A middle-brow taste? How ultraprocessed food consumption relates to class, the market and eating practices in France

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How ultraprocessed food consumption relates to class, the market and eating practices in France

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Return of the UPF

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Research question (1)

- **Tastes and markets : the literature on the social stratification of food tastes**
  - Following Bourdieu (1979), analyses in terms of distinction
  - Tastes for products, but also eating out (Paddock et al 2017, Lindblom and Mustonen 2019), shopping places (Oncini 2019, Huddart Kennedy et al 2019), labels…
  - Market segmentation provides signifiers for class tastes and symbolic boundaries
  - Focus on the opposition between the top and bottom of the social space

- **From markets to practices: the sociology of eating**
  - Eating is a complex and sometimes inconsistent bundle of practices
  - Repudiating mass-produced convenience foods = part of a 'hegemonic habitus that highlights idealised feminine positions' (Bugge and Almas 2006)
  - Yet interviewees use these products in specific circumstances

Research question (2)

- **From convenience to ultraprocessed foods (UPF)**
  - Actors tend to conflate convenience and food processing
    - The literature allows to analytically separate them (Jackson et al 2018…)
    - Convenience as a sale narrative for processed foods (Shapiro, 2005; Warde, 2016)
  - Define processing?
    - Theoretically-driven definitions (Daniels and Glorieux, 2015; Plessz and Gojard, 2015): outsourcing to the industry
    - Expert-driven definition: ultraprocessing the NOVA classification, designed by nutritionists
    - Vilified, yet widely used (36% of energy intakes in France, 60% in the USA, Julia et al 2018)

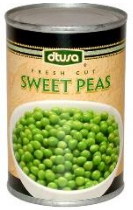
Do UPF purchases depend on class ?

Should we understand them in terms of tastes or as resulting from food provisioning practices?

Ultraprocessed foods

The NOVA classification (Monteiro 2010)

