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## **Cooking - as identity work**

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<b>Summary</b>		
<p>What kind of activity is cooking? In the Norwegian food discourse the domestic cook is described as a scientist, an artist, an expert, a perfectionist, a patriot, a protector of nature, a politician, a gourmet, a good mother, a good wife and a domestic mistress. This makes daily cooking to something more than routine housework, it is also a significant part of self presentation and identity formation. The material that will be presented is part of a doctoral project on the process of establishing food habits. An aim of the project is to get an understanding of what roles cooking has in everyday life. A characteristic trend in domestic cookery the last decades is the increase in the use of foreign and commercial food products, kitchen technology and cooking utensils. Cooking has become fashionable. Food processors, blenders, pasta-/coffee-/bread-machines are typical examples of necessities in middle class kitchens. However, there is little that indicates that this has saved time and labour, but rather has led to higher demands on the domestic cook when it comes to creativity and complexity. This is also due to the fact that cooking has shifted from a back stage activity more to a front stage activity. The ideal kitchen of the 50s was a closed working room, while the ideal of today is more open, available and informal. Food-programs on TV is also seen in association with this process. When food-programs first came in the 60s they reflected the goals of the Norwegian food policies. Cookery was portrayed as a serious activity and the TV-cook made sensible and traditional food. Today the most popular food-programs show cooking more as entertainment and self presentation.</p>		
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# Cooking - As Identity Work

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## ABSTRACT

What kind of activity is cooking? In the Norwegian food discourse the domestic cook is described as a scientist, an artist, an expert, a perfectionist, a patriot, a protector of nature, a politician, a gourmet, a good mother, a good wife and a domestic mistress. This makes daily cooking to something more than routine housework, it is also a significant part of self-presentation and identity formation. The material that will be presented is part of a doctoral project on the process of establishing food habits. An aim of the project is to obtain an understanding of the role of cooking in everyday life. A characteristic trend in domestic cookery during the last twenty to thirty years is the increase in the use of foreign and commercial food products, kitchen technology and cooking utensils. Cooking has become fashionable: food processors, blenders, pasta/coffee/bread-machines are typical examples of necessities in the middle class kitchen. However, there is little that indicates that this has saved time and labour, but rather has led to higher demands on the domestic cook when it comes to creativity and complexity. This is also due to the fact that cooking has shifted from a back stage activity and more to the front stage. The ideal kitchen of the 50s was a closed working room, while the ideal of today is more open, accessible and informal. Food-programs on TV are also seen in association with this process. When food-programs first came in the 60s they reflected the goals of the Norwegian food policies. Cookery was portrayed as a serious activity and the TV-cook made sensible and traditional food. Today the most popular food-programs show cooking more as entertainment and self-presentation.

## INTRODUCTION

Preparation of food has traditionally been regarded as a low status activity in the western world. It has been largely regarded as a practical and not a theoretical pastime, a manual and not a mental activity, a skill but not an art. These impressions may be traced back to antiquity. Plato made a sharp distinction between head and hand, and between rational and passionate activities. Those associated with the head enjoyed a much higher status than those associated with the hand, body and senses (Heldke 1992). Food preparation was regarded as a necessary evil, and all the better if this could be avoided. In spite of the fact that this dichotomy applied in many respects to the modern conception of food preparation and eating, there is reason to believe that Plato erred when he regarded food preparation as a purely manual task. There are many examples from modern times that food and eating comprise something more: it is something demanding aptitude and skill, it is something people consider important, and it is charged with emotions. Food preparation is demanding of the head, hands and the heart. It is precisely in this connection that Heldke (1992) attempted to put a new conception on the activity of food preparation by introducing Dewey's concept of a thoughtful practice. As such, Heldke (1992:314–315) refers to cooking as an activity to be regarded as “intelligent”, “inherently and immediately enjoyable” and “full of enjoyed meanings”. They are also “wary, observant, sensitive to slight hints and imitations”.

There is much to suggest that the status of food preparation has been elevated in status in that activity of cooking and growing interest in culinary matters in recent years. Another example of this is the significant investment of the urban middle class in time and money for the purpose of food preparation. In this context food preparation can be viewed as an intellectualised leisure-time activity. The urban middle class also occupies a hegemonic position in the Norwegian food culture. Other example is the pre-occupation with the health aspects of food. One consequence of this is the vast number of cook-books on the market today of the type: *Correct eating*, *Good for the palate*, *good for the heart*, or *Slimming naturally*. A study (Bugge and Døving 2000) also showed that the platonic approach to food – “an activity where one should use the minimum of time and energy” – was something generally regarded with contempt, and willingly used as a synonym to expressions such as “grazing”, “fast food culture”, and “decline of the family meal”. Both the decline of food culture and healthy living

are popular themes in Norwegian public debate. In the following we will look more closely at the most prominent Norwegian discourses on food. What is it that characterises the important accounts of what is “correct” and what is “incorrect” in food preparation? Who is it that imparts these statements? Who are the target groups?

## METHODS

The material that will be presented is part of a doctoral project<sup>1</sup> on the process of establishing food habits. An aim of the project is to obtain an understanding of the roles of cooking in everyday life. The material is based on qualitative interviews with young Norwegian women, and surveys into the eating and drinking habits of the Norwegian population. Newspapers, cookbooks and food programmes on TV as well as the Internet have also been important sources of material. One simple method of gaining access to Norwegian food discourse is to use the open databases on the Internet. In this connection a search was made on Alta Vista using “the meal” as the search term. In 1999 this was the largest anarchical search base on the Internet. The search was undertaken on 05.10.1999, and we had in excess of 500 ‘hits’ of which the first 200 were used for further analysis. The material was systematised and analysed.

## IDENTITY AND DISCOURSES

A discourse is an analytical concept, which refers to a tradition for the exchange of ideas. It denotes a collection of statements, hypotheses and theories which comprise an articulated presentation. There is no unambiguous definition of the concept of discourse. However, it has been particularly associated with Michel Foucault who defines discourses as practices which systematically create the objects we are talking about (1984). Within the discourse analytical approach particular attention is attached to description and construction. The application of the concept has clear associations with the social constructivist approach. A transliteration of Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) acclaimed expression would permit it to be said that Foucault was concerned with the social construction of reality as discourse in practice. Various discourses construct social phenomena in a specific manner (Burr 1995).

In the discourse-analytical approach identities which may be immediately taken into use are called subject positions. Subject positions are situated in relation to discourses. This is similar to the sociological role concept. Roles are, however, linked to institutions and not to discourses. The idea is that the discourse presents entire packages defining the manner in which one shall live, considering not just specific social contexts but the entirety in general. A subject position is thus more than a role (Neumann 2001). In using the concept of subject positions an attempt is made to show how our identities and personalities are formed by socially and culturally available discourses. A central feature in the discourse-analytical approach is that identity is something which arises in the interaction with other persons, and which is also based on language. This means that the identity of the individual is constructed from those discourses available to us culturally, and upon which we can draw in our communication with others. Our identity consists of threads woven together into the material which we may call a person’s identity: gender, age, education, income, position, and so forth. Specific representations or discourses of the various subject positions will be found in our language. We are the end product – a specific version of these things which are available to us (Burr 1995).

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<sup>1</sup> This research is part of my PhD thesis: *Dinner. A sociological Analysis of Norwegian Dinner Practice* (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway).

### THREE PROMINENT NORWEGIAN FOOD DISCOURSES

As this discourse analysis will reveal, there are several discourses in which the domestic cook is located, and there are quite different meanings which are invoked. With the aid of the Alta Vista Internet data base three prominent Norwegian food discourses were identified.

**Table 1:** *The Prominent Norwegian Food Discourses*

	<b>The Gourmet Discourse</b>	<b>The Health Discourse</b>	<b>The National Discourse</b>
<b>Media</b>	Weekend pages in national newspapers. Food programmes on TV and radio. Specialised journals. The Internet.	News media. Research-based TV programmes. Medical columns. Brochures.	National media: National TV channels (NRK, TV2, P1).
<b>Opinion formers</b>	Celebrity cooks. Culture and media personalities.	Medical experts. State authorities (such as the National Council on Nutrition and Physical Activity)	National authorities (for example information councils in agriculture, the National Council on Nutrition and Physical Activity, Farmers associations, Culture and media personalities.
<b>Target group</b>	Age group 30–50 yrs. Higher education. Upper income bracket. Urban residents.	Young women. Mothers. Middle-aged men. Patients.	Ethnic Norwegians. Working women.
<b>Social field</b>	Leisure kitchen (w/e and holiday). Dining out (restaurants).	Everyday kitchen.	Everyday kitchen. Festive holiday meals.
<b>Orientation</b>	Hedonism. Distinction. Conspicuous consumption. Relation-building (“dating”).	Everyday. Responsibilities. Sensibility.	Transmission of Norwegian food culture. Mobilisation against decline and decay. Nostalgia.
<b>Subject position</b>	The Gourmet	The Therapist	The Traditionalist
<b>Key words</b>	Haute cuisine Mediterranean style Bouquet Garni Balsamico Garlic Olive (-oil) Ruccula lettuce	Healthy Therapy Fat/Cholesterol Vitamins Digestion Glycaemia index Dieting (slimming)	Norwegian Traditional food Etiquette Sunday dinner (Grand-)mothers kitchen Boiled potatoes Meat balls

All discourses have a clear impression of how people ought to eat, but the understanding of what is considered as correct and incorrect are quite different. The gourmet meal appeals to pleasure, the therapeutic meal appeals to reason, while the national meal appeals to national sentiment and nostalgia. However, it is important to take into consideration the fact that discourses do not include widely different moral spheres in our culture, and neither do they necessarily apply to different groups. This has to be seen in association with the fact that a meal is always situational. In the realm of Norwegian food culture the opinion is held that the everyday meal should be informative and disciplined, while the weekend and holiday meal should be more hedonic and pleasurable. As such there is no essential conflict between the different discourses – the various understandings of the meal are linked to different settings (for example, the kitchen and the living room) and to different times (such as weekday and weekend).

