergies and intolerances, and since 2006 I have developed a life-threatening allergy to garlic. Although I have had a handful of anaphylaxes since then, I enjoy eating, cooking, and feeding others with or without allergies. I have also learned to understand and manage my allergies through the information, knowledge, and support provided by other people with food allergies that I have met offline and online. Moreover, in the last 10 years I have also conducted research on food allergy beyond the study that I discuss in this paper. I regularly attend professional and commercial events and read online sites related to food allergy, including different types of blogs. Thus, I have brought my several viewpoints in doing this study and writing the paper together with the perspectives of the three bloggers to study allergy foodwork from the standpoint of women who do this work.

Methods

In this paper I study allergy foodwork through a combination of textual and ethnographic approaches (Campbell, 2016; DeVault, 1991, 2017; Leibel et al., 2018). To understand the public discourse, I have analysed a series of texts about food allergy at the crossroads of the health domain (NHS Direct), the food sector (the Food Standard Agency, FSA; supermarket websites; and food allergy events like the Allergy Show), and the media (the BBC and The Guardian and Daily Mail newspapers). Furthermore, I have explored three food allergy blogs in order to study allergy foodwork as mediated everyday practices. Rather than focusing on ‘professional’ bloggers like journalists covering allergies or gluten-free bloggers with commercial sites, I have zoomed in on ‘personal’ bloggers, i.e. people who are living with food allergy – either personally or as carers of children with multiple food allergies – and writing from their own experiences. The overwhelming majority of the food allergy bloggers are women, so I selected three female bloggers to study. Based on information provided online at
the time of writing this paper, they have different professional occupations in addition to their blogs. An overview of the three food allergy blogs and their bloggers is presented in Table 1 below.

**TABLE 1 – HERE**

*Case 1: What Allergy (WA).* WA is an award-winning blog, based in the UK and started in 2009. It is one of the first allergy blogs. Ruth, the WA’s blogger, presents herself as an English white woman who has been living with multiple allergies – including some food allergies – since she was a child. The blog has a large audience and more than 100,000 monthly hits. Ruth runs a food allergy support group and she is well known in the UK allergy community.

*Case 2: Yes No Bananas (YNB).* YNB is a ‘food allergy mum blog’. Alexa describes herself as a mother who is caring for a child with food allergy and as a half Jewish and half Italian woman based in London. With a background in journalism, she started blogging when she was taking full-time care of her first son, who was diagnosed at five months with multiple food allergies. Alexa’s story as an allergy mum has been profiled in local media and online.

*Case 3: Allergy Girl Eats (AGE).* AGE is ‘a food allergy blog for people who love to eat, cook, and travel’. Kortney has had multiple life-threatening food allergies since she was a child, growing up in a Chinese Canadian family based in Toronto and now living and working in Berlin, Germany. In particular, since 2019 she has published a series of posts based on interviews with young adults who, like her, have grown up with experiences of multiple food allergies.

**Data collection.** For each blog I collected and analysed the ‘about page’ (or equivalent), all the blog posts (up to August 2019), and the comments and their replies. The ‘about page’ or the first blog usually introduces the blogger and the aim of the blog. The three authors started their blogs in different years (WH in 2009, YNB in 2012, and AGE in 2015) and they are all still
active sites, but with different regularities of posting. All of them reply very quickly to comments received by posts and some of them receive multiple comments (with a maximum of 20 to 30 comments). People post comments quite regularly; some of them are also food allergy bloggers. Reading through the posts and comments, I noted that there were some interactions between Ruth and Alexa. Moreover, to understand the perspectives of the bloggers and their experiences of living with food allergy beyond the content of their blogs, I collected additional data on each of them, including online profiles, interviews, talks, and other material (e.g. YouTube videos). Their LinkedIn profiles provide information about the bloggers’ professional experiences and backgrounds. They all have jobs where they undertake other digital media work in addition to blogging. In the analysis I have also used two talks about living with food allergy. The first is by Ruth, who was involved as speaker in a Houses of Parliament event on allergy in 2013, together with a consultant paediatric allergist and a general practitioner. Her talk is titled ‘Living with Multiple Life-Threatening Food Allergies’ and the audio-recording is available online. The second talk is one that Alexa gave in 2013 at a food industry event, where she was invited to represent ‘the allergy mum’, and it was titled ‘Do You Want My Family’s Business?’