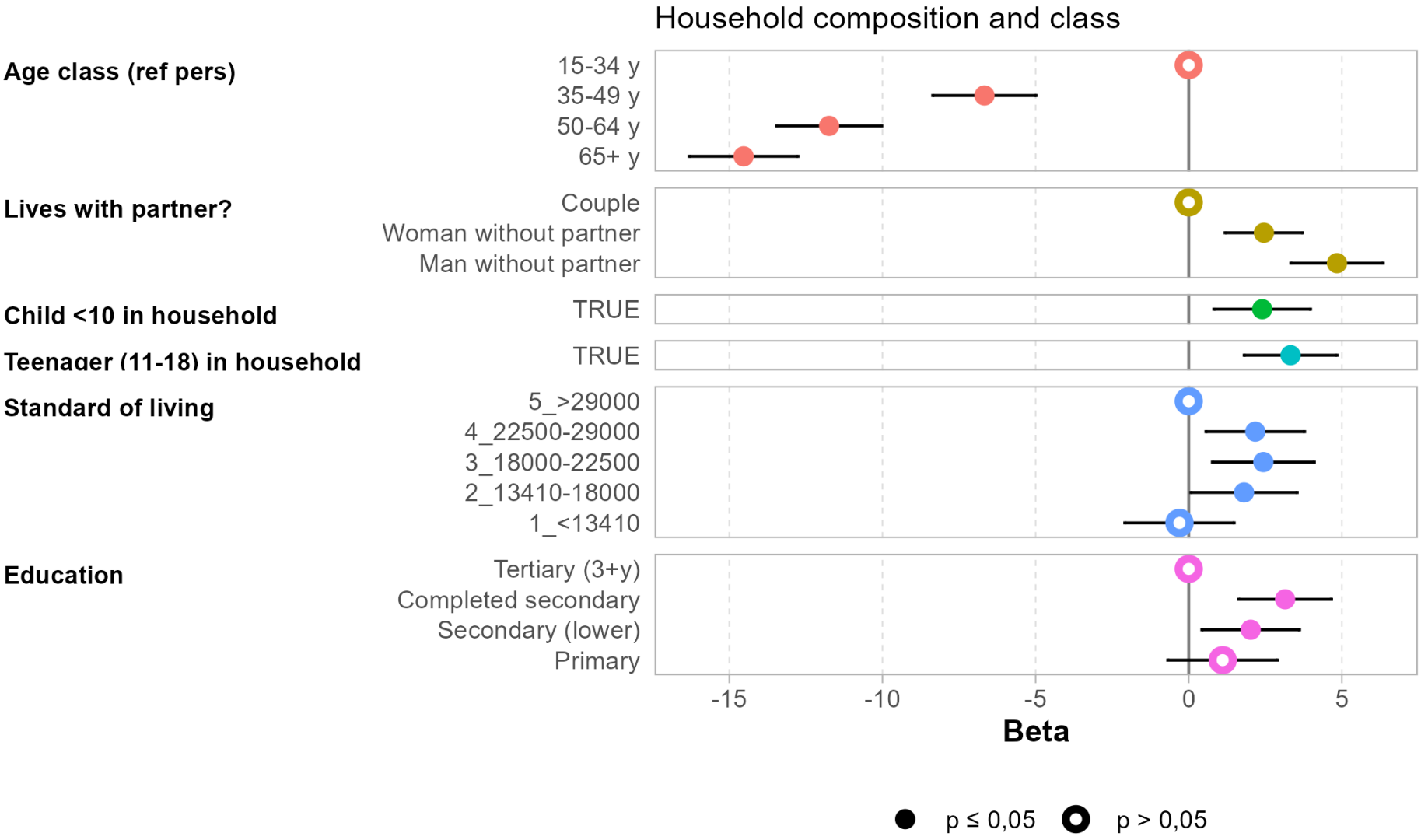
Centre Maurice Halbwachs

1	Minimally processed: fresh or raw foods only slightly modified: dried, frozen, sliced…	  
2	Culinary ingredients: extracted from raw products (pressed, ground…)	 
3	Processed: made from 1 + 2, with simple formula and culinary processes (cook, bake, can)	 
4	Ultraprocessed: - complex formula (>4 ingredients) - non-culinary ingredients or processes (additives, extruded cereals)	   

Data and methods

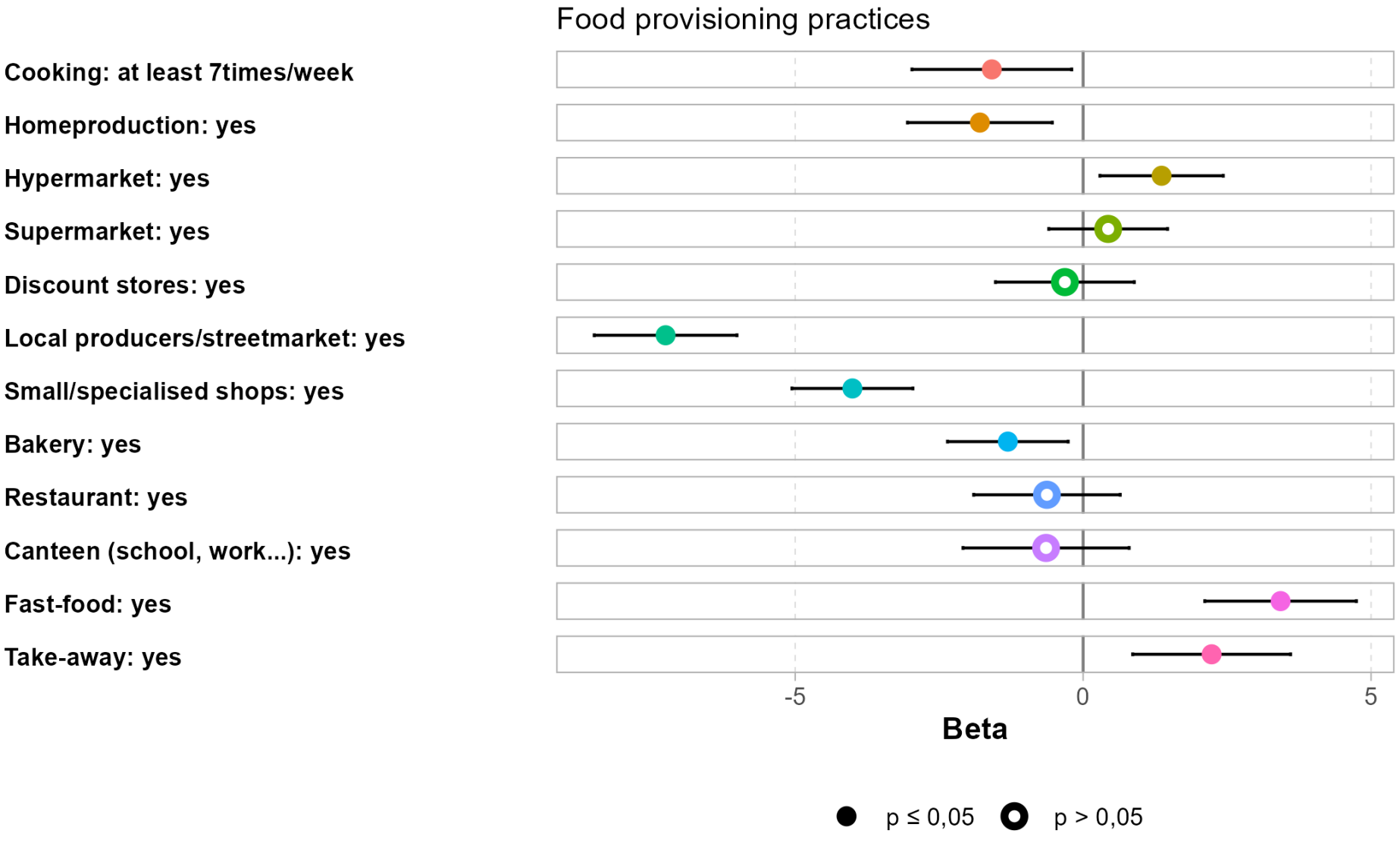
- **Household expenditure survey 2017**
  - Run by French national statistical office every 5 years
  - A random sample of 12,081 regular households living in France (+ 5,000 in remote territories)
- **Data collection**
  - Expense diary (or purchase receipts) during one week for all household members.
  - 2 interviews collect household characteristics, durable expenses over the month or year, and check accuracy of expense diaries
  - Info on provisioning practices and housework (home production, meals away from home, cooking…)
- **Study population**
  - Metropolitan France sample: half randomly selected for questions on housework (6,012)
    - 5,476 households with complete answer and good-quality expense records.
- **Key variables**
  - Linear regression, with weights, unstandardised coefficients
  - Dependent var: Budget share of ultraprocessed foods in the food-at-home COICOP group.
    - Together with experts of the food market we examined the most detailed, level of the COICOP nomenclature and classified each item according to NOVA nomenclature.
  - Class position and household composition: income level, education, age, partner, children
  - Food provisioning practices
    - Frequency of cooking and shopping
    - Home production
    - Types of shoping places and eating out