## 1) THE GOURMET DISCOURSE

### Framing: A Conspicuous Cooking Practice

Gourmet discourse is linked to a set of rules which apply to the cultivation and generation of “the good taste”. Taste is thus not entirely a private matter, but something broader which distinguishes and bonds. The old adage “there’s no accounting for taste” – *De gustibus non est disputandum* – does not thus apply in gourmet discourse. It is not the fare of everyday, but new and trendy food which is the subject of this discourse – it is the exotic, the pleasurable and the erotic which appears important and where the Mediterranean lands – particularly Italy – are clearly over-represented with positive nuances. One trend in Norwegian food habits commencing in the 1960s and lasting until around 2000 is that foreign foods have been increasingly less unusual. That which was considered as unusual and exotic in the 60s is now considered as virtually Norwegian. In the children’s column in a Norwegian national newspaper, the following observation was made by an 8-year old boy: “Norwegian food is best! Mamma says that we must eat food from every country in the world. She makes strange food. When I say I don’t like it, she says that it’s French or Indian or Italian or something. I only like real Norwegian food. The best of all is spaghetti and pizza.”<sup>2</sup>

The continental food custom became the height of fashion in the 80s. Historically, this coincided with the so-called ‘yappy period’. The term ‘yap’ is an abbreviation for ‘young, aspiring people’. The Norwegian historian Furre (1990) provides the following description of the urban lifestyle of that time: “The conspicuous opulent lifestyle flourished in the capital’s nightclubs (...). The smaller towns and urban centres tried to emulate this. Life of credit cards, financial sprees and speculation in best continental fashion was part of this vogue – outdoor life with espresso and café with “c”.<sup>3</sup> For a short period these speculators were the heroes and celebrities of the weekly and daily press. This newly-acquired and credit-financed wealth was elevated into the spotlight for admiration, in a country where traditionally wealth was to be discretely veiled behind a puritanical cloth of equality and uniformity (p. 443).

One consequence of this increased welfare was a significant investment in the kitchen and kitchen equipment. A manifestation of this in the kitchen of the 1970s, 80s and 90s is the increasing number of technological aids found on the kitchen bench. In the 90s the food processor became a necessity on a par with the mixer. There is little to suggest that such technological aids have been time- and labour saving for the domestic cook: on the contrary they have led to higher expectations and demands. The food processor was to enable the domestic cook to concoct exciting mixtures of fresh ingredients. The same applied to the juicer, electric wok, the raclette, coffee machine, bread-maker and pasta roller. The microwave oven also occupies a central place in the middle-class kitchen, being largely used to heat children’s food. The more professional style of food preparation is also reflected in the increased sales of kitchen knives and gas ranges. Such household equipment has an important symbolic function.

Seen from a gourmet standpoint, it can appear that food preparation has aroused a deeper interest for expensive design equipment and technological aids in brushed steel. One name which has become well-established in the market for kitchen equipment in Norway during the last ten years has its origin in the Italian designer company of Alessi. The firm was established as early as 1921, but it was not until the 1980s that serious interest was shown in designer kitchen equipment.<sup>4</sup> Even though the purchase of expensive designer equipment correlates with the urban middle-class consumption pattern, there is little doubt that this also ex-

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<sup>2</sup> *Aftenposten*, 14.5.2002.

<sup>3</sup> The original Norwegian word is “kafé”, but substituting the ‘k’ with ‘c’ is a sign of becoming “continental”.

<sup>4</sup> Alberto Alessi entered into an association with designers such as Philippe Stark, Richard Sappi and Also Rossi. In the 1980s several new series of coffee and tea cans were launched. In designing kitchen equipment many materials were used including steel, wood, porcelain and plastic. Gradually a wide spectrum of products was developed ranging from coffee pots, containers for ice-cubes, and many implements designed for the kitchen. Among the most famous of these is Grave’s coffee can; *Can with bird* dating from 1985, and Starck’s long-legged lemon squeezer *Juicy salif* (1990).



tended to other consumer groups. In Norway, Alessi is not only sold in exclusive kitchen equipment stores in the large towns, but also in Norway's largest ironmonger chain, the *Jernia* group, which has about 150 outlets in Norway.<sup>5</sup>

Another general trend in Norwegian food culture is the increase in jazzy cookbooks. These books are not especially concerned with everyday meals, but rather at introducing exciting new recipes based on fresh natural ingredients. The menus are complicated and present a continual challenge to the family cook to become experimental in the kitchen. In the same period many glossy food magazines also appeared on the market along with book clubs with food and wine as their theme. During the 80s and 90s men have also become an increasing part of the food discourse. Previously, the typical cook-book author was a woman (Grøn 1942). But among recent publications in the subject many have been written by chefs, personality cooks and food experts. The same also applies to TV food programmes. During the course of the 90s the female Norwegian TV-cook was superseded by her male counterpart and dishes received a more masculine touch. Much attention was given to sophistication and experiments. Food was not first and foremost regarded as a service to the family in the provision of a good and solid meal, was now an element in the entertainment of guests with exciting and unexpected dishes.

Both immigration and tourism have exposed Norwegians to the foreign kitchen more than previously including those of Spain, Italy, Greece and Pakistan. The modern Norwegian selection of groceries immediately reveals the influence of these kitchens with its sun-dried tomatoes, the olive, feta cheese, sardinellas, pine nuts, serano ham, balsamico vinegar, garam masala – to name but a few. One characteristic of the 1990s home kitchen was the particular attraction of foods and dishes from distant countries including China, Japan, Burma and Mexico. But gradually much of the fare from distant lands has become an everyday ingredient of the Norwegian menu. When foreign foods lose their exotic and exciting appeal and become an indistinguishable dish or a pub lunch, then the local or regional fare may regain its appeal. In recent years one has indeed noted that traditional Norwegian dishes have enjoyed a renaissance as the trendy food. Throughout the 1980s and 90s an increasing variety of fruits, vegetables and groceries have become available including baby carrots, crunchy carrots, cherry tomatoes, mini-potatoes, mini-corn (maize), fresh parmesan, fresh pasta, crème fraîche, etc. At the same time the kitchen has enjoyed many new products: nan bread, couscous, tortillas, pesto sauces, sushi rice, and more. The most important changes in the historical Norwegian kitchen and the modern arena is that it has become more comprehensive and complex. The post-modern kitchen is characterised by a rich multi-national vocabulary, a broad range of ingredients and a wide variety of preparations. The marketing of commercial foodstuffs, the presentation of menus in newspapers, the weeklies, and magazines, TV-programmes and so forth have all encouraged the kitchen to become a laboratory for experimenting with new dishes and tastes.

### **The Media: The TV-kitchen**

The mass media are important disseminators of the gourmet discourse. The first TV-programme in Norway on the kitchen and food preparation appeared during the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> The programme leader at that time was a domestic science teacher – Ingrid Espelid. At that time she was employed by the Information Bureau for Fish. She had the role of both TV-cook and programme hostess. The guests in the programme were either dieticians and nutrition experts, or master chefs. This programme continued to be aired until the late 1990s. The strong social-democratic philosophy of equality which characterised the political thinking of that era was reflected in the programmes' own discourse: the food and menus which were presented should, according to the rules, be based on ingredients which were available throughout the

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<sup>5</sup> [www.jernia.no](http://www.jernia.no)

<sup>6</sup> *Fjernsynskjøkkenet* – TV-kitchen

entire country (Brinch 2002). In addition to attention to traditional Norwegian fare, it was also important to introduce the viewers to more exotic foods and ingredients. The recommendations throughout the entire series were to be associated with a healthy diet. Brinch (2002) considers that the programme “TV-kitchen” should be regarded as a stage for the state’s advice concerning an appropriate diet, and where there was never any doubt about the significance of the dishes presented or the selection of foods shown. Thus is, thus, a typical example of a hegemonic discourse. What was new with the TV programme was how food should be prepared. Hitherto, one had only observed how mothers, grandmothers and neighbours had prepared food in their own kitchens. Traditionally, the kitchen had been a workroom, completely isolated from the area where the dishes were to be presented such as the dining room and lounge. When the whole process was presented on TV, this was to have consequences for the views held on food processing. Even though it had been difficult to illustrate the entire process in magazines, food preparation nevertheless was still to be considered as a back-stage activity.

In recent years the TV-kitchen has changed its style, both in form and content. The present programme is no longer characterised as an advertisement of popular dishes, but rather as a journey of culinary experiences. It was in the mid-1990s that the programme was first presented to viewers in this form. It was at this time that the Norwegian Broadcasting Company<sup>7</sup> purchased a British TV series featuring TV cook Keith Floyd. In the series Floyd took a role partly as a explorer–traveller, partly as an anthropologist. He referred to himself as a *gastro-naut*. Brinch (2002) describes the difference between Espelid Hovig and Floyd in the following terms: “Not only was the domestic science background exchanged with a rather motley background, but the formal pedagogic training – and presentation – was replaced by a personal, self-taught performance. Floyd’s food preparation became more a feast for the eyes simultaneous to an entertainment for the entire family” (p. 2). The first Norwegian-produced food/entertainment programme was launched when Lars Barmen replaced Espelid Hovig in the autumn of 1998. The series *Barmeny* (a wordplay on the presenter’s name relating it to ‘menu’ in Norwegian), was to continue the NRK traditional approach to food presentation, simultaneously to being a food and experience programme. The most visible difference was that the female domestic science teacher was replaced by a male chef.

Since 2000 or so, Norwegian viewers have also become acquainted with the British TV chef Jamie Oliver. The difference between *Barmeny* and *Jamie’s kitchen* is that the chef is more the focal point, not just as a professional and as a food presenter, but also as a celebrity. There is always a reason behind Jamie’s activities in the kitchen, and the meals always have a specific social function. Friends and family gather in the kitchen to enjoy each others’ company. The programme *Oliver’s Twist*<sup>8</sup> is interestingly placed under *Entertainment* in the newspaper reviews.<sup>9</sup> In the programme Jamie invites his friends in who are to assist in re-decorating the apartment. By way of gratitude he will prepare a fairly formidable lunch from them and where the menu includes grilled artichokes, party paella and apple strudel. According to Brinch (2002), this chef has become an international celebrity or media personality which akin to that traditionally linked to artists, royalty or politicians. In June 2003, Oliver was bestowed with the honorary title “Order of the British Empire” by Queen Elisabeth”.<sup>10</sup>

Words and expressions in reviews of recent food programmes together with the programme-leader’s cook-books (spin-off products) illustrate how food programmes have evolved from the rational discourse of the programme TV-kitchen to an entertainment discourse. Words and expressions have been borrowed from the world of music and film: “Barmen unplugged”, or “Jamie – the rock star of the kitchen”. Food preparation is presented as a form of entertainment. For those concerned with enlightenment, food preparation was a very serious theme. In more recent programmes it appears that the intention is to give a more invigorating

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<sup>7</sup> NRK – The Norwegian Broadcasting Company

<sup>8</sup> *TV Norge*, 25.11.2002. (TV Norway)

<sup>9</sup> *Aftenposten*, 25.11.2002.