**Data analysis and theorizing.** Based on an abductive approach (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014), I analysed the data with a focus on foodwork in everyday food practices and paid particular attention to gender, class, and race. Using a constant comparative approach, I coded

2 The talk and slides are publicly available online (https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/bicameral/post/post-events/allergy, accessed on 31/10/2019).

the data and identified the main themes. For instance, whiteness (Berg, 2008; Levine-Rasky, 2011; Swan, 2017) emerged in the data about food allergy discourse in relation to the themes of hygiene, purity, and cross-contamination (Glabau, 2019) and in the data about food practices as cooking and tinkering with recipes to cope with the ‘bland taste of free-from food’. However, I have struggled to make use of these references in relation to the intersectional analysis of the food practices, as explained in the discussion and limitations of the paper. The key pattern in the data was the difference between the representations of food practices in the public discourse and in the blogs. A good example is the practice of ‘reading labels’, which in the institutional texts – like the NHS website about food allergy – is viewed as a simple and routine activity, whereas in the blogs it is described as a complex and skilful activity that requires time, knowledge, attention, and in some situations interaction with a number of other people in order to be conducted successfully, i.e. without major or even deadly consequences. Using the sensitizing concept of ‘articulation work’, these experiences and their representations in the posts became central in explaining other patterns in the data.

ALLERGY FOODWORK AS ARTICULATION OF WOMEN’S WORK

I discuss the study of the allergy foodwork in two parts: first, as articulated in the public discourse of food allergy; followed by looking at the everyday food practices – grocery shopping, home eating and cooking, and eating out – of women with, or mothers of children with, food allergies, as represented in the three blogs.

Allergy foodwork in the public discourse of food allergy

It was a perfectly innocuous Mother’s Day breakfast that booted us into a new way of life. … Was it the flowers? Pollen in the early spring air? Something in his eczema creams? The paediatric team couldn’t say, really: just go straight back to the GP or A&E if it happens again. Barely a month later it did, and this time the cause was blindingly obvious.
I gave him his first taste of banana. Within minutes there were red splodges where the mash had touched his skin, and soon hives had spread across his face and neck. So, another dash to the doc for antihistamines and a request, now, for specialist referral. … He asked us to run through exactly what had happened on the morning of the first reaction. We blathered on about pollen and flowers, skin creams, floor cleaners. He asked what we had eaten. Scrambled eggs, we said. ‘That’ll be it’, he said. [YNB, 22/01/2012]

The rest is a long and boring story, but the upshot is this: we were sent home clutching a bottle of Benadryl, a prescription for two EpiPens, three pamphlets on nut-free, wheat-free and egg-free diets, a good deal of sensible advice from the doctor and dietician and now, nine months on, here we are. [YNB, 24/01/2012]

The excerpts above are from the ‘Yes No Bananas’ blog and, together with one of the quotations at the beginning of the paper, explain why Alexa is blogging about the day-to-day living with food allergy and how her journey as a mother of a young baby with multiple food allergies started. The food allergy of a child once diagnosed is something that is managed by parents. Pamphlets and advice about health risks and ‘free-from’ or avoidance diets explain the basics. The content of these leaflets is reproduced on the NHS website under the topic of ‘food allergy’. After a section on treatment that is summarized as ‘The best way to prevent an allergic reaction is to identify the food that causes the allergy and avoid it’, there is a section on ‘Living with food allergy’ that I reproduce partially in the next excerpt. It states that ‘The advice here is primarily written for parents of a child with a food allergy. However, most of it is also relevant if you’re an adult with a food allergy.’ The section is titled ‘Your Child’s Diet.’