UPF share is highest for intermediate levels of income and education



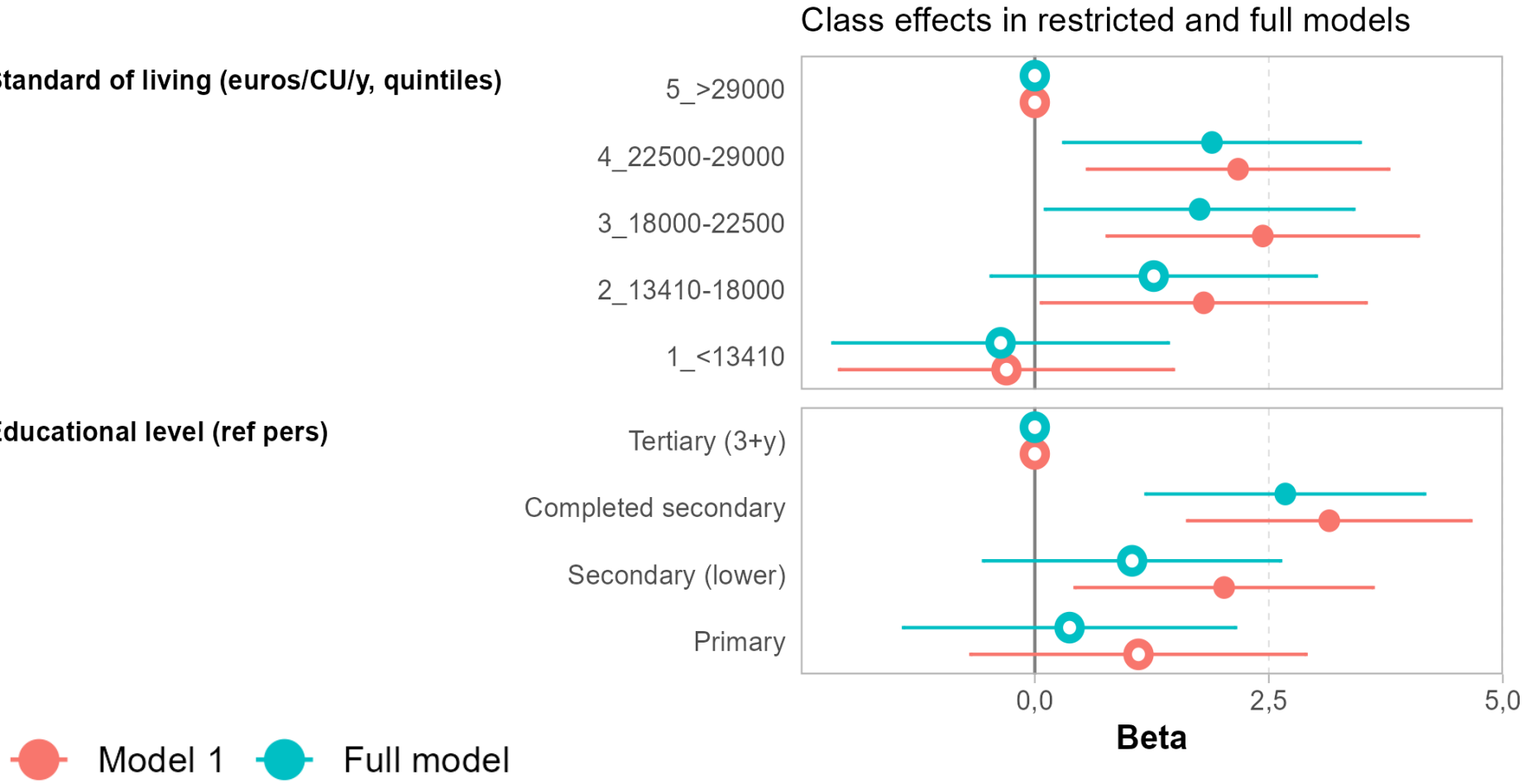
Model 1

UPF share varies according to provisioning practices



Full model

Provisioning practices do not account for education and income effects