<sup>10</sup> *Aftenposten*, 15.6.2003.

presentation of activities associated with the kitchen. In *Jamie's kitchen* the atmosphere associated with food preparation and the aura surrounding participants in the ensuing meal are equally important as the contents of the meal itself. Food should not be “gaudy” but “natural” – devoid of “excessive detail” and “nonsense” (and hence, the “naked chef”).

In the programme mentioned “Party paella”<sup>11</sup> features on the menu. It is clear that taste is a vital and central theme. In order to achieve the right taste one must, of course, use fresh ingredients (“not frozen peas” or “canned mussels”) and natural products (“Spanish paella rice”). Under no circumstances could the dish be characterised as “unpretentious” or a “simple” everyday meal. In a basic Norwegian cookery book (Espelid Hovig (ed.) 1982/1999), paella is presented much more as an everyday meal: fresh mussels, prawns and tuna are replaced with their canned counterparts, fresh peas with frozen peas, and paella rice with long-grained rice. What is interesting is that Oliver recommends that the domestic cook begins to prepare the paella after the guests have arrived. This illustrates the change in food preparation from a back-stage activity to one which is far more in focus. He concludes by describing it as an “important social event”. It is the Italian kitchen which dominates in his programme: ruculla salad with ham, polenta fingers with tomato sauce, spaghetti bolognese, frittered zucchini, chocolate tiramisu, risotto with almond pangritata and mascarpone, spaghetti puttanesca, bruschetta, carpaccio. In *Barmeny* a combination of traditional Norwegian dishes and more modern recipes is presented. However, in the autumn of 2002 the Italian kitchen also began to dominate this series. We follow the chef on a culinary journey to Italy: he travels to Parma to learn all about Parma ham and parmesan cheese, to Piemonte to learn to make carpaccio, risotto with asparagus, ravioli and so forth. The various programmes which have been aired show how the TV-chef's role has changed according to the times. Entertainment has become an essential element in food preparation, and the Italian kitchen occupies a central role.

#### **The opinion formers: TV-chefs**

Foucault (1984) considered that power was not a form of personal property, but the effect of discourses. When we describe something in precise terms we propagate specific knowledge which generates power differences between groups. A central feature in the discourse-analytical approach is that events, people and social phenomena are subjects for a variety of possible constructions and representations. Given that several discourses are always to be found encompassing a social phenomenon which permit alternative views and actions, some constructions or discourses will always be more dominating and “correct” than others (Burr 1995). TV-chefs are a typical example of individuals who have discursive power. They occupy a special position, able to define what is correct or incorrect in the preparation of food. However, there are also many other sources which inform of the current trend in food including films, magazines, advertisements and cook-books. The food producers also use considerable resources on advertising their products in the media.

#### **The target group: Middle-class women**

The food we eat is closely linked to cultural codes, and it is precisely this which enables food to become a good indicator of identity. When we speak about food and our eating habits, we are referring to ourselves as bodies, citizens in society and members of a family, relatives, gender, a specific social class, a nation, and so forth. Food thus serves to define who we are: “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are” (*Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je the dirai ce que tu es*).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Spain is an extremely popular holiday destination for Norwegians. Along with Swedish meatballs, paella is certainly a dish which for several is associated with a form of “stupid tourism” (Kimmeridge 2001).

<sup>12</sup> This expression originates from one of the most famous food artists throughout time, Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1756–1826). This phrase comes from the beginning of his book *Physiologie du goût* (1825).

Urban residents with a high socio-economic status in the age range 30–50 are the target group of the gourmet discourse. The exotic and exclusive dishes which dominate the gourmet discourse are, however, virtually absent in the data emerging from surveys of the Norwegian population's eating habits. When it is claimed that "sushi" has become a popular dinner meal in Norway, this does not imply that this has become normal or widely popular, but rather that this is a trend-setter and modern. The study of Norwegian meals illustrated that such dishes were typically more to be found among the hegemonic urban middle class (Bugge and Døving 2000). One standard Norwegian dictionary<sup>13</sup> defines the term "trend" as "the current vogue and style", something which is "modern", and "appropriate to the time". The fact that there is a current style immediately suggests that there is a hierarchy of taste: some things will be in good taste; other things will not. This comes to expression in many forms in the qualitative material. A young well-educated woman can inform that the family ate "sushi" for dinner on the very day that the interview was made. She also mentioned that she did not have a particular liking for "traditional Norwegian food". In this connection when mentioned that meat-balls (rissoles) tasted terrible. Here, it is not only the sensory experience of taste to which she was referring, but also in the sense of incorrect and old-fashioned. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) considers that taste is just a sense for distinction. Further, he considers that taste must be seen as the basis for everything – people and objects – everything that one is to others, how one classifies oneself and others. When one legitimises one's own taste, it is typical that one refers to what one does *not* like. Or as the above-mentioned middle-class woman expressed: "traditional meat-balls taste terrible". Taste is perhaps first and foremost 'distaste', an aversion or intolerance for other's taste – in other words – "you are what you *don't* eat!"

The qualitative interviews reveal that a conspicuous relational identity construction in Norway is the distinction between "I am different" (the urban middle class), and "I am like most people" (the working class). The manner in which women communicate their association can be regarded as contrasting symbolic groups, something which is important in social differentiation. The concepts are used as positive identification criteria. The terms are not defined as class identity in the same way as middle- and working class, but as a collective representation. Those associating themselves with "most people" regard themselves as moderate, average and "normal people". A typical description of personal food habits in this category is: "I do not like all these new and strange dishes with strong spices". This contrasts notably with the middle-class woman's descriptions: "If we shall have meatballs, then we must make them a bit different. It's very important to have other things in them so that it's not just ordinary Norwegian meatballs". The middle-class woman's intention is to be creative, different, and to distinguish herself from "the majority". It is important to be receptive to new tastes: it reflects the fact that one is keeping up with the times and has the correct food-cultural skills.

It is well documented in official statistics, market surveys and a range of social studies that there is a statistically significant relation between food customs and social class. It may nevertheless be observed that these differences are not initially associated with income, but that rather it is food preferences which can be linked to a form of class culture (Bourdieu 1984, Tomlinson and Warde 1993). What type of food people prepare and eat is thereby more or less an expression for their class association and social position. In his analysis of French eating habits Bourdieu shows how tastes vary within each class and sub-strata. It emerges that the French middle class prefer lighter food such as chicken, fish, fruit, vegetables and the leaner dairy products while the French working class prefer the more solid dishes such as red meat and full-fat dairy products. Bourdieu (1984) observes that in general the middle-class eating habits are far less pragmatic than those of the working class culture. A number of Norwegian studies show that similar differences also exist in Norwegian food culture (Bugge and Døving 2000).

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<sup>13</sup> *Bokmålsordboka* (1997).

### The social field: The domestic kitchen

Changes in views concerning food preparation also lead to changes in the design of the kitchen. One consequence of this was the emergence of the large kitchen as well as kitchen solutions which were more closely associated with the family living room. In contrast to the ‘laboratory’ kitchen of the 1950s, the modern kitchen is more open plan, accessible and informal. It is no longer a work-room, but also an activity and a social area. Food preparation is more visible, and it is no longer just the end-product which is presented. In her sociological analysis of home furnishings Sellerberg (1977) chose an interactionist perspective. The home is furnished in accordance to how one wants to live life simultaneously to expressing the taste and style corresponding to the individual’s personality and social identity.

An example of how this self-presentation comes to expression in the design of the kitchen emerges in the importance attached by kitchen furnishers to so-called ‘fronts’. “Fronts have a steadily increasing role in the design of the kitchen” (Smestad 1987). The term ‘front’ comes from Latin and essentially means ‘the forehead’ or ‘brow’. In connection with kitchen design the ‘front’ refers to the kitchen façade. The attention given to the façade is an indication on the one hand of welfare (expensive materials), and on the other of changes views on food preparation. In a publication about the largest manufacturer of kitchens in Norway,<sup>14</sup> (Smestad 1987), it emerges that the most exclusive designs on the 1980s utilised an oak façade. The kitchen illustrated in the book also had the appropriate name *Oak gourmet* (1985). In the advertisement for this kitchen suite elements covering both food preparation and serving are illustrated. In the text, we read “Oak gourmet. What an exciting environment for those who love making food and naturally attach importance to products and the settings. Oak gourmet is solid oak. Draws and door-frames in solid timber, plate glass – all in solid oak – and with several layers of clear varnish” (Smestad 1987:141). Thus, it is not only the food which shall be “pure” and “selected”, but also the kitchen furnishings. The advertisement itself was the combined effort of the manufacturer and a leading Norwegian advertising agency.<sup>15</sup>

### Orientation: Differentiation and integration

It was certainly not food that was in Veblen’s thoughts when he introduced the concept “conspicuous consumption” in 1899, but appears to be a central focus in present eating habits. Food preparation is not merely something carried out by women in order “to satisfy man and child”, but also to “find self expression”. One of the claims made about contemporary society is that we live in a consumer society. This is essentially associated with the increased supply of goods and services, and that commerce has had an increasingly important role in everyday life. This has also changed women’s food preparation customs. The increasing availability of commercial food products (ready – and semi-prepared products) have released much of the productive work linked to food such as hermetically preserving fruits and vegetables, baking and so forth. The housewife has become a consumer. Consumption is a completely different activity than providing the home with the necessities of life. The market economy’s ethos is precisely the free choice of the individual, thereby laying the foundation for the possibility for self-expression and the achievement of the dreams of the chosen lifestyle (Amelien, Storm-Mathiesen, Bahr Bugge 2003). Giddens (1991) defines lifestyle as a more or less integrated set of practices which the individual chooses, not only to meet utilitarian needs but also to provide the basis for a specific presentation of oneself (narrative of self-identity) (p.

<sup>14</sup> Norema

<sup>15</sup> A market survey was undertaken in association with the Bates Group (Ted Bates) which would register life-style, taste and attitudes to their immediate environment. It was important for the kitchen supplier to associate different target groups with the various kitchen facades. On the basis of the survey, the products were placed into what was referred to as “six different basis environments” which were linked to the various consumer segments (life-styles): the classical, the culinary, the rural, the functional, the technical and the effective kitchen environment. The intention was to establish which facade had a “natural place in the different environments”. An oak front had its natural place in the culinary environment, and was appropriate for “those who enjoy making food” (Smestad 1987:141).

81). The concept of lifestyle is not particularly fruitful for traditional society. The assumption is that the individual has a wide range of choice. Lifestyle is something to which the individual adjusts himself, and not something that is passed down from one generation to the next. These choices become restructured into routine practices which come to expression in the manner by which an individual dresses or eats, for example.

