

# Suitable cooking? Performances, procedures and positionings in cooking practices among Danish women

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In later years, the Danish media public has witnessed a growth in the amount of magazines, lifestyle sections in news media, television shows, coffee table books and home pages that all seem to celebrate ordinary everyday life activities such as for example cooking home made meals, baking, preserving, cleaning, producing and maintaining clothes, decorating the home and gardening. A significant proportion of these media products are targeted at so called younger women (between the age of 25 and 50), meaning effectively women who are most likely to have younger children and be in full-time employment or education. Since the symbolic representations of these specific media products invite and encourage relatively high levels of involvement in everyday activities, it is interesting how the users practice such activities in their alleged busy lives and how they handle the social normativity of the celebratory medialised representations.

This paper presents the first empirical analysis from the research project, “Cooking in Medialised Society” which attempts to shed light upon the above questions in the Danish context. Outlined here are the working research questions (although far from all of them are treated in this paper):

- What kinds of specific cooking practices are performed?
- Which kind of consumption moments are part of the cooking practices?
- Which kind of understandings and procedures are drawn upon in order to cook?
- With which types of engagement are cooking practices performed?

- Through which trajectories are cooking and cooking practitioners moving in time and space?
- How are representations of cooking in women's magazines appropriated in relation to cooking practices?
- How are representations of cooking constructed and negotiated among women as part of the social normative regulation of cooking related conduct?

The first and shortest part of the paper outlines the analytical approach of the research project, taking its starting-point in a practice theoretical perspective and working methodologically with a combination of individual re-interviewing, auto-photography, and focus groups among Danish female readers of the magazine "Isabellas. Enthusiastic about Everyday" (1). The second and longest part of the paper presents and discusses empirical patterns in the cooking of the participating Danish women, falling in three sections. The first section is on cooking performances and exemplifies different styles of cooking in the complex configurations of the women's practices. The second section is on cooking procedures and gives examples on how cooking activities are carried out as bodily/mental procedures. The third section is on cooking positionings and relates to the normativity of the celebratory media products as it is about positions in relation to suitable cooking.

## Analytical approach

The theoretical perspective of the research project is a practice theoretical one (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 1996; 2001; Warde, 2005). The practice theoretical perspective has entered the discussions of the sociology of consumption as part of the reactions from late 1990's against the alleged dominance of a post-modern understanding of consumption with focus on the individual consumer as free and creative actors and the symbolic aspects of their activities. These reactions consisted in underlining the necessity of treating consumption as everyday life phenomena by highlighting the practical, routinised, conventional and collective character of consumption (Gronow and Warde, 2001).

Outlining the details of practice theory and its relevance to sociology of consumption in general is not the aim of this section and is done much better elsewhere (Reckwitz, 2002; Warde, 2005). In stead, I will shortly present the elements of a practice theoretical perspective most relevant to the research project on cooking, argue for the analytical advantages and present the methodological design of the empirical project in relation to these advantages. The approach is on purpose termed as theoretical perspective in stead of theory, because there seems to be a consensus in the most recent attempts to synthesise that there is not a coherent practice theory (Warde, 2005:132) but rather a perspective or particular reading of elements among the writings of a group of theorists (e.g. Bourdieu, 1990; Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978; Garfinkel, 1967; Giddens, 1984 and Latour, 1993) who share assumptions on social practices.

A synthesised definition of a practice as an activity within this perspective is the following:

*“A practice...is a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice – a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of other etc....”* (Reckwitz, 2002:249).

Practices, such as cooking, are in this definition seen as configurations of a number of equally important and interconnected dynamics. This configuration understanding of practices is central to the conceptualising of the actual practices within a practice theoretical perspective (Schatzki, 2001:53), and it is also characteristic of Alan Warde’s analytical translation of a practice theoretical perspective into sociology of consumption concepts. Here he clarifies the concept of practice as constituting a nexus of practical activity and its representations which become coordinated by understandings, procedures and engagements (Warde, 2005:134). The most important advantage of the character of these configuration understandings of practices is that they foreground the performance

of activities without privileging single analytical aspects. In stead, each of the single analytical aspects forms an equally important part of the configuration of practices. In relation to empirically investigating cooking practices, this holds a number of analytical advantages.