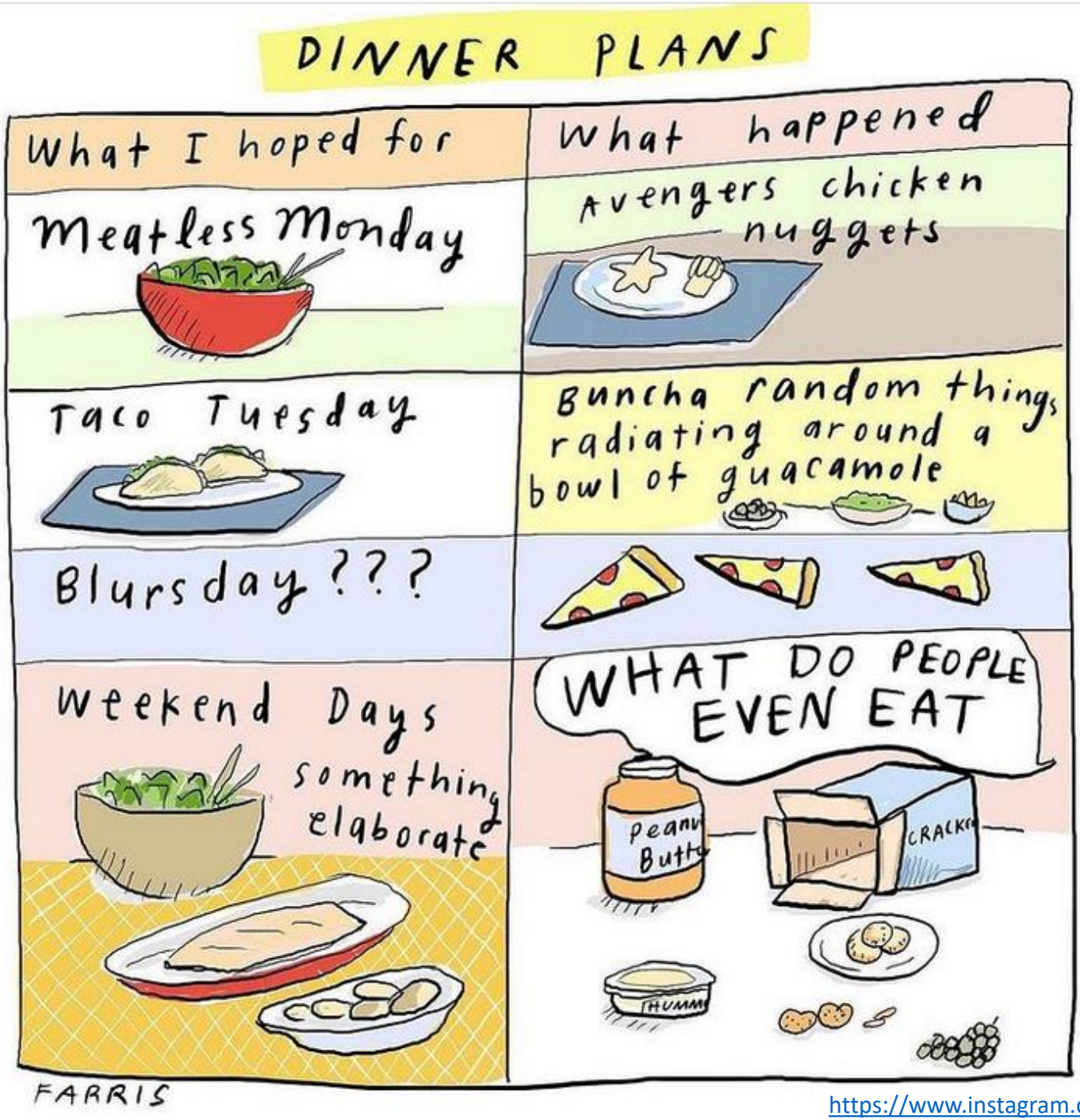


Model 1: only household characteristics
Full Model: household characteristics + provisioning practices

Discussion

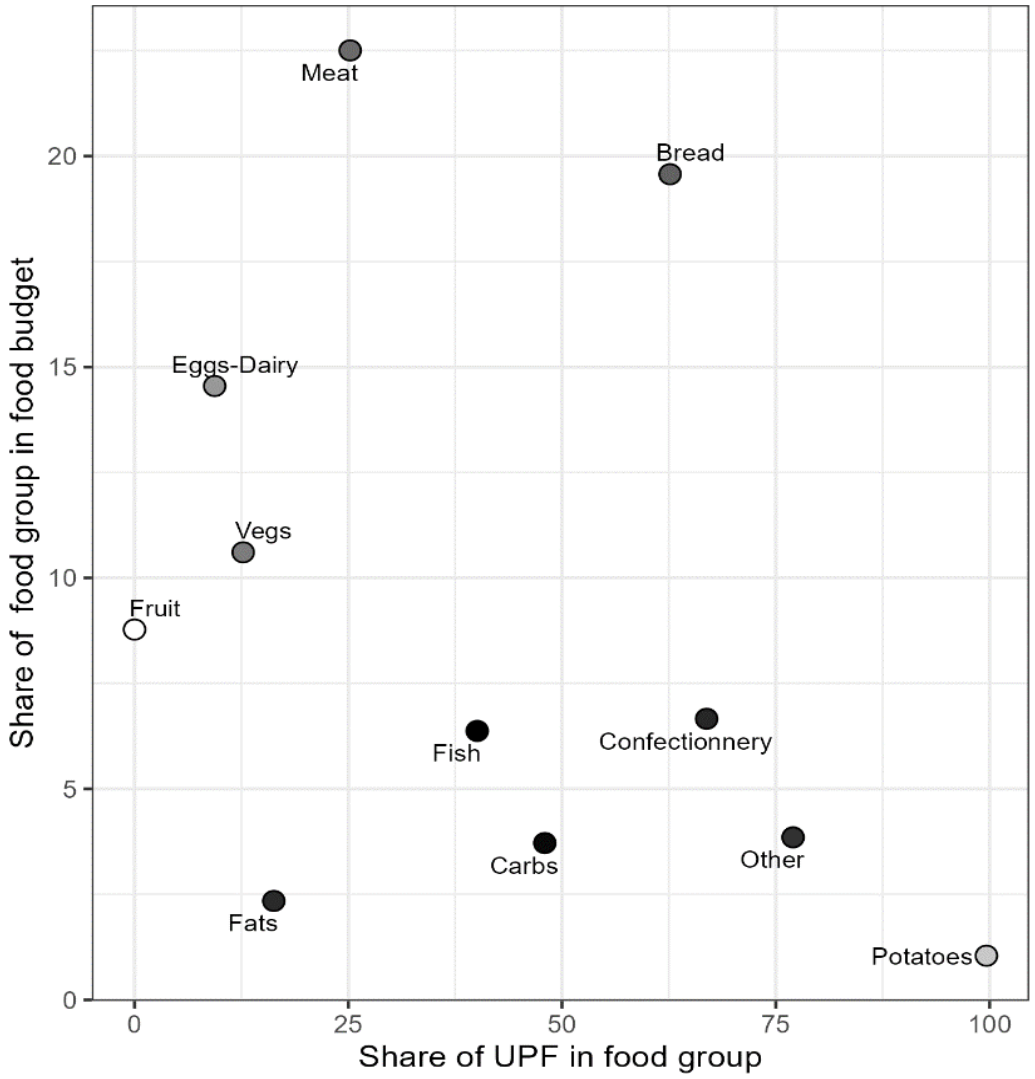
A middle-brow taste?