Fashion is regarded as the antithesis of tradition. To follow the fashion is looked at as a differentiation or a distancing strategy while following tradition can be seen as an integration strategy. A distancing strategy when preparing a fashionable dish would be to assemble unexpected combinations. Another would be to use unusual and exotic taste regulations. An essential point of going with the trend is precisely conformity with one's own group while at the same time distancing it from others (Sellerberg 1979). Several studies show how the higher status groups will attempt to disassociate themselves from lower status groups through food (Bourdieu 1984, Mennell 1985, Mintz 1985, Fitchen 1988). In a column from *Norsk Dameblad* [Norwegian Ladies' magazine] from the 1960s, we read of an interview with a middle class woman: "If I am inviting guests then I invite them to an Italian evening. The table is laid with Italian porcelain and glass, and I shall serve pizza. This is a hot cheese dish, actually a Neapolitan speciality. (...). Pizza tastes delightfully and has that particular advantage that it can be prepared in advance, something which means much to a busy working woman". The woman interviewed is busy and sophisticated. She has been on a study-journey to Italy and wishes to serve her guests something exclusive and distinguished. Today, it would be unthinkable to serve pizza in such social circles. The example illustrates how taste is both individual, class-distinguishing, and a history-related phenomenon. During the last 40 years pizza has been transposed from being a distinguished middle-class cuisine to a term of abuse – unhealthy, fast-food. This is clearly not a food product which will emphasize the differences in a cultural hierarchy.

In sociological literature, changes in vogue are often described as a process where the subervient groups attempt to imitate the attire and food of the upper strata, and that the latter abandon old and new status indicators which again will emphasise their distinction relative to the lower status groups ("trickle down). McCracken (1988) considers that this metaphor may be misleading as the process is possibly more characterised by an upward "hunt and flee" process rather than a downward process. As such this is comparable with the diffusion process described by Bourdieu (1984) in his book *La Distinction* (1979). In French the term 'distinction' has a double meaning. First it concerns making or seeing differences; secondly it refers to distinguishing – to distinguish oneself from others in a specific manner (Bourdieu 1984). Gourmet discourse may largely be said to be the middle class reaction to lower class food – a form of conspicuous food consumption or food snobbery. Døving (2002) describes how ketchup and mustard represent a form of distinction between the middle class and the majority of people in Norwegian food culture. The middle class generally adopts a superior attitude towards ketchup. This is also the attitude of gourmet chefs. These swear by fresh ingredients, and ketchup represents a poor surrogate. For the middle class ketchup is held to be in poor taste. The product is often linked to "incorrect food" such as fast-food (hamburgers and hot dogs).

### **Subject position: The Gourmet Cook**

When the British food authoress Nigella Lawson appeared on Norwegian TV in the autumn of 2002, she appeared in many ways to be a materialisation of the modern domestic cook: "With her charming smile and intriguing short cuts she made appealing food which was quick and easy to prepare".<sup>16</sup> She describes her own dishes as "quick meals". "I love to eat a quick meal, and to prepare something at full speed does not give me a nervous breakdown".<sup>17</sup> The dishes she prepared in her cookbooks are typical for the modern everyday fare. There is no mention of meat and fish dishes, but TV-food, snacks, "girlies food", food for the rainy day

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<sup>16</sup> [www.matsiden.no](http://www.matsiden.no)

<sup>17</sup> [www.nrk.no](http://www.nrk.no)

and junk food.<sup>18</sup> She considers that her popularity must be seen in the light of the fact that she prepares food for the home in contrast to the many other professional TV-chefs. “My food is easy to prepare at home. I hate this artificial food ready served on individual plates. My attitude to food is that there should be more than enough and should be served from a large bowl in the middle of the table. I am not interested in making restaurant food”.<sup>19</sup>

In a review of the programme it was said that what was courageous in Nigella’s approach to food was that she “dared to admit that she enjoys being in the kitchen”, and that she “likes to make good food for herself, her family and friends”.<sup>20</sup> This must be seen in association with the feminist discourse of the 1960s and 70s. When Lawson published the baking book “How to be domestic Goddess” in 2002, it aroused many negative reactions. The title of the book was seen to be an encouragement to the woman to return to the kitchen. Lawson herself considered that the title should be seen as ironic. Her intention was not that women should be housewives again. First and foremost the book should be a source for making “women and men less strangers to their own kitchen”. As the author herself states: “That is precisely why we purchase cookbooks and watch food programmes. We dream about that day when we will have the time to make food”.<sup>21</sup> Regarding the title of the book (“Goddess”), it is interesting that she describes the target group as both “women and men”.

In several connections she has been referred to as the “best and most influential culinary author” in Britain.<sup>22</sup> She would prefer to be called “a modern Schönberg Erken”<sup>23</sup> and the female equivalent of Jamie Oliver. And: “in the centre are those temptations she offers”. Having looked more closely at her food programmes it is however clear that it is not the food in itself which is the theme, but also Nigella’s attitude, voice and the environment of the food preparation which is in focus. Appetite for food is often linked to sexuality. The Internet search showed that there are many appetising metaphors associated with the woman together with the fact that a meal is often the focal point of a date, a prelude to sex, and as a spice in the tired relationship.<sup>24</sup> Regarding Lawson, she has been described both as a “temptress” and a “sex symbol”. In this connection it was also pointed out that there was never “an apron in sight in her food programmes”. What’s wrong with an apron? In the Norwegian dictionary (1997), an apron is described as a garment for protection or decoration which covers the front of another item of clothing. Figuratively, this may also mean decorum. In a study of changes in Norwegian clothing customs it emerges that while the apron was an absolutely essential item of clothing for the older female generation, this has virtually disappeared among the younger generation. There is much to indicate a change in the thinking between these two generations. The younger woman will willingly express “Neither will I fly around like a housewife” (Grimstad Klepp 2001:67). To wear an apron hardly seems compatible with the impression that a modern, working woman wishes to make. It is quite normal that the working woman changes into everyday attire when returning from work. The young woman does not then put on an apron but rather a jogging suit. It is this which represents the modern apron. An important reason for not using an apron is precisely that “you always put your jog-

<sup>18</sup> A meal can be defined as a social situation (Bugge and Døving 2000).

<sup>19</sup> www.magasinet.no

<sup>20</sup> www.capelen.no

<sup>21</sup> Interview in *Magasinet* 23.11.2002.

<sup>22</sup> www.nrk.no

<sup>23</sup> The Norwegian female cookery book author Schönberg-Erken was an important source for promoting new and unusual dishes, refining the preparation of food and encouraging a large choice of ingredients (Store kokebok 1936). Among other things her contributions included an Europeanization of the domestic kitchen at the beginning of the 20th century (Grøn 1942).

<sup>24</sup> In the cookbook *Gazpacho i Cordoba – og andre oppskrifter på det gode liv* (Kimmeridge 2001), we can read the following: I believe that it was the female vegetarian Maria-Teresa who in her time taught me to love gazpacho. That was how I liked her, I also like that naked, southern, appealing dish with its enticing appearance ... (...). Gazpacho became my focus of fascination, my fetish and all my eroticism became directed towards gazpacho ... (p. 99). Or: “It was Giulia Bosci, one of Italy’s prettiest young actresses who taught me what “alla romana” meant (...). She then roasted the veal steaks in spluttering butter and olive oil (...). She served then (...). But this was just the overture. Saltimbocca always leads to something more. “Alla romana”: This is the way we do it in Rome (pp. 155-156).

ging dress on when you get home” (Grimstad Klepp 2001:67). Common to both garments is that they are especially intended for home use, and they are not regarded as especially sexy. In Goffman’s terminology these garments could be described as ‘behind the scenes’ gear<sup>25</sup>. While sex symbol Nigella does not use an apron this is nevertheless a part of the Swedish TV-chef Tina Nordström’s outfit.<sup>26</sup> On several occasions she has been described as “every Swedish man’s dream wife”, while Nigella is also referred to as a “seductive temptress” and a “domestic goddess”. For the trendy domestic cook there is assumedly little doubt that the apron is to be preferred to the jogging suit.

### **Recipe: How to cook a gourmet meal**

“Dressing for green salad: Press a garlic clove, add a handful of finely chopped mint leaves, stir in Extra virgin olive oil until of suitable consistency. Mix with torn green salad, preferably a variety of types, and serve immediately. This dressing was demonstrated by the chef in one of the leading restaurants in Pienza, Toscana. A refreshing appetizer to the meal. This may also be used in Norwegian menus as a side dish to fish and meat (chicken and pork).”

This description shows how we understand meals in a given format. The domestic cook will have structural and cultural concepts concerning “correct and “incorrect” food, and how the correct meal is to be structured. Garlic and olive oil (extra virgin) are assumedly two of the most conspicuous “trade marks” in the Norwegian urban middle class dinner culture. This is something one ought to “like” if one wishes to be a part of the middle class food culture.

### **Keywords**

There are number of typical words and expressions which emerge in the gourmet discourse and where Mediterranean expressions are excessive in their nuances. In many languages the continental spelling often replaces the national spelling. In Norway, for example, we do not visit the “kafé” but the “café”, and it is not “kaffe” which is drunk but “cappuccino” or caffè latte”. Few national words and expressions are used in this discourse.

## **2) THE HEALTH DISCOURSE**

### **Framing: The Medicalized Cooking Practice**

An important change in society during the 20th century was the increased role of science. The scientific model and technological products made an intrusion into many aspects of life. That branch of science which has possibly been most successful in assisting an understanding of food is medicine (Zola 1983, Conrad 1992). The fact that medicine encompasses a steadily increasing number of human and societal problems is frequently referred to as a medicalization process. The focus of this process is that concepts and descriptions of situations, conditions, behaviour, are medical. As such food becomes a question of health and sickness – a medicalized food culture.

One trend with Norwegian eating habits in the last twenty or thirty years is the increasing attention to healthy foods (Wandel and Bugge 1994, Bugge 1995, Wandel 1997). Historical studies show that for one or another reason there has always been concern about people eating the correct food. But when nutrition became a recognised science in the 1920s, this theme

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<sup>25</sup> In his book *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman 1959) uses a theatrical analogy in his analysis of human interaction. In his account of what he describes as the art of impression management he employs the concept of front stage and backstage: “The front is that part of the performance that generally functions in rather fixed and general ways to define the situation for those who observe the performance (Ritzer 1992:217). He argues further that fronts tend to be institutionalised (collective representations). According to Goffman, fronts have a tendency to be chosen rather than to be created.