There’s currently no cure for food allergies, although many children will grow out of certain ones, such as allergies to milk and eggs. The most effective way you can prevent symptoms is to remove the offending food – known as an allergen – from their diet. …

Reading labels. It’s very important to always check the ingredients list on any pre-packed
food or drinks your child has. Under EU law, any pre-packed food or drink sold in the UK must clearly state on the label if it contains any of these 14 ingredients that can cause an allergy: … *Unpackaged food.* Currently, unpackaged food does not need to be labelled in the same way as packaged food. The law requires food businesses to tell customers if their food products contain any of the 14 allergens, but this can be done in different ways. … If you or your child have a severe food allergy, you need to be careful when you eat out. The following advice should help: let the staff know … read the menu carefully and check for hidden ingredients … prepare for the worst. [NHS Direct]

The overall message is simple. There is no cure for food allergy and the best way to manage it is to identify the allergic food and then to avoid it. Food allergy becomes the individual responsibility of people with food allergies and, in the case of children, their carers. And managing food allergy is articulated into an issue of food choice and consumption (e.g. following a food avoidance diet). These intersecting narratives of parenting and caring, management of health risk as individual responsibility, and food consumption and choice constitute the public discourse of food allergy and are encoded in institutional texts like leaflets and public health websites.

However, there are disjunctures and disparities in the food allergy discourse. First, the work of managing food allergy is gendered. Health care systems are shifting the responsibility for the management of chronic illnesses onto patients and their families. In the case of food allergy, social expectations by health professionals and discourses of the heteronormative nuclear family socialize women into taking up extensive caring work and normalize intensive mothering. The burden for caring, especially in the case of health issues and chronic diseases such as asthma and food allergy, falls overwhelmingly on women and carries heavy costs for their ability to engage in paid work (Page-Reeves, 2015; Timmermans & Freidin, 2007). In the post below, Alexa illustrates the consequences for mothers of children with food allergies.
We’ve added a few more to the list since then. … That’s all manageable for now: he’s 14 months old and it’ll be a good while yet before I let him out of my sight for any length of time. Nursery isn’t happening, as far as I’m concerned, until he’s at least old enough to communicate how he feels. I simply can’t trust anyone else to keep an eagle eye on him in the same way that I, my husband or our closest family would. The biggest thing, really, is trying to keep him safe from harm while never, ever wanting him to feel like the funny allergic kid. [YNB, 24/01/2012]

The anticipation of keeping the child safe (‘can’t trust anyone else to keep an eagle eye on him’) and avoiding nursery, but also wanting to avoid him feeling like the funny allergic kid, is understandable and relatable for many mothers. However, it can also be viewed as an example of intensive mothering (Cairns & Johnston, 2015), which is only a possible option for mothers who can afford to work outside the home. Second, an allergen avoidance diet is expensive. Cooking from scratch can reduce the cost of managing food allergies and some free-from products are available in supermarkets, but these are not affordable for many people and families because their costs are significantly higher than ordinary food. In 2017, NHS England stopped the supply of gluten-free products to people with coeliac disease that had previously been available on prescription. The move was justified by, on the one side, gluten-free food being seen as a lifestyle good and, on the other side, gluten-free products now being available at supermarkets like Tesco and Morrisons.4 Finally, free-from food is considered safe but bland. Free-from food is a generic vision of ‘pure food’, where purity and hygiene are connected to unmarked whiteness and affluence (Glabau, 2019), and is therefore racialized. It

4 ‘Why It Is So Expensive to Eat with Food Allergy’ 01/02/2019
is a broadly appealing solution that, bought at premium prices and with additional foodwork, can be adapted to personal taste and to cultural differences. Hence, existing gendered, racialized, and classed inequalities are reproduced and amplified by food allergy, as I’ll discuss later on in the paper.

In sum, allergy foodwork is overwhelmingly seen as the responsibility of women as mothers and as providers of food for their families. Food allergy activities are socially organized by work arrangements that are shaped by the means and taste of white, affluent people. What is key is that allergy foodwork, if not completely disappearing, is reduced to a simplified and abstracted understanding in the public discourse of food allergy. Next, I illustrate how everyday food allergy practices are represented on the blogs together with their underlying activities that I see as allergy foodwork.