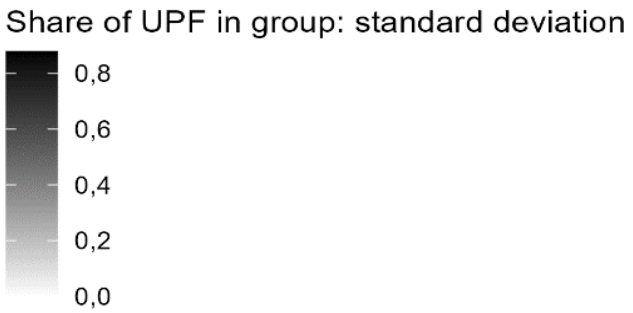
- **Families with intermediate socioeconomic status spend more on UPF**
  - The home-cooked dinner appears as a moral imperative for mothers
  - Symbolic boundary-making often relates junk/convenience/ultraprocessed food with lower-class lifestyle
  - Purchase data suggest that at least when it comes to food processing main contrast is not between the lowest and highest SES
- **UPF is not only about convenience for the consumers**
  - Innovation, new products, textures, shapes…
  - Products designed and advertised for children
- **UPF and eating out**
  - Are they two different ways of outsourcing food work?
    - More meals away from home on a regular week <-> more UPF
    - Eating out expensive and not always convenient (kids?)
    - Lower class households probably rather buy cheaper (UPF) foods in discount stores (price effect?)
- **How UPF may tap into class tastes?**
  - Higher SES: UPF vs distinction in food provisioning : exotic products, organic/ethical labels, specialised shops… weigh more in budget
  - Lower SES: UPF vs frugality/respectability: domestic labour, traditionnal recipes…
  - Intermediate SES: Taking advantage of what the market offers as a middle-brow taste?



https://www.instagram.com/p/CS5lJ6HsnZ2/

How UPF expenses distribute across food groups





BDF 2017, Metropolitan France, weighted data.

UPF expenses in food budget:
average = 34%
D1 = 10%
D9 = 59%

Results

Results from the linear regression: household structure

Variable	Coefficient (p. value)
(Intercept)	41*** (<0,001)
Age (ref pers)	
15-34 years	—
35-49 years	-5,3*** (<0,001)
50-64 years	-9,0*** (<0,001)
65+ years	-11*** (<0,001)
Household	
Couple	—
Woman without partner	1,6* (0,015)
Man without partner	3,0*** (<0,001)
Child <10 in household	2,8*** (<0,001)
Teenager (11-18) in household	3,3*** (<0,001)

Results from the linear regression: class position

Class position	
Standard of living (euros/CU/y, quintiles)	
Q5_>29000	—
Q4_22500-29000	1,9* (0,019)
Q3_18000-22500	1,8* (0,036)
Q2_13410-18000	1,3 (0,2)
Q1_<13410	-0,37 (0,7)
Educational level (ref pers)	
Tertiary (3+y)	—
Completed secondary	2,7*** (<0,001)
Secondary (lower)	1,0 (0,2)
Primary	0,37 (0,7)

Results from the linear regression: food provisioning practices

Food provisioning practices	
Cooking: at least 7times/week	-1,6* (0,025)
Homeproduction: yes	-1,8** (0,005)
Hypermarket: yes	1,4* (0,013)
Supermarket: yes	0,43 (0,4)
Discount stores: yes	-0,32 (0,6)
Local producers/streetmarket: yes	-7,3*** (<0,001)
Small/specialised shops: yes	-4,0*** (<0,001)
Bakery: yes	-1,3* (0,014)
Restaurant: yes	-0,63 (0,3)
Canteen (school, work...): yes	-0,64 (0,4)
Fast-food: yes	3,4*** (<0,001)
Take-away: yes	2,2** (0,001)

Class differences similar in model with and without food provisioning practices