<sup>26</sup> See Subject Position: The National Cook



came to occupy an even more central place (Grøn 1942). A central theme in the health discourse is the side-effects of the affluent western diet. As one elderly man commented in respect of Norwegian food habits: “It’s now Christmas every day”.<sup>27</sup> In the health discourse this eating pattern becomes linked to the phenomenon of life-style diseases. In the last few years scientific research has thrown light upon the dangers not only of fat and cholesterol, but salt, refined sugar, and chemicals, all of which are regarded as hidden dangers in the diet. The traditional meat and fatty Norwegian diet is described as a potential hazard. The whole-fat dairy products are the villain of the piece. The price we have to pay for this lavish eating style is conditions such as obesity, atherosclerosis and diabetes. This has resulted in the Norwegian population being encouraged to be more Spartan in their diet. One consequence of this is that a number of traditional recipes have been changed. A typical example is the reduction in the use of fat and eggs.<sup>28</sup>

The transition to a leaner diet has been particularly manifest among the middle class. Among the less well off, the heavy and nutritious meat diet continues to have a central place (Bourdieu 1979, Belasco 1993, Wandel 1997, Crotty 1999, Bugge og Døving 2000). The relation between class, health and lifestyle is complex. Bourdieu (1984) draws the distinction between social classes whereby an individual will have different views on control and autonomy in one’s own life. He concludes that people with considerable cultural and economic capital will generally have more ability not only to define good taste, but also to determine their own body and appropriate lifestyle.

The health discourse showed that overweight and slimming are central issues. Obesity is normally seen as a condition where people have a high level of stored body fat. From a sociological viewpoint, however, it is not necessary to further quantify this.<sup>29</sup> Sobal (1999) considers that a relative definition is more fruitful. The quantity of fat permitted will vary between different groups (women, men, dancers, labourers). There is much to suggest that obesity is considered as a stigma in contemporary society. It is the slim body which is the ideal. A stigma is to be considered as a quality which gives no credit and disqualifies social acceptance. In the classical sociological study *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity* (Goffman 1963), it emerges that this can be related both to the body (excessive fat) and psychological deformities (character flaws). The popular view of the cause of obesity is essentially linked to over-eating and inactivity. Eating is a particularly problematic subject of overweight persons. There are a number of reactions to this state: denial, clandestine eating, avoidance and redefining a situation. Stigmatisation has many consequences for social life: finding a partner, access to the career ladder, exposition in the press of obesity and dieticians’ views on obesity (Sobal 1999). One article in a Norwegian newspaper<sup>30</sup> takes up the challenge facing the overweight persons during the summer: “The sun is shining and lightly-clad bodies crowd the beach. The best time of the year? Not for everyone. For many overweight persons the summer is a nightmare”. The 27-year old woman interviewed described how food for her had become both a friend and an enemy. She concluded saying “I don’t think I would have been a better person had I been slimmer, but I am certain that I would have felt better in myself”. She also added: “I really do need help, but in Norway this is something which one

<sup>27</sup> *Norwegian Ethnologic Survey questionnaire*. This is an organisation which assembles material on Norwegian culture. The material is classified by county and available to researcher who wish to study Norwegian cultural heritage.

<sup>28</sup> The increasing awareness of the dangers of animal fat and cholesterol has resulted in relatively large changes in the Norwegian diet. From the 1970s and up to 2000 the use of fat has been changed in many respects. Less butter and hard margarine is use, and more soft margarine and oil. Consumption of fruit, vegetables, fish and grain products have increased significantly. There has been an increase in minerals with a high sugar content and processed potato products and meat. In a qualitative study (Bugge 1995), it emerged that the concern arose among women who would prefer to “cut off the fat on meat chops”, and to fry in oil instead of margarine and “do not buy dairy and meat products with a high fat content”, “only bought butter with few calories”. Such expressions were typical examples of the changes which the consumer had made in the basis of the recommendations of experts.

<sup>29</sup> Body mass index (BMI).

<sup>30</sup> *Dagbladet*, 21.6.2003.

must manage oneself. I think that the State considers it more important that Norway is a non-smoking zone than to have a population satisfied with their life”.

There is a general conception that the individual is responsible for his own body. This has also resulted in slimming becoming a lucrative business area. One example of this is the extensive use of the concept GI (Glycaemia Index). This index was first introduced in 1981 by Jenkins. In Norway, Dr Lindberg has made this a familiar term, first and foremost through popular scientific books and the media. Dr Lindberg runs a clinic called “Weight in Balance”. His theories have been the subject of comprehensive public debates. He has been described not only as a “food expert”, but also as a “dietary agitator”. Even though he has the title “Dr” he is by no means a member of the recognised medical community. In a review of his book *Naturlig slank* [Slimming naturally] (2001), we read that this is considered as an “audacious book which conflicts with the official view of what is considered to be a healthy diet”.<sup>31</sup> What is considered to be a provocation in his theories are precisely that he criticizes the key carbohydrates in the Norwegian diet – potatoes and bread. Neither is his dietary advice in accordance with the official Norwegian guidelines.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, there is little doubt that his dietary advice has made considerable inroad among large groups of the Norwegian population. In this connection mention should be made that his book (cited above) was at the top of sales statistics in Norway (2002/3). The public acceptance of Dr Lindberg may perhaps be seen as a reaction against the preachings of the medical elite. One of the books on the Norwegian market covering this theme has the title *The GI Revolution* (2003).<sup>33</sup> In this connection it is important that the medical elite undertake a comprehensive effort to maintain their hegemonic position in the health discourse.

Another feature of the Norwegian eating pattern is the disquiet surrounding modern food production and its possible consequences for health. This relates, for example, to the use of additives, antibiotics, farm waste and run-off. Animal disease and genetically modified products. Consumers clearly desire a pure and natural product. There are also many who are concerned with animal husbandry in modern food production. This is not only linked to the effects on health but also to environmental and ethical considerations (Bugge 1995).<sup>34</sup> In the 2001 version of *Boeuf Bourguignon* the following may be read in a cookery book: “Ox in the age of the mad cow disease? (Kimmeridge 2001:197). Even though meat is the most central ingredient in a Norwegian dinner, and that meat consumption has risen throughout the past few decades,<sup>35</sup> there is much to suggest that views are changing towards meat. Meat is not only unhealthy but is also ethically and politically incorrect (Bugge 1995). This reconsideration of the human relationship with nature and the environment has had many consequences for the Norwegian consumer pattern. In most shops we can now find ecological milk, eggs from free-range hens, ketchup without additives, and so forth. The introduction of these types of product illustrate how the food industry has been responsive to the scepticism which consumers have shown to modern food production.

### **The media: News and research**

The health discourse is concerned with the creation of norms associated with healthy and unhealthy eating habits. In general the discourse has clear references to the therapeutic effects of food. The message is often formulated in terms of what people should or should not eat. But

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<sup>31</sup> [www.helserevyen.no](http://www.helserevyen.no)

<sup>32</sup> The National Council on Nutrition and Physical Activity

<sup>33</sup> The term ‘revolution’ here refers to an attempt to restructure the medical order (*Statsvitenskapelig leksikon* 1997). In the above case reference is made to the attempt to change the medical order.

<sup>34</sup> Studies by Wandel and Bugge (1994) have shown that large sections of consumers are concerned with the source of their food. This is also one of the themes in the musical video *Remind me* made by a leading Norwegian pop group *Røyksopp*. Here, the course of the milk-shake is traced from the cow, via the fast-food chain, and back to the animal.

<sup>35</sup> In the 1990s meat consumption increased by 10 kg per person, and has never been so high consumption as at the present time.

what is considered as healthy or unhealthy has changed in the course of history. Irrespective of the theories which have been fashionable, the public have received nutrition information from a variety of sources including nutrition experts, the mass media, newspapers, TV, magazines and cookbooks. The health discourse has essentially been disseminated using scientific terms. This appeals to health and reason, and food and meals are presented in a logical and neutral language in contrast to the symbolic terminology of the gourmet discourse. In a study of consumer's views concerning food, health and the environment (Bugge 1995), it emerged that consumers regarded much of the research-based information as relatively complex and confusing. One distinctive feature of the scientific understanding is that this must be open to a constant revision of the status quo. A typical reaction to this was: "I take all these statements with a pinch of salt as they all seem to be contradictory: one day are we informed that we should not eat carrots – the next we are told that these are incredibly nutritious!" This study shows that Norwegian experts were considered to be very credible while at the same time nutritional science was regarded as a combination of "basic common sense" and "new scientific knowledge". Those interviewed were most sceptical to "foreign studies": "A study undertaken in England – possibly they had fed enormous quantities of a substance to some rats". Such surveys were generally regarded as eccentric with little relevance to the subject's own diet. The results showed that even though the persons interviewed had an ambivalent attitude towards information of diet through the media and experts, they had a relatively large influence on the subject's own considerations of good and bad food habits.

### **Opinion formers: Medical experts**

As mentioned, much reference is made to research in the health discourse, and medical experts are frequent guests in TV-programmes on health and food, for example. It was in the 1980s that an esteemed professor in nutritional science<sup>36</sup> appeared as a regular guest in the programme *Norwegian TV-kitchen*. He was acknowledged as a particularly important disseminator to the Norwegian public of information on the new concept of cholesterol (Brinch 2002). The medical experts cooperate with other public bodies regarding norms for correct food habits as well as influencing attitudes and behaviour, the dissemination of information and to stimulating public debate. Foucault (1978) describes how modern science continually attempts to control and discipline the human body and lifestyle: We live today in a world where to an ever-increasing degree our bodies are subjected to surveys and control by professional and administrative institutions. The so-called GI revolution may possibly be interpreted as the common man's revolt against the health authorities. In recent years there has been a number of heated debates around the GI-diet. Participants in the debate on the one side have been representatives of the medical elite, and on the other the dietary agitators. The medical experts have been criticised for their arrogance, disdain and taciturn attitude towards alternative ideas. In this association the experts have been referred to as "the Norwegian dietary mafia" and the "bread professors".

### **Target group: Young women**

To have an overweight body is consequently to be associated with a number of cultural, social and psychological stigma, and is the subject of much criticism and prejudice in the western world. This message has been particularly directed towards women, and there is also much to suggest that women, more so than men, feel it their responsibility to have a healthy life style and to manipulate their body in order to attain beauty and health. In general there are more stringent and other limits for the woman's appearance (demeanour and body) than for men. To be slim is important for a women's attraction and value on the partner market. A predominant cultural conception is that women attract husbands with a high socio-economic status through their attractive appearance. Having an "attractive wife" is also one manner of

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<sup>36</sup> MD, Ph.D., Kaare Norum, Institute for nutrition, University of Oslo

expressing one's own social status ("a trophy"). In this connection it is important to mention that the Norwegian Dictionary (1997) defines the word "slim" as "a small, slender and stylish woman".