**Allergy foodwork in everyday food practices**

Food allergy peeps we need to stick together! We are a little weird. Want to know why? Because we have a different way of living than those, who can go to the grocery store and blindly fill their cart! We are always checking to see if we are in a safe environment and when we eat, we eat cautiously. We have enhanced survival tactics, and I guess that’s weird to a lot of people. … We’ve got asthma, eczema, our best friend is named Epipen, and for the amount of food packaging we’ve studied in our lifetime deserve a Phd in label reading. We carry a fanny pack for our inhalers and EpiPens. We have to make sure we know what’s going on at all times; when we’ll eat next, if we’re going to be in an enclosed environment with food, if a something may contain X, or whether we need to pack snacks for the day. We are food allergy geeks! … Our food allergies make us strong, organised, and observant. [AGE, 02/07/2016]
As illustrated by the excerpt above from AGE post ‘Food Allergy Geeks Unite’, people with food allergies are always organizing, juggling, and connecting. This articulation work is difficult to notice because it is done so skilfully and pervasively, in a seemingly effortless way. What is routine for other people becomes a multistep process for them. The analysis of the three blogs shows how the extra time and continuous effort that is needed to do ordinary activities are experienced by the bloggers as work. I specifically focus on grocery shopping, eating at home and cooking, and eating out.

*Grocery shopping.* According to the bloggers, grocery shopping takes a lot of time and money. Reading and understanding labels for people with food allergy is vital. The excerpt above from AGE refers to a well-known joke: for the amount of reading labels they do, people with food allergies deserve a ‘PhD in label reading’. They need to learn about different types of ingredients, categories of food like ‘free from’ and ‘may contain nuts’, and the formats of labels required by different food legislations in different countries, so travelling with food allergies can be challenging. Some labels remain difficult to read, due to the size of prints, colours, and other aspects. A common practice is to ask other people to double-check the label, even if it is a product that they have bought before, because manufacturers regularly change some of the ingredients. Mistakes with labels happen and can have tragic consequences for people living with life-threatening allergies, as Ruth describes in the post below, titled ‘ALWAYS read the label’.

I read recently the tragic news of the death of an 11-year old boy who ate a chocolate bar from Morrison that contained dairy. He tragically had an anaphylactic attack and died. … I’ve done it too … missed an allergen … how on earth could I have missed that the main ingredient, marked in bold, just as it should be, was indeed milk. … The moral of the story is, check, check, check, and before eating, check again. And in my case, perhaps get someone with better eyesight to also check! [WA, 26/07/2019]

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It takes extra time to buy allergy-free food also because a single shop might not have all the ingredients and products needed to prepare meals. The excerpt below is taken from a long post by Alexa titled ‘Do You Want My Family’s Business? (Life Is Nuts with an Allergic Child)’. It is the transcript of a talk that she gave to a food industry event where she was invited as a food allergy mum where she highlights how making multiple trips to different shops is normal and takes a huge amount of time.

Grocery shopping takes an eternity. I can’t just shop in one store. Last week, I had to visit Waitrose for his cereal, Morrisons for his dried fruit snacks, Sainsbury’s for mini yoghurts, Marks & Spencer for ice-cream and bread and Whole Foods for his nut free porridge. Then, even if I’ve bought a product a hundred times before I still have to scour the label to make sure they haven’t suddenly started introducing a contraband ingredient. [YNB, 23/10/2013]

Stocking the cupboard whenever is possible and online buying become necessary. The cost of free-from food and ingredients makes budgeting and buying in bulk important weekly and in some cases daily tasks. Food budgeting is important because ‘safe’ food is typically expensive, and a larger portion of money goes toward food for individuals and families. Allergy-friendly products are available in many shops, but this food is generally higher priced for smaller quantities. The bloggers discuss how researching food and shops helps to save money through buying safe food in bulk and during sales promotions. A significant amount of time is invested in finding tasty allergy-free food, and so the blogs offer ‘product reviews’ with the best brands for specific items and where they can be bought.

*Eating at home and cooking.* Although free-from ingredients and food, bought at premium prices, are safe, they are normally quite bland, so many posts and comments in the blogs are dedicated to suggestions on how to prepare meals that are attractive, especially for small children. Free-from food like flours and other ingredients are produced in a way that is broadly
appealing to customers, who are expected to use their cooking skills to adapt their meals to personal taste and cultural differences. Many people learn to cook from scratch because ready meals and convenience food are ‘inconvenient’ due to multiple food allergies. In some cases, the women bloggers and their readers talk about cooking from scratch because free-from food tends to be quite expensive. Baking is not just a hobby when people have multiple allergies and cannot eat products that are only gluten-free or without peanuts. Finding good and tasty recipes, especially for children’s meals, becomes a mission. The exchange and adaptation of recipes are the core activities of some commercial food allergy blogs. It is also central to the AGE blog, where Kortney blends nutritional science and practical advice in engaging and informative posts about cooking with food allergies, as demonstrated in the quotation below from the post ‘Chocolate Chip Chickpea Cookies’.