*First*, the configuration understanding of practices in a practice theoretical perspective facilitates the focusing in the empirical research on the doing and carrying out of practical cooking activities in everyday life without privileging intentionality and meaningfulness such as most phenomenological approaches within everyday life sociology tend to do (e.g. Chaney, 2002; Gullestad, 1989; Luckman, 1989; Storey, 1999). From a practice theoretical perspective, cooking has to be carried out, produced and performed through practical cooking agency in order to be recognised as cooking. This does not necessarily mean that cooking practitioners interpret their doings as subjectively meaningful and intentionally oriented towards particular purposes. It does mean that it is an empirically open question whether specific cooking practices are understood as meaningful or can be interpreted as intentional. The existing discussions in the sociology of food on cooking suggests that this empirical openness is required since the empirical research points to a plurality of overlapping practitioner understandings of cooking with very different levels of engagement. Cooking can e.g. be seen as a necessary burden of a chore (Lupton, 1996:40), as pure routine (Warde, 1997), as meaningful family-integration (Holm, 2003:22-24; Moiso et al, 2004:265-67) and as pleasurable pursuit (Hollows, 2003; Murcott, 2000).

Methodologically, the research project on cooking among Danish women uses for example repeated qualitative individual interviewing of 8 women (2) as part of the data production. Within these interviews, different types of interviewing are applied in order to cater for the different elements of the configuration of cooking practices. Ethnographic interviewing (Spradley, 1979) is used to produce descriptions and understandings of concrete cooking. Biographic interviewing (Atkinson, 1998) is used to produce stories about trajectories of cooking. And active interviewing (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003) is

used to produce positionings and change of perspective in relation to engagement in cooking and acceptable cooking practices.

The *second* analytical implication of a practice theoretical perspective on cooking is its ability to work as socialconstructivist but without privileging discourse as most socialconstructivist approaches typically do (e.g. Burr, 1995; Phillips and Jørgensen, 2002). Cooking is not a given activity, cooking is all the time done, re-done and differently done. But the production and performing of cooking practices is as much done by silent and tacit procedures with body, food stuff and tools (Murcott, 1983) as it is done by cooking practitioners reflecting and talking about food, eating and cooking. Thereby body and materiality gains a proper weight in the empirical analyses, which is important in a very obviously body-focused field of consumption as food and cooking, where food stuff is handled with hands and food directly incorporated by eating (Falk, 1994; Fischler, 1988; Lupton, 1996; Warde, 1997).

Methodologically, it might seem obvious to use participant observation with cooking practitioners in order to produce data that embraces body and materiality of cooking practices. The research project however uses auto-photography (Heisley and Levy, 1991). The participating women have taken photos of their own cooking one or two everyday evenings (ingredients, food stuff, tools, places, activities and the cooked food or meal), and these photos are used as part of the second individual interview as a help to embody and materialise the stories about cooking activities (as well as supplementary data material). This methodological strategy fits the efforts of moderate socialconstructivism to dissolve the firm distinction between interview data and observational data. Hereby it becomes possible to see accounts as well as events as “enactments” of the social life (Atkinson and Coffey, 2003:118-20).

The *third* analytical implication of using a practice theoretical perspective in the cooking research project is that the empirical analysis can focus on the complexities of the social flow of practically performed cooking, rather than individual consumer choices about shopping, food and meals, so the individual consumer actor is not privileged as was the

case when post-modern assumptions dominated the sociology of consumption (Gronow and Warde, 2001). In stead, the individual consumer or cooking practitioner is seen as a crossing-place for a plurality of practices. The agency-capacity could among other things consist in being able to cook as part of the daily manoeuvring between cooking practices and other practices, such as parental practices, work practices and transportation practices.

Methodologically, it is important in the research project on cooking to be reminded about such a dissolving of the artificial distinction between the individual and the collective, because this also helps striking a balance between seeing social life as both conditioned and constituting (Giddens, 1984). A large part of the empirical data from the project (and in deed the data used in this paper) consists of interactionally produced individual narratives or enactments, and this holds the risk of overestimating the importance of the individual construction of cooking practices. Hence, the data production attempts to take the social conditioning of cooking into account via several strategies: to interview the cooking practitioners biographically (Atkinson, 1998) in order to produce data on the social trajectories of cooking; to interview cooking practitioners about present everyday life conditions in the individual interviews; and to make focus group interviews (Bloor et al, 2001) where the individually interviewed women participate together with other women from their own social network in order to produce data on the present normative conditionality of cooking.