Slimming is also a typical woman's activity (Sobal 1999). It is also the theme in a report from the Norwegian Health department: *Femininity – healthy or dangerous?*<sup>37</sup> Among other things this report discusses the significance of health, beauty and aesthetics in the modern women's culture – a culture where health may gain or be put at risk (NOU 1999). One example of the health risk is that many women who slim are already within the limits of what is medically defined as a "normal weight".<sup>38</sup> One consequence of this is conditions such as anorexia and bulimia. It has been mentioned from several quarters that a woman's eating pattern must be seen in the light of the norms which social institutions and materialist interests impose upon women: the fashion and beauty industry, the slimming industry, the health sector and the role expected to be played by the gender. All this, coupled with living in a society characterised by welfare and surplus results in status being accorded to those able to manifest control of their body. The discussion around obesity illustrates the complex cultural ideology associated with the normative acceptable body. Foucault (1978) describes how the condition of the body is frequently interpreted as a materialist indication of the individual's moral character. In a consumer-theoretical perspective the body is often considered as an object for constant change and transformation (Giddens 1991, Featherstone 1994).

### **Social field: The everyday kitchen**

The health discourse has its place in the everyday kitchen. The association with the type of food to be consumed in the different rooms (kitchen/living room), and times (week-days/weekends) are clear. Health and gourmet appear to be important antitheses where week-days and weekends are their relative time spheres. In the weekday syntax the elements are the kitchen, health, fish, fibrous bread, while the weekends syntax contains the elements living room, hedonism, fry and fritters, fine, white bread and alcohol. These spheres are strictly and ritually separated within the weekly cycle (weekday/weekend) and the annual cycle (week-days/holidays). The weekend and holiday ethos is that one eats more of the "prohibited" and "sinful" and what one desires, while the weekday shall be structured and disciplined.

### **Orientation: The body as an action system**

In the 1950s it appears that one was more taken up with collective health, while today bad eating habits are more of an individual responsibility – generally associated with a weak will and lack of self-control and discipline. Giddens (1991) considers that a characteristic trend of the post-modern society is that the body has become a part of the reflexive modernisation. The body has become regarded as a part of an action programme. In this connection it is also worth mentioning that Giddens (1991) considers that the expression "being on a diet" in the narrow sense of the phrase is only a particular version of a much more general phenomenon – the cultivation of bodily regimes as a means of reflexivity influencing the project of self (p. 105).

One concept particularly associated with reflexive modernity is the lifestyle concept. Seldom has a concept been so rapidly adopted by the popular and scientific literature as this. Most dictionaries did not, however, refer to the term until after 1970. In the Norwegian dictionary (1997) the term is used synonymously with 'way of life', i.e. the manner in which an individual lives, dresses, his habits, social circles and values. Articles using this concept were first registered in *Index Medicus* in 1972. Coreil, Levin, Jaco (1985) undertook an examination of all articles indexed under 'lifestyle' in the period 1972–1983. This showed that the majority

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<sup>37</sup> NOU (Norwegian Official Reports) 1999:13.

<sup>38</sup> Body Mass Index (BMI),

of articles referred to lifestyle as meaning a specific form of behaviour which was identified as a risk element for illness and sudden death. This interpretation of the concept alludes to an understanding of lifestyle as a personal trait which is possible to modify, and that the individual may change his lifestyle according to his own volition. Little or no attention was given to the major society within which the individual was living. This atomistic perspective is particularly paradoxical when one takes into consideration that the lifestyle concept emerged from a school tradition which gave precedence precisely to context and meaning.<sup>39</sup> The problem with the positivist use of the lifestyle concept is that food habits, for example, are regarded as an isolated element divorced from the social context. Based on a sociological viewpoint, one objection to the medical approach to eating habits will be that one will largely regard the person as a privatised or autonomous individual, and that one overlooks many of the social and cultural structures which encompass the pattern of eating habits. In sociology this is characterised as the social game or the social bond.

### **Subject position: The therapeutic cook**

The therapeutic cook shall prepare wholesome and healthy food. The female founder of the most successful Norwegian slimming company, Grete Roede, appears as the leading exponent of healthy Norwegian food. In June 2003, Roede was bestowed with no less than the King's gold medal for her services. The basis for this award was her "weight-reducing contribution for the nation". In this connection she was dubbed as the "slim queen" who had slimmed away more than "5000 tons of fat".<sup>40</sup> Roede states that what is important for the domestic cook is to make balanced meals with bread, potatoes, pasta, rice, fish and meat in addition to fruit and salads. Everybody should be able to eat until they are satisfied, but calorie-rich food should be avoided with caution. In the 1970s Roede launched the concept of "yes-food", "cautionary food" and "no-food" for the Norwegian population.<sup>41</sup>

### **Recipe: How to cook a therapeutic meal**

"We can describe Mediterranean diet with just a few keywords: Much fresh bread. Large quantities of fresh vegetables, fruit, potatoes and root vegetables. Moderate quantities of meat

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<sup>39</sup> Considerations concerning different life-styles can, among others, be traced back to Marx's studies from the end of the 1800s. He regarded life-styles as being determined by one's financial circumstances. Marx considered that life-styles which emerged within a society corresponded to the division of labour within society. That is to say that income and employment status were considered to have a major effect on life as lived by the various social groups. The first definition of the life-style concept can be traced back to the 1920s. It is largely associated with the Austrian psychiatrist Alfred Adler, but many consider that the most important contributor to the concept was Max Weber and his concept "style of life", which again was associated to the Weberian class concept. The word "class" for Weber was a social grouping whereby members have the same ideals regarding their way of life. Generally, people belonging to the same social class share this conception, although not necessarily so. The concept of social status (class) normally serves to express how common features result in individuals seeking out like-minded and how relatively closed groups of persons with similar tastes and life-style are the result (Østerberg 1984). Veblen (1899) was concerned with developing the Marxist life-style concept to include other influential factors than the purely economic. Veblen meant that a person's life-style was also motivated by the valuation of status. Parsons observed that through this perspective Veblen's theory had constructed a synthesis of the Marxist tradition (conflict-filled economic interests), and the symbolic significance of life-style patterns which could be used in a broader comparative manner (Weberian tradition). In this connection it should also be mentioned that it was Weber who conceived the concept of "socio-economic status". What was important for Veblen was thus to develop a holistic life-style concept based upon considerations of income, work, education and status (Coreil et al. 1985).

<sup>40</sup> *Aftenposten* 19.6.2003.

<sup>41</sup> [www.grete.roede.no](http://www.grete.roede.no)

– served once or twice a week. Fish and seafood. Cheese strewn over pasta or served together with salad. Beans of all varieties were included in the daily meal. Fresh fruit to complete the meal. The small amount of fat used was olive oil. Animal products were used in moderation. The fat in milk products was saturated fat thereby increasing cholesterol. Even though you remain slim, caution is needed in consumption of butter and whole milk. One needs ½ litre milk and cheese on a couple of slices of bread in order to cover one’s daily needs for calcium. There is no need to drink excessive quantities of milk. Preferably use skimmed milk and lean cheese both on the table and in food preparation”.

This description of the meal includes clear references to the therapy which the composition of the meal can give. Mediterranean diet is often used as an indication of a wholesome and healthy diet. This is explained by the fact that these countries have lower rates of heart and vascular disease than North-European countries. As Brillat-Savarin pointed out as early as 1825: “People’s destiny is dependent upon the constituents of their daily diet”.

### **Key words**

Healthy food is characterised by a Calvinistic ethos – i.e. frugal and thrifty. The ascetic characteristic stands in strong contrast to the hedonistic gourmet discourse. Central concepts include, for example, low calories, fibre-rich, lean, low fat, cholesterol-free and heart-friendly.

## **3) THE NATIONAL DISCOURSE**

### **Framing: A critique of post-modern cooking practice**

One of the big narratives concerning the Norwegian food pattern is that the Norwegian kitchen is threatened by external forces. As shown, this is related to the modern Norwegian life style together with the increasing ingress of foreign diets. In the debate on Norwegian food habits, American food-culture imperialism is frequently discussed. It is particularly the fast-food restaurants which are regarded as a threat to good eating habits and an example of a decadent food culture. McDonalds was founded in 1954 by Ray Crok although not established in Norway until the end of the 80s. When the hamburger was introduced into Europe in the 70s and 80s, it was described as the latest trend, and the younger generation loved this youthful and American taste. In his book *The McDonaldization of Society*, the American sociologist George Ritzer (1992) maintains that not only did McDonalds revolutionise the restaurant branch and created trendy foods, it also affected American society – and subsequently the rest of the western world in several ways. He characterises this process as McDonaldization, that is an increasing importance attached to efficiency, calculability, predictability and control.

In the Norwegian food culture debate caution has been given among other things to the expansion of the American fast-food culture. In a brochure from the National Association for Public Health (1998), we can read the following: “We wish to protect the family mealtime and caution against the development of so-called ‘one hand food’; fast-food which may be eaten at any time and any place.” The growth of this “food culture” is relatively large in the USA among other countries, and many are concerned that Norway will follow this path”. (p. 5). The study of mealtimes (Bugge and Døving 2000) showed that the idea whereby family members “only take some food” when this fits into the individual time schedule does not appear to be a particularly widespread eating pattern. In the 1980s this pattern became referred to as “grazing”. A survey showed that the majority (90%) of Norwegian families eat dinner together on a daily basis. The dinner represented the social peak for the family, and without this meal many considered that they would not feel that they were “a family”.

Considerable opposition exists to fast-food and American foods in many European countries. This has also resulted in so-called underground or opposition movements where the food consumer is encouraged to eat ethnic, exotic, ecological, vegetarian and home-produced food and to show solidarity in their purchases. This “anti” kitchen culture appears to provide the

basis for social gatherings of urban, radical trend-setters (Bugge and Døving 2000). One such movement calls itself the *Slow food* movement.<sup>42</sup>

Even though there has been an increasing tolerance shown towards other tastes and other food cultures, there is an ongoing discussion in many western countries on the extent to which the new and foreign foods are a threat to local and national traditions. A typical expression in this connection is “nobody eats Norwegian food any more”. Frozen pizza is a typical example of such worldwide or mass-produced food. In the Norwegian dissolution discourse there is no other dish which has been subjected to so much debate; it has become virtually a problem for society. Even though the pizza has become more acceptable over the years, there is little to suggest that the domestic cook ideally wishes to serve it for dinner. This has become a dish comparable to the gutter press: “everybody eats (reads) it and everybody hates it”. Searching on Google using “Pizza Grandiosa” (Norway’s most sold frozen pizza) made hits covering everything from private home pages to newspaper debates, the Value Commission’s final report, political parties’ national congresses and parliamentary debates.