Did you know that chickpea flour can also be the star in a sweet recipe? It is an excellent substitute to regular flour and lends a dense texture to these chocolate chip chickpea cookies. The first time I made this recipe, my husband loved them and said they reminded him of a sweet samosa. Not really what I was going for, so I tweaked and tweaked and tweaked, to finally come up with this recipe. I also wanted these to be easy to make with kitchen staples and not break the bank. The original recipe from Ambitious Kitchen calls for coconut oil and coconut sugar, which are both pricey. Plus I wasn’t a fan of the subtle coconut flavour. … And it worked making these top 14 free including coconut. [AGE, 06/2019]

The excerpt illustrates the interactional nature of allergy foodwork and makes visible the articulation work involved, such as the interactions with the husband about tweaking the recipe, the adaptation of a recipe from another blogger, and the source of recommendations about alternatives. The reference to the price of ingredients suggests that the cost of living with food
allergy is an issue for many people. Substituting expensive ingredients is a way to make some dishes more affordable.

*Eating out.* For people with food allergies, eating out requires planning, communication, continuous surveillance, and monitoring tasks. This work is made invisible by the combination of mundanity and regularity of these activities. Various posts describe the home as the only place where people feel comfortable because they have learned how to manage food allergies there. Outside the home is where normally allergic reactions happen, and eating out causes fear, anxiety, and even panic attacks. The next post by AGE is called ‘Eating Out Is Not Always Easy with Food Allergies: The Emotional Journey’.

To eat out with food allergies can be stressful, especially when you are a food lover! Oh, the emotional journey this can cause! I love restaurants, and sometimes I am all game for eating out. Other times it invokes a paralysing fear. On this blog, I try to promote all the positives of eating out, but reality is often speckled. A common occurrence in deciding to eat out looks like this: I say yes let’s do it, and then as we approach the restaurant I panic out of it. When I find it ok to eat out and when I decide it isn’t, has no apparent logic. I chalk it up to mostly gut feeling and my mental state. Not only my emotions are involved. I’m not the only one impacted by this. I don’t make it easy on my husband who loves eating out as much as I do, so when I hint at it and then renege it is equally hard on him.

[AGE, 2019]

Eating out requires military preparation. First of all, people with food allergies research venues in advance and find ‘safe’ places, including through online ‘word of mouth’, e.g. reviews and suggestions added in various blogs and their comment sections. Before eating out and more generally leaving the home, they always remember to carry the allergy kit that they have with them all the time – food allergy care plans, the food allergy on laminated or written cards, and their own food, just in case nothing is available at the venue.
At restaurants and other food places, the women bloggers and their readers discuss how they learn to develop a swift trust through spending time in long conversations with waiters and chefs and showing loyalty. They are the people in whose hands they put their own and their children’s lives, after all, so they feel obliged to help them with a detailed list of allergens, and possible cross-contamination (e.g. ‘these are the things that I can eat’, on a laminated card). The risk of eating out with food allergies is managed by investing time and money in finding eating places (i.e. they are often repeat customers and they like to recommend ‘good and safe places’ to others). Ruth explains that she does not want to be or to be perceived as a picky eater who keeps on saying ‘I can’t eat that … and that … and that.’ Like other women, she feels responsible for reassuring others that food allergy people can eat so many things and love to eat. Accidents still happen and they have consequences, which in some cases are extremely serious. The post below is titled ‘My Personal Witness Statement’ and was written by Ruth one year after the event.