The *last* analytical implication of using a practice theoretical perspective in the cooking research project is its ability to embrace the normativity of everyday practices. The foregrounding of the performative in cooking practices enables the empirical analysis to look at acceptability and normative expectations in the making of suitable cooking conduct. What does it consist in to “do good cooking”? What kind of cooking is appropriate for which kind of context? When is a cake homemade enough to bring to a kinder garden party? Such analysis is parallel to the analysis and argumentation made from the advocates of theoretical intersectionality, where the main focus is on how social categories are “done” by social actors, for example “doing gender” (West and

Zimmerman, 1987) or doing other kinds of differences, and which Judith Butler (1990) imported into the practice theoretical discussions.

Methodologically, the cooking research project uses focus groups with the individually interviewed women and women from each of their social network as participants. Focus groups are particularly good at producing data on social conventionality, the negotiations of this and positionings in relation to this (Bloor et al, 2001:4-89, because focus groups consist in participants' negotiations of various themes where the sense-making is constantly influenced by the social interaction. The research project uses network groups exactly because this implies a certain level of mutual social control in order to further expressions and negotiations embracing normativity (Halkier, 2002:34-35) of cooking. But as mentioned earlier, the use of active interviewing (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003) in the individual interviews is intended to produce social positionings in relation to suitable and unsuitable cooking.

## Cooking performances

This section is the first among three to present the first attempt to analyse the empirical enactments produced by the selected Danish women on what kind of cooking is being done and how cooking is performed in their everyday lives (3). Methodologically, ordinary qualitative coding and categorising was used in the working up of the material (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), combined with the operationalisation of the configurations of the concept of a practice. Specifically, this section presents five different ideal typical *styles of cooking*, which are not methodologically individually based, but only individually exemplified in the paper to make it reader-friendly. In other words, each ideal typical cooking style represents cooking performances of several participating women, and the cooking practices of each woman is in accordance with several different cooking styles. The analytical basis of each style of cooking is the configuration of the performing of cooking practices: to look at what kind of cooking activities are carried out and how these activities are coordinated by understandings, procedures and engagements. The presentation of each cooking style will begin with a short narrative over the cooking

performance of an auto-photography exemplifying that cooking style, meaning that the short narrative builds on the concrete cooking of a specific every day evening meal that each of the women chose to prepare and take photos of for the project, combined with the knowledge of the individual interviews.

*Cooking as improvisation over pleasure*

Ellen rummages through her freezer, searching for some curly kale she knows is there, because she feels like eating some “solid farmers’ food” on a cold, rainy November day and have a beer and a schnapps to go with it. There are no cookbooks or other recipes lying around, it is an ordinary Wednesday. While her little boys are running around her feet, a smoked fatty sausage, found in the fridge, to go with the milk-stewed curly kale and spinach is boiling in an old red pot at the cooker, and she arranges plates with pickled herring and boiled egg on rye bread for starters, because her brother and his son have turned up unexpectedly for dinner. Luckily, the brother brings some meat balls he has made, and when Ellen has finished stewing the kale and spinach, she arranges all the food on the dinner table on inherited china and sheepdogs everyone to sit down and share the meal to have a good (“hyggelig”) time.

This style of cooking practices is coordinated by various understandings, procedures and engagements, but pleasure is enacted as part of many of the aspects of the coordination. Cooking is mostly done on the basis of what the practitioner feels like eating on the very day and what food stuff is found in cupboards, fridge and freezer, including left-overs. Shopping is done without a plan for specific meals but in order to have a storage of food stuff with which to improvise. Ellen and her family subscribe for example to a weekly organic vegetable box scheme, where the providers decide what is in the box. The same goes for use of cookbooks and recipes – if the ingredients are not there, the practitioner improvises and replace with something from the cupboard or fridge, or phones her mother or a friend to discuss what would be a proper replacement. Cooking is understood as a relaxing activity that makes family and friends happy, and food and cooking is discussed intensely around the dinner table. *“You know, if I have baked a bread or something, that’s lovely tangible compared to what I do in my job...and then some meal*

*came out of it, and often the children go yum-yum, and you can see they shove it in, and that is some kind of satisfaction.”* (Ellen) One of the first memories of cooking Ellen recalls in the biographic part of the interviews also focuses on the pleasure of cooking. She remembers how her father filled their large bathtub with water and curly kale to wash it, and she used to picture to herself how wonderful it would be to jump in and immerse herself in all the wet kale.