Much of the criticism directed towards Norwegian eating habits can also be seen as an indirect criticism of women’s increased working activity. One trend researcher reported the following “Mother has stopped being a housewife – we scurry between job, work, school and leisure activities – now and again we grab a hamburger at a kiosk or café”<sup>43</sup>. As indicated there is little to suggest that this is a general pattern among Norwegian families. The survey (Bugge og Døving 2000) revealed that a half of the Norwegian population never eats food from a kiosk, and only 3 percent did so on three or more occasions each week. Nevertheless, these small percentages became representative for the Norwegian population. Further, there is little to suggest that the woman’s increased working activity has resulted in her abdicating the kitchen. Even though the task of food preparation is now more evenly divided between the sexes, the women essentially remains responsible for food preparation. Finally, mention should be made of the fact that the woman’s increased working activity has had consequences for cookbook literature. In the 1980s many cookbooks had the working woman as their target group. In the basic Norwegian text on food preparation for 1982, we find, for example, a comprehensive chapter entitled *Dinner in a half-hour* (Espelid Hovig ed. 1982). This orientation on everyday food shows precisely about the change in mentality which has occurred between the housewife of the 50s and the modern working woman.

### **Media: “Stories of decline and decay”**

Views on the moral, cultural and social decline of the Norwegian meal are not only expressed in the media, but also by experts and ordinary people. In these recounts of decline, much reference is made to “the good meal traditions we used to have”. This “used to have” has not, however, been precisely referenced. Murcott (1998) suspects that that which experts and opinion formers compare this with is what she calls “the mealtime’s golden decade” That is to say the middle class families of the 50s and 60s with homebound housewives. Today, however, mealtime customs are in the process of disappearing. On the basis of empirical studies (Bugge and Døving 2000), there is reason to place a large question mark behind the many dramatic and negative descriptions. What is it that has resulted in these negative accounts having made such impact? There is much to indicate that some form of myth is being established – that these accounts are based more on scepticism rather than fact. It is possibly such myths that are required in order for the public to be united in their understanding of the social

<sup>42</sup> This was an organisation founded in Italy in 1986. It came to France in 1989, Switzerland in 1995, Germany in 1998 and to the USA in 2000. The organisation has offices in 45 countries and a total of about 65,000 members. They define themselves as “eco-gastronomes” where what is important is that man, as a consumer of food, has the correct balance between one’s own consumption of food and consideration of nature and the environment (Kimmeridge 2001, www.slowfood.com).

<sup>43</sup> *Fylket*, 11.11.1996.

conventions that they have inherited as well as the social changes they are experiencing (Connerton 1989, Murcott 1998). At the end of the day these accounts possibly say more about cultural reminiscences than factual information about the changes have actually taken place. It is quite possible that the Norwegian food culture has never been better than it is today (Bugge and Døving 2000).

### **Opinion formers: The food product manufacturers**

Food product manufacturers have not only been receptive to the increasing concern associated with modern foods but also the views held on modern commercial products as being essentially worse than home-made food. Ready-to-serve food has a low cultural and moral value in Norwegian food culture. The food products producers have therefore devoted considerable time and resources in convincing the public that canned soups and soup powders are just as good, if not better, than home-made foods and sauces. A certain amount of processing in the home kitchen seems necessary, however, for the domestic cook. In order that the woman should feel that she has assisted in the preparation herself, she is not only instructed to add water or milk, but also eggs and margarine. To facilitate the use of powdered sauce, cake mixtures and similar products, the producers have introduced an element of nostalgia into their marketing with reference to “just like mother used to make”. There are numerous products on the Norwegian market which bear the legend “Home-made” or “Mothers...”-

The qualitative data confirms that pure ready-to-serve meals present a problematic choice. They do not fall under the heading “proper dinner”, but rather are regarded as a “quick solution” and “TV-food”. Ready-made meals are however an accepted alternative on those days when the importance of the meal has to be down-graded on account of other social activities. They are also associated with lower expectations and demands of a meal when family members are absent. There is also much to indicate that cans and packets are used as a basis. That is to say that the woman adds ingredients according to her own whim in order to give the dish a more personal and home-made touch. Home-made meals are the norm, but a few “additives” are within the rules. It is easier for men to serve a ready-made meal than for women. The typical weekday dinner finds itself somewhere between the pure “ready-prepared” product and the genuine “home-made meal”. There is much to indicate that the choice of the meal is a conflict between “properness” and convenience.

### **Target group: Working women**

The identity of the woman is formed not only through the socialization processes of early childhood but also as a result of dominance and the many features of culture. We are characterized and structured by the manner in which gender is structured and understood at various levels. Gender comes to expression through biology, identity, symbolism and structure. It is in the interplay between these elements that the identity of the domestic cook is born. Studies have shown that food preparation is a central feature of the woman’s own understanding of her person as a mother and a woman, and is a central feature in the creation of a family (Charles and Kerr 1988, Devault 1991, Bugge and Døving 2000). It is “natural” for women to supply others with food. The title of McFeely’s (2000) historical study of food customs is entitled “Can she make a cherry pie?”. According to the author, the question “... but can she make food?” has been a symbolic expression throughout the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century, referring not only to an evaluation of a woman’s skills in the kitchen, but also of her qualities as a woman and mother. In order to illustrate the solid social foundation of food preparation as a woman’s duty, McFeely refers to the children’s song *Billy Boy*. The song is a dialogue between a mother and her son and about the woman he wishes to marry. He says “she is my darling” to which the mother’s reply is “But can she bake a cherry pie? Beauty, charm and intelligence are important characteristic of a wife, but the ability to make food is a treasure (p. 1). Here, there is no distinction made between royalty and the proletariat: A theme in a TV interview with the Norwegian Crown princess, Mette-Marit, immediately prior to the royal wedding in 2001, was how she had mastered the challenge of preparing the first meal for her parents-in-



law. In a subsequent newspaper review we read that: “Mette-Marit’s reply was ‘pasta and tuna fish’. This was the dish served to the parents-in-law the first time they came to dinner. Now, the nervous Mette-Marit has my full sympathy, especially when we remember that her parents-in-law are none other than the King and Queen of Norway”.<sup>44</sup>

A notable feature of post-war housework was that the woman should serve the husband, children, extended family and friends. The strain of the role should not be manifest. The housewife of the period was presented in the weeklies as sweet, slim, often blonde, elegant hairstyle, and a small pinafore to protect that pretty house frock from spots and stains. She was virtually never shown while she was preparing food; rather she was shown triumphantly presenting a cake or dinner plate (McFeely 2000). In the book *The Hours* (Cunningham 1998),<sup>45</sup> we meet the housewife of the 50s, Laura Brown – behind the scenes – just when she is making a birthday cake for her husband. “The cake is not exactly as she had hoped. She tries not to worry about it. It is only a cake she says to herself. (...) She had hoped (admits to herself) that it would appear a bit more sumptuous, attractive, more admirable. The cake she has made appears to be a bit on the small side – not in size, but appearance. It appears amateur; home-made.” (p. 100).

For many women, however, the challenge of being a housewife was not enough. The dreariness and restlessness was an important theme in the 1960s. It was also during the 1960s that the American woman became a working woman (McFeely 2000). The same occurred in Norway. Furre (1990) considers that the commencement of “the new women’s movement” commenced in the summer of 1970. The American feminist, Jo Freeman, held a lecture in Oslo Feminist Movement. It was after this that the first new-feminist groups were established. This was, however, the consequence of a number of political processes which had been operative during the 1960s. Furre mentions the “education explosion among women”; women had new expectations of the future, a new view on the role of the housewife, and the single-income family became less common. With its vitality, articles, books, actions and demonstrations, the new women’s movement succeeded in placing the woman’s situation high on the agenda (the right to birth control, abortion, equal pay, independent economy, kindergarten places, maternity leave). Among the many subjects with which the women’s movement was concerned, it emerged that the change of roles and work-sharing in the home was the most important. One consequence of this was that women gradually came to be referred to as “double-employed”. The fact that many women have part-time work may be seen as a compromise solution between that which Furre (1990) describes as “the traditional patriarchal family situation” and “the demands of the labour market”.

Several decades after the emergence of feminism, both Norwegian and international studies (Fürst 1995, Bugge and Dølvig 2000, Devault 1991, Murcott 1998) have illustrated that food preparation continues to be the women’s responsibility and the area of women’s liability. It is essentially the woman who ensures the daily management of meals. Among Norwegian couples under 40 years only 8 percent state that it is the man who normally or most frequently makes food. Younger couples have a more egalitarian approach to work-sharing than older couples. It is among those couples where the woman has a high education and income that the most even division of labour is found concerning responsibility for food, but even here it emerges that the woman essentially assumes the onus for the family meal (Bugge and Døving 2000). Why is this so? The woman will frequently argue that it is “more practical” for her to prepare the food. Women generally work fewer hours than their husbands, and many consider that they have a greater skills concerning food and food preparation than their husbands. Some even state that they enjoy making food. When one looks more closely at the practical reasons there is, however, much to suggest that there is more than just pragmatism behind this: food is still a part of the identity of the woman. Food preparation is not only associated with the practicalities of preparing a meal, but is also incorporated with the duties of care inherent in the emotional and social conditions related to the family. The qualitative ma-

<sup>44</sup> *Dagsavisen*, 8.8.2001.

<sup>45</sup> This book has later been filmed starring, among others, Nicole Kidman and Meryl Streep.

terial, however, shows that the woman finds it difficult to define this more clearly. This corresponds to Devault's (1991) findings in her study *Feeding the family*. In this connection Devault maintains that language is not adequate in its description of the woman, food and family life. She calls this an experience without a name "I feel like, you know, when I decided to have children it was a commitment, and raising them includes feeding them" or "I like to cook for him. That's what a wife is for, right?" (p. 10). Devault (1991) prefers to regard food preparation as a welfare task, and as a social construction. In this construction care was construed as the woman's function, and this function is powerful. In other words one may speak of a type of family discourse: the discourse of feeding the family.

Even though the possible variations for the social acceptance of the woman have increased in the last few decades, there is little to indicate that the feminists' alternative woman discourse which encouraged women to vacate the kitchen, has been successful. Women who do not prepare food for their family are described in quite negative terms in the qualitative material. These women are typical examples of "the others" – those with whom we do not wish to identify ourselves.