After being served dairy in a pub last year I had a very severe anaphylactic reaction and ended up in intensive care overnight. This is my Personal Witness Statement. I’ve been wanting to share this with you all for some time now but it’s a difficult one for me. Talking about anaphylaxis is very personal; sometimes it really upsets me. [WH, 20/02/20]

Food allergies disrupt family life and social relations. In the blogs there are plenty of discussions about the need to avoid the isolation and stigma attached to food allergy, with suggestions on how to manage dinner invitations and children’s parties. In particular, there is an emphasis on the socialization of children with allergies and not passing on fears and other negative emotions that might affect their relationship with food and other people. The excerpt below is from a post by Alexa called ‘Do You Want My Family’s Business? (Life Is Nuts with an Allergic Child)’ and, with the rest of the post, it is a powerful narrative of feeding and mothering a child with multiple allergies.
As a family, we love to eat out. I’m half Italian, half Jewish. What better in life than food? … It’s not because we don’t want our children to eat out. I can’t think of anything more wonderful than to be able to stroll into a café and order Sidney a sandwich. He would be over the moon. But the fact is that wherever we go it’s virtually impossible to find anywhere for him to safely eat or buy a snack. I certainly haven’t found a single place that can cater for my child without me first having to send emails, make phone calls and issue a catalogue of demands to organise things in advance. That’s OK for the odd special occasion. But day-to-day? It’s exhausting, impractical and impossible. … The fact is, families like mine are a huge consumer group. We love to eat out. We are noisy and we talk to one another – via blogs, support groups, Twitter – all the time. If we find somewhere safe, we will shout about you from the rooftops. [YNB, 23/10/2013]

In the blog posts and their comments, there are blends of emotional honesty and support, parenting advice, and cooking tips with technical details about nutritional and medical issues, mental health, and food allergy advocacy and policy. For instance, after the death of a young girl due to an anaphylactic shock from eating a sandwich from a food chain, a coalition of people actively involved in the UK food allergy community and led by Alexa, the blogger of YNB, provided a group response to an initiative to improve food labelling legislation. Thus, the blogs facilitate the production of a great deal of specialized ‘hybrid’ knowledge that combines expert knowledge with more personal and experience-based knowledge that is situated and embodied (Code, 2014; Haraway, 1988; Harrison, 2014).

Starting from their own lived experiences, the women bloggers with their readers and other people in the food allergy community produce new knowledge and expertise, which are articulated together with the tensions and disjunctures in the public discourse of food allergy in their blogs. The dominant view of food allergy as an easily manageable condition is not passively accepted or actively resisted by people with food allergies but renegotiated based on
the combination of knowledge from experience and expertise that is collectively articulated. This all shows that allergy foodwork textures everyday food practices with women’s in/visible work and intersecting inequalities that remain hidden in plain sight through skilful and complex articulation work.

DISCUSSION

This study offers an analysis of allergy foodwork in everyday food practices of women with, or mothers of children, with food allergies, using articulation work as analytical lens. Examining the work arrangements that constitute the social organization of food allergy from this perspective enables to make visible discourses, standards, and other arrangements that are considered normal, objective, and universal, which are typically taken for granted and cannot be easily seen. Multiple discourses that organize everyday food activities as women’s foodwork are also skilfully layered and encoded in the public discourse of food allergy that frame food allergy activities as individual responsibility for self-care and children’s care, risk management, food choice, and consumption. The public discourse of food allergy reinforces idealized versions of eating and living with food allergy and keeps women’s allergy foodwork and layered inequalities hidden in plain sight.

The analysis of the three blogs provides a detailed picture of the food allergy activities in everyday food practices from the perspectives of women who do the work. Food allergy activities are normally done mixed with other activities, and in many cases, when they are done well, they disappear (e.g. preparing a ‘safe’ lunch box and eating it at work without feeling sick). They are necessary to accomplish the task of avoiding allergic food, but they are so mundane that they go unnoticed. The situated enactment of everyday food practices is characterized by continual permutations of tailoring, aligning, juggling, substituting, monitoring, preventing mistakes, and improvising (e.g. tailoring recipes based on nutritional knowledge, cooking techniques, budget and affordability of ingredients, time availability, and
taste buds). Allergy foodwork practices are mostly invisible, interactional and characterized by different configurations of physical and mental efforts, time, resources, skills, and knowledge.

