

Eat later, waste less: The practical utilization of leftover food

○Homemaker

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1. Aim

While consumers have been recognized as a major contributor to food waste in industrial nations or blamed at times for being irresponsible, little sociological study has yet been dedicated to the actual food conservation practices within the domestic domain, that is, the home. The research explores the everyday consumption and conservation of food through which waste reduction may be achieved in mundane ways.

2. Data & Methods

A diary study was conducted to track everyday eating habits. Data collection was done through smartphones with pictures of food eaten on occasions and sent in real time, whenever possible. This study was expected to gather actualities of eating habits as well as to overcome the limitation of diary studies that depend on memory recall and may result in records that are incomplete, if not inaccurate. Over the course of two weeks, 20 males and 18 females between the ages of 20 and 40 filled out entries that the researcher analyzed as valid samples among the total number of 100 participants from all over Japan. The research takes a qualitative analytical focus to practices in naturally occurring settings to examine the relationship between eating and the sociocultural contexts of domestic lives, rather than treating eating as an isolated behavior in which psychology is employed in the interpretation of decision making (Delormier et al., 2009).

3. Results

The results show that about 10% of homemade meal preparations are either driven by the expiration date and/or made with the use of leftovers. Practitioners were mostly women—married women, in particular. The analysis identifies a set of such food conservation practices to demonstrate how they are performed in the course of everyday cooking and meal preparation: classifying items to be consumed, reading their labels, storing them for later use, and notably, transforming leftovers, to name a few. Furthermore, it is found that the skill of cooking with leftovers is practiced in relation to the routines of homemaking.

4. Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates the embedded nature of dietary activities within a domestic context of everyday life with particular attention to the recycling and/or remaking of meals. This empirical research argues for the contribution of a practice approach to gain insight into policy options for reducing consumer waste in which theoretical accounts have often been proposed.

References

Delormier, Treena, Katherine L. Frohlich and Louise Potvin, 2009, "Food and eating as social practice," *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 31(2): 215–28.