### **Social field: The home**

There is a broad opinion that a couple should hold common values, attitudes and customs. Food preparation is an important area where this may be practiced. This is also seen in suggestions for gifts particularly appropriate to the bride and bridegroom. In such a list from the theme publication *Bride and Wedding* (1998), more than 95 percent of gift suggestions were related to the preparation of, or serving food. This illustrates the importance of food as a social function in the establishment of the home. Among the suggestions for presents were: food processor, hand blender, oven-proof dishes, omelette pan, wok, microwave oven, fondue set, pancake (waffle) iron and kitchen equipment such as a casserole, ironware and a fish steamer. Can openers also appeared on the list, but these should be electric! The focus on the expectations attached to food preparation seen both from the standpoint of society and that of the bridal couple must be said to be overwhelming. The various gift suggestions also say something about the type of food which is expected to be made.

### **Orientation: Tradition and integration**

A typical trend with the introduction of new dishes is that they are acceptable to the extent that the taste does not provide a shock. New dishes will always be a subject for local modifications and adaptation to circumstances. One consequence of this is that it can take some time before foreign dishes acquire an authentic and genuine characteristic. This comes to expression when one examines closely how the preparation of spaghetti sauce has changed in its incorporation into Norwegian food culture. The first version of the Italian Bolognese sauce was made of sausage meat, normally mixed with tomato puré, ketchup or packet tomato soup. In the 1982 version of Norwegian spaghetti sauce (Espelid Hovig 1982), this is described under the heading: "Mix with minced meat and tomatoes". This sauce contains onions, garlic, canned tomatoes, stock, salt, pepper, basilica and thyme. It is a matter of choice whether one uses margarine or oil. In the 1999 edition this mixture has become "Bolognese meat sauce", and is described as the most well-known of the Italian spaghetti sauces. The fact that it has become a refined version of the 1982 sauce is seen when the instructions suggest that the sauce will take an hour to prepare as against 30 minutes for the earlier version. In addition to minced meat the sauce also contains lightly smoked bacon. Further ingredients are onions, carrots, celery root, garlic, canned tomatoes, white or red wine, stock, salt, pepper, oregano.

There is a broad general opinion that food customs change rapidly. But when one examines the various processes resulting in change, it is a much slower process. One example of this is the change in food customs following migration. One study (Koçtürk-Runefors 1991) of Turkish immigrants into Sweden shows that their food customs have changed only slowly. This was associated with the fact that food in many respects was associated with their ethnic identity. To omit central ingredients such as rice, pasta or potatoes, would be particularly threat-

ening to their own understanding of their identity. Immigrants' "strange food habits" is, however, something which also creates divides between ethnic Norwegian and Swedes, and Pakistani or Turkish immigrants. In her historic study Mcfeely (2002) also shows how this also applied to the great migration to the Americas. At that time ethnic Americans were particularly taken up with the Americanisation of immigrants' food habits. When, for example, Italian immigrants "continued to eat spaghetti" this was regarded as a sign of a lack of assimilation. The correct food was normally regarded as the white American protestant norm: "Meat and potato were king of the dining table", and if one was to use foreign dishes, then this ought to be Americanised. In a Norwegian study on change and stability in food habits (Wandel, Bugge, Skoglund Ramm 1995) it emerged that the introduction of new dishes was not only difficult for immigrants but also for older cooks. One woman states "I received pizza with liver in it. My mother thought this was meat-and-potato hash. Another exclaimed "Take the wok for example – my parents wouldn't even know what that was!"

The Norwegian dictionary (1997) has as its intention to contain the essential vocabulary of modern Norwegian. Terms such as "fondue" and "wok" are not found however. Neither are dishes such as sushi or taco, although drinks like espresso and cappuccino are terms which were defined. The same applied to goulash, pita bread, kebab and pizza. The fact the "wok" is a relatively new concept in Norwegian food culture also emerges in basic Norwegian texts. Wok dishes are not described in the 1982 edition of Espelid Hovig's book, but in the 1999 edition two dishes are described which are prepared in the wok: *Rett i Wok* – a word play whereby the translation means "direct into the wok" or "the wok dish. The other was simply "Wok with pork, paprika and apple". The latter is described as a quick and delightful meal which may be prepared in a wok or a large frying pan" (p. 292). Accordingly, the wok may be substituted with the good old-fashioned frying pan.

What is it that characterises modern Norwegian food customs? – have the traditional Norwegian dishes become marginalized? Data both from surveys and qualitative descriptions suggest that this is not the case. It is the traditional Norwegian dinners which dominate, that is "meat or fish, potatoes and vegetables". When the woman is asked to describe what is to be served for dinner, the typical answer is "we eat normal Norwegian food". This concept "normal Norwegian food" was revealed as a result of both tradition and integration. A typical Norwegian dinner week can quite often be a mixture of what the women described as "foreign food", "Norwegian food", "traditional dishes", "modern food", "home-made food", "light dishes". The fact that Norwegian dishes have a high social and cultural value emerged in these choices did not require to be validated. Their form and content was self-evident. Regarding both "new and foreign food" and "light dishes", these frequently required an explanation – either these were "trendy" or a "quick solution on those days when time was scarce".

### Subject position: The national cook

The female Norwegian TV-chef and domestic science teacher Ingrid Espelid Hovig is often referred to by the public as "the nation's housewife". Throughout several decades she has been a significant preacher of good food practice. Her basic books<sup>46</sup> on food preparation are also those which top the Norwegian sales statistics. A "basic book" is one which in addition to menus also takes up diet and processing techniques. It also provides an account of social customs and conventions. In this respect the cookbook is regarded as a basis or assumption for developing good food habits. Hovig's book has virtually an obligatory place in the Norwegian kitchen. Under the heading *Jamie flirts with Ingrid*<sup>47</sup> we read " 'I love Ingrid,' says the British TV-celebrity who is on a flying visit to Oslo to market his fourth book. In front of a united press corps Jamie flirts with Ingrid who is completely taken up with it". The flirt between the food entertainer and the domestic science teacher is virtually an analogue on how modern food preparation methods flirt with the traditional. The last of the TV-chefs with

<sup>46</sup> *Den rutede kokeboken* [The checked cookbook] (1982, 1999)

<sup>47</sup> *Verdens Gang* 12.6.2003.

whom Norwegian viewers have become familiar is the Swedish Tina Nordström. It is interesting to note that she has just been described as a combination of Jamie and Ingrid. Tina's dishes are seen as exciting, varied about not egoistic. Neither are they expensive dishes. Tina has good food preparation skills ("she knows what to look for in fresh fish", "how to use the most common herbs"). She has a sparkling and infectious enjoyment of food. She was also named as "The TV personality of the year 2000 in Sweden".<sup>48</sup>

### **Recipe: How to cook a national meal**

"Two mealtimes in addition to breakfast and the lunch box should be a part of the every day meal tradition. Food is not just nourishment, vitamins and minerals. It is equally as important to gather round the table and to chat together. Many are busy. There is not always time for this, but we should nevertheless attempt to gather for a family meal at least once every day. Then, those who live together can sit down, have a chat and relax. Previously, when several generations lived under the same roof, young and old sat together at the same table. Stories were passed down from generation to generation. This created a union and security.

In this description of a dinner, reference is made to "previously". It was in earlier times that a proper mealtime was eaten, the women were housewives, all dishes were home made, and the family ate together. But is it unclear what "previously" refers to, and who it was that lived as such. This quotation is a typical example of the many descriptions of how the mealtime has become threatened by the modern Norwegian living style.

### **Keywords**

The description of a national mealtime has a narrative structure which may be compared to the symbol-saturated language of the gourmet meal, but similarly to the healthy meal the moral aspects are more emphasised. Food should not only be "Norwegian", "a part of the Norwegian food tradition", but concepts such as "mother's kitchen", "home-made" and "boiled potatoes" are as music in this discourse!

### **CONCLUSION**

Some may consider this paper to be very comprehensive. My intention of presenting such a detailed description of the major narratives of the modern Norwegian food culture was precisely to illustrate how complex and extensive the theme of food is. The very diversity of cultural contexts in which the domestic cook now appears also suggests that there has been a significant rise in the status of food preparation in Norway. There is very little to suggest that the domestic cook has a platonic relation to food preparation – she uses the hands, the head and the heart. As this account has shown, the domestic cook does not use just one ingredient or prepare a meal – but also engages an image and conception of these. The daily newspaper, weekly magazines, TV-programmes and advertisements are full of such food portrayals.

In the Sunday edition of a national newspaper in Norway,<sup>49</sup> on one day selected at random, there were no less than 4 articles on food and drink in the 11 pages of the Sunday section. Under the title "Visit London – Experience the World", the reader was encouraged to undertake a culinary journey through London. In this connection London was referred to as one of the world's most multicultural cities. On the next page we read of less successful meals because of having no luck with the dinner partner: "You have been in this situation before, and you know that it is just like lotto". Thereafter follows a number of horror stories from reality: "It was New Year's Eve 1996, in a timber villa in one of the more exclusive districts in Oslo.

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<sup>48</sup> [www.gyldendal.no](http://www.gyldendal.no)

<sup>49</sup> *Aftenposten*, 22.6.2003.

I was the only one in the house who had not sweated over a law degree or a town house, and felt that I was out-of-place. At least, it felt like that when my dinner partner, just about to graduate in law, and with a long-haired blond girlfriend, dazzling smile and posh attire, sat down on my right. After the dinner festivities had commenced it emerged that this man had much to say about food and drink. (...) he chatted and chatted (...) and as each glass was emptied, the snobbery continued to swell. Suddenly he was an expert on everything from wine, cognac, espresso and...”. The next article had the title: “Czech beer culture follows Norwegian tracks”. Here we read that the Czechs are becoming Norwegian in their drinking culture – that is to say in moderation during the week, and in excess at the weekends. This is based upon a field survey into the Czech drinking habits carried out by Dr Smid in association with sociology students at the University of Prague. The final article had the title “Norwegian cheese fairy tale only for foreign palates”. This is the story of camembert from the little dairy The Blind Cow, which was discovered by an American cheese expert. This cheese has now come to the finals of the Fancy Food Show in the USA (arranged by the National Association for Specialty Food Trade).

It is precisely these kinds of food portrayals which emerge in the national newspaper that contribute to making food and cooking something more than just routine housework. There is also a considerable identity work involved. Systematisation and analysis of the public image of food show that those contexts which appear most frequently are concerned with cooking as a conspicuous practice, for example the food tourist or the food snob (The Gourmet Discourse), cooking as a health issue, for example the unhealthy Norwegian drinking pattern (The Health Discourse), and cooking as a part of what it means to be a good mother and wife, and a good Norwegian, for example the Norwegian Camembert (The National Discourse).

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