Food allergy as anomaly heightens intersectional inequalities in the social organization of everyday food practices, but also creates additional ones. The analysis of allergy foodwork captures two intersectional dynamics. A first set of foodwork practices is related to managing the cost of living with food allergy. They are constructed with an intersectional sensibility and the narratives of the blogs are adjusted for varying audiences. These are practices relating to batching and budgeting in shopping, tinkering and substituting ingredients in recipes and cooking from scratch, and reviews of products and food venues with an emphasis on prices and value for money. Whereas some posts reveal class privilege – like eating out and buying expensive free-from food to escape the ‘compulsory’ cooking of food allergy – the women bloggers and readers quite regularly highlight the high prices and lack of affordability of free-from food and suggest alternative ways and advice to mitigate the economic burden of food allergy for people on low incomes and limited budgets (e.g. young adults and students with food allergies).

A second set of intersectional foodwork practices is related to changes in the food allergy arrangements that can disadvantage some people with food allergies more than others and displace, amplify, and complicate their allergy foodwork. The emergence of new food allergy standards and guidelines can simplify and even eliminate some forms of allergy foodwork (e.g. changes in food labelling that make them easy to read and provide a full list of ingredients), but also create more invisible foodwork for others. For instance, the list of 14 main allergens by food regulation agencies is now mandated on food labelling and in restaurants in the UK, Europe, and the US, but they create extra work for people who are allergic to food not on the 14 allergens list (e.g. some restaurants only serve customers with one or more of the 14 food allergies, or those who do not have an allergy at all). Moreover, they create new forms of
invisible work for other groups of people like teachers in schools, workers in restaurants, and others who also need to do some allergy foodwork (Page-Reeves, 2015). The dynamics of these intersectional allergy foodwork practices capture the iterative and processual relationship between different forms of visible and invisible work, and how relations of power shape these dynamics and the lived experiences of food allergy.

Although this study advances the understanding of allergy foodwork, there are still some limitations. Since the analysis was based on the three blogs, it is dependent on the information that is shared online by the bloggers. In relation to the intersectional analysis, while some elements of the bloggers’ background – like gender, single/married status, motherhood – were openly disclosed, I have derived other aspects like occupation, class, income, age, race, and ethnicity indirectly from textual and visual information provided in the blogs and other online sources (e.g. LinkedIn). Although I have considered different references in the blogs to ethnicity in relation to food allergy practices, I have struggled to make analytical use of them. The study of additional blogs in combination with other methodologies (e.g. multi-modal and longitudinal analysis of the blogs and possibly interviews with the bloggers) may be needed to undertake a more intersectional analysis of allergy foodwork.

**Foodwork as multiple articulation of in/visible women’s work and inequalities**

I have argued over the course of this paper that we can conceptualize foodwork as the multiple articulation of the visible and invisible work that goes into the mutual constitution of foodwork arrangements and everyday practices, and this advances our understanding. Taking the multiple perspectives of everyday women’s lived experiences and other groups who are marginalized in our food systems as our starting point provides important insights into the systems of power that produce rising inequalities in these systems. Anomalies like food allergy are generative sources and an amplification of inequalities, but also inhabited sites to go into and actively listen to inhabitants’ voices, starting with women’s voices.
The power of feminist studies of foodwork is to understand how it is actually happening, how it is organized to happen as it does, and how it could be organized differently. It is making visible the work that constitutes social arrangements, everyday food practices, and their dynamics. We can therefore start our analysis by viewing the ‘everyday world as problematic’ (Smith, 1987) and also including the reified and the abstracted work that organizes current foodwork arrangements and keep them in place, as they are ‘inhabited institutions’ (Bechky, 2011; Leibel et al., 2018). Restoring accounts of this actual work, which is often hidden in plain sight, enables us to understand the durability of the current food order.

However, rendering foodwork visible is not enough, if that is all we do (DeVault, 1991, 2014). Conceptualizing and studying foodwork should enable us to think how ‘it could have been otherwise’, remembering that ‘it is not to say that it is’ (e.g. Hughes as quoted in Star, 1994, 2007). To expand our capability to think about how foodwork could be organized differently and to seek the change, I propose that foodwork as the multiple articulation of invisible and visible women’s work can be used as a generative metaphor. It draws on the double meaning of the word ‘articulation’ both as connections of parts and as the use of language to express meaning. This implies that articulations – as connections and as meanings – are not inevitable, and they can be rearticulated under certain conditions, at least potentially.