### *Cooking as craft*

Dorte stands at her kitchen table, cutting meticulously beetroots, parsnips, celery, parsley roots, snack pepper and red onions into similar size pieces and mixes them together in a large ovenproof dish with olive oil, salt and thyme, next to the other ovenproof dish she has already filled with similar size cut potato boats. After she has put both dishes in the oven, she clears and cleans the tools she has used and sharpens her vegetable knife. Dorte fetches a packet of minced beef out of the fridge, which she is looking especially forward to turn into hamburger steaks. The family has just bought 10 kilos of minced beef directly from a local farmer, and she reckons it is a challenge to fry it properly because this type of minced beef has a tendency to be more dry than the meat from the supermarket but also to be more tasteful. She calls her big schoolgirl daughter into the kitchen and guides her in shaping the hamburger steaks, which she then concentrates on frying. Her husband and daughter have laid the dinner table, and Dorte arranges the oven dishes and the steaks on the table, supplying the meal with bottles of ketchup and remoulade from the fridge to dip the roasted potato boats in. She has taken some of the steaks and out them in the fridge for dinner the day after, when dinner has to be easy made because the whole family play badminton.

The various activities, understandings, procedures and engagements of this cooking style tend to circle around a notion of the craft of cooking. How cooking is done is mostly not reflected much upon but is rather based on a naturalised notion of knowing what and how to do in order to cook a meal, and the abilities of the craft have been incorporated by life-long experience with practising cooking, beginning from early on in childhood. The memory Dorte mentions very first about cooking when interviewed biographically is a

memory of participating in the slaughter of a pig and the making of sausages etc. at her great-grandmother's farm. Hence, cookbooks and recipes from friends, magazines and internet are mostly used for new inspiration. To cook meals from the ground is taken for granted, and shopping is planned and organised in order to provide storage of food stuff with which cooking can be carried out that results in proper, tasteful and healthy meals. To have well-working kitchen tools is very important for the processes of turning raw materials into meals. According to Dorte, a knife must for example be sharp enough to be able to "pass the tomato-test". Cooking is understood as a taken for granted ability that is capable of producing a multiplicity of happenings in the family life – from pleasurable experiences, over fuel for other activities, to regulating the food intake. *"You know it's again a bit like that...clean food stuff, you know what you get, right...not that I am fanatical, but I like it when it is something you yourself have made, and it is something you yourself know what is, and it is not some pumped up cold cut or spread you get, I like that idea, right..."* (Dorte)

#### *Planned cooking*

The previous evening, Birte has taken a leftover of a large piece of smoked salmon out of her second freezer. She knows that it will not last too long in the freezer and needs to be used, and she thinks it will go nicely with the new pasta type she has bought on one of the nearby farms where they import Italian specialities and put into her storage room. Hence, both types of food stuff were combined when she and her husband made the bi-weekly schedule for evening meals five days ago. Now Birte has put an apron around her highly pregnant body and manoeuvres around in the corner of the kitchen between cutting the smoked salmon, keeping an eye on the pot with water on the cooker, and cleaning the onions, the garlic and the red pepper by the sink before chopping them as well. She fries the vegetables, adds the salmon, some fresh cream and dries basil, and then finds it is the right time to put the spaghetti into the pot of boiling water, so everything will finish at the same time. After having discarded the water from the spaghetti, she mixes everything together and uses a specific spaghetti-spoon with teeth to serve the meal on the plates for herself and her husband.

This style of cooking practices shares some characteristics with the previous cooking style, cooking as craft, in the sense that the know-how and procedures of cooking meals from the ground are largely taken for granted, and knowing how to do cooking draws upon lifelong experiences, dating back from being involved from early childhood. Birthe remembers how both she and her sister were included in cooking, baking and preserving with their mother and keeping the vegetable garden with their father. However, this style of cooking differs from cooking as craft by the significance of planning going into almost all aspects of the configuration of the cooking practices. Cooking is always done on the basis of the running bi-weekly plans for evening meals, and Birte's house has a very large storage room for dry food stuff and two freezers – one for meat and homemade prepared dishes, and one for vegetables and berries – which are organised with lists. Hence, shopping for food stuff is done fairly seldom and after planned lists, in the supermarket as well as at the local farm shops. The planning aspect is not just used to organise the practical what and how to cook on a daily basis, but it is also used to follow the seasons for food stuff and to regulate the food intake – to eat more of what is considered nutritious. Cookbooks and recipes are also drawn upon in the planning but mostly as inspiration when making the bi-weekly plans. Cooking is understood as an activity that needs to be organised and scheduled, even if it takes planning one's own kitchen garden for next year. But when it is organised it is a pleasurable pursuit, even when having guests: *“I have to rig out things before the guests arrive, I think it would be terrible if they came and the cakes were not on dishes and the coffee was not put on and the cocoa was not ready to just heat...once the guests are here I wouldn't want to think about that, I want the time for them.”* (Birte)