Future research can explore further the transformative potential of women’s everyday foodwork. First of all, foodwork practices may not always change, but meanings often do. Some food practices that become normal in a given context are far from normal in other contexts, and new practices can emerge (e.g. gluten-free eating is a necessity for coeliac people

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5 The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘articulation’ as 1. (a) the act of speaking; (b) articulate utterance; speech. 2. (a) the act of jointing; (b) a joint.
but is growing into a lifestyle choice where more people choose free-from food). The flexible accumulation strategies of capitalism that are embedded in industrialized food systems have found ways to turn these new practices into new market niches, promoting ever more segmented markets, smaller groups, and niche lifestyles. However, some practices can become transformative when they create a discontinuity in the dominant practices in the wider food systems (e.g. the growth of free-from food as a healthier food than processed food).

Furthermore, narratives and stories as forms of articulation work can be used to re-store women’s foodwork and their intersectional practices. They can break existing patterns and frame new connections of activities and meanings that result into new practices. Stories can give voices to people previously excluded and amplify them, but also allow to discover the inherent multiplicity in everyday food practices and their inequalities. Narratives from personal, everyday perspectives like blogs are important to understand situated practices of working and knowing and give attention to nuances, to the unnoticed, to silences, and to unmarked articulation work (Berg, 2008).

Finally, we can critically study blogs to understand ‘whose stories are not being told’ (Harrison, 2014, p. 346). Blogging can be viewed as a form of self-expression, but also as a way to develop community and engage with other women facing similar issues. As I have shown, food allergy blogs offer textual and visual articulation of women’s work. While I have studied these blogs as digital representations of foodwork, they can also be examined as a form of digital foodwork themselves. Our understanding of digital foodwork can be extended by comparing food allergy blogs to other food blogs (e.g. Lofgren, 2013; Rodney, Cappeliez, Oleschuk, & Johnston, 2017). More critical studies of food blogs have the potential to enrich our knowledge about how doing food is doing racialized, gendered, and classed labours (Swan et al., 2018). We can study blogging as a form of representational intersectionality and blogs as sites of articulation work that connect people and produce new situated knowledges upon which people can act to
seek change (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Blogs and other online spaces can become resistant knowledge projects (DeVault, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I respond to Swan, Perrier and Sayers’ (2018) call for feminist studies of foodwork that could extend our understanding of the organization of women’s work and racialized, gendered, and classed inequalities in the provisioning, preparation and consumption of food. I mobilize DeVault and Star together to bring feminist STS studies of women’s work and the transformational potential of everyday food practices back into intersectional studies of food, work, and organization. Putting into dialogue DeVault’s and Star’s understandings of the visibility and invisibility of work and inequalities, I conceptualize foodwork as the multiple articulation of visible and invisible women’s work that is mutually constituted by food arrangements and everyday food practices. I demonstrate the value of this conceptualization by studying allergy foodwork as represented in three blogs that are written by women with, or mothers of children with, food allergies. The paper seeks to broaden the conversation about the organization of foodwork and inequalities by suggesting how foodwork could be organized differently, starting from the transformative potential of everyday food practices, blogs, and food allergy.

Bringing this all together, I make three main contributions. First of all, by introducing articulation work as sensitizing concept and as a feminist lens to conduct intersectional analysis, I expand our understanding of foodwork, developing further the discussion of how women’s work is made invisible and deleted in everyday food practices and highlighting the work of managing marginalities and anomalies in our standardized food systems. The second contribution is showing how, by studying foodwork in blogs as a site and as a methodology, blogs themselves provide useful representations of foodwork. These blogs offer access to women’s lived experiences of foodwork and resulting inequalities, oppression, and
empowerment. Lastly, I propose food allergy as a novel standpoint for the study of foodwork and intersectional research. As anomaly food allergy denaturalizes the normality of food work arrangements and everyday practices enabling us to see rising inequalities. Therefore, we should develop our understanding of food allergy as a food justice issue further.

We have much to gain from listening to women’s voices, like those of the bloggers whom I have introduced and discussed above, who have provided more than texts, stories, and situated knowledges about day-to-day life with food allergies. Together with other women directly referenced below and relevant others, they are brilliantly artful in articulating how (allergy) foodwork could be done and organized differently by connecting, talking back, and blogging at the intersections.

REFERENCES


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Table 1 – The three blogs and bloggers