### *Manageable cooking*

Martha reads the instructions on the packet of rice to check how to boil it into a rice porridge. She turns the cooker on under the pot with organic low-fat milk and has a cup of tea, sitting on the edge of the kitchen-table while waiting for it to reach the point of boiling. The she pours the rice into the pot, waits for the milk to boil again, lowers the heating of the cooker, puts a lid on and go into her living room to flick through some magazines. Now and again a couple of times, Martha goes back into the kitchen to stir in

the pot in order for the porridge not to be burned. When the rice porridge is finished, she arranges it in a plate for herself – as her boyfriend is not at home, he does not like rice porridge – and arranges two little heart-shaped bowls on the side, one with cinnamon-sugar and one with butter, both to put on top of the rice porridge.

This style of cooking practices is mainly coordinated by understandings, procedures and engagements owing to manageability. Cooking is only done on the basis of what the practitioner feels she can handle fairly easily, such as a bowl of rice porridge or a homemade pizza: *“It’s nice it’s so easy...it is as if you can just walk around the supermarket and put those things in the basket you want on top of your pizza, and there isn’t really so much to do about those things before they come on top of the pizza crust, so it’s very easy to see, and I like that. I like it when cooking becomes manageable...(laughing)...you know, twenty pots boiling and remember to cut things in particular ways and...have you also remembered to put this in the oven and, you know...that really stresses me completely. So chop, chop, chop, on top of the pizza, into the oven, twenty minutes later there is food...I like that pretty much.”* (Martha) Part of the biographic interviewing with Martha consists of her narrative about how her mother never involved her in cooking, and how difficult it was to move away from home, not knowing what to do and trying to “look over the shoulders” of friends. Shopping is done every day according to what she and her boyfriend feels like eating, to supply the small storage in the fridge. It is often the same type of meals that are cooked in a kind of a rotation of a standard repertoire of cooked meals. Each of these standard-repertoire cookings mostly require a lot of chopping, but end with most of the ingredients in one bowl or dish, such as salads, oven-dishes and wok-fries. Recipes are torn from magazines and put in a folder if they have been tested easy to follow. Cooking is ambivalently understood as a necessary and complicated activity, but which at the same time must produce tasteful and aesthetically pleasant meals.

### *Cooking as healthiness*

Thea pulls many different types of organic flour, grain and nuts out of her cupboard, preparing to make homemade wholegrain buns to go with the salad. The fresh yeast is

already dissolved in salted water, and before she begins to dive her hand down the various flour and grain bags, she washes, scrapes and grates a couple of carrots to put into the dough of the buns. Gradually, the consistency of the dough takes shape in her hands while she is kneading it with grated carrot, grains, sunflower kernels and wholegrain flour. She puts the dough away under a dishcloth to rest, remembering to take out the shrimps from the freezer so they can defrost in time for the meal, and goes into the living room to sit with a cup of tea and a magazine. After half an hour, Thea puts her linen apron back on again, ignites the oven and forms the dough into little balls on the baking tray. While the buns are baking, she chops leafy salad, tomatoes, avocado and red pepper and puts them in a big bowl with some cold pasta left-over from the fridge. In a smaller bowl, she mixes fromage frais with ketchup and fresh dill for a dressing. When the buns are finished, she lays the table with a tablecloth and candlelight and arranges the buns, the salad, dressing and shrimps between her and her husband, next to the big bowl of fresh fruit.

This style of cooking practices revolves around “doing healthy” in a broad sense of the term. Cooking is being done preferably in such ways that either the practitioner feels she is doing something good for herself and her husband’s wellbeing, or by using procedures and products that are constructed as more healthy – such as organic food stuff and low-fat products, but the last type of healthiness is typically balanced with the first type which includes e.g. tastefulness. Shopping is done every other day, but upholding storage from which to compose meals, and recipes are not necessarily used, except for inspiration for new and different cooking which is enjoyed. Cooking is understood as a relaxing activity that brings wellbeing about both for herself and for those the practitioner cooks for. *“I think I have found out that when I make things myself...it gives me a greater pleasure to eat it, and I gain a better, I don’t know if you can call it a better consciousness, but it makes me feel better, I think I am doing something good for myself by not jumping over the lowest part of the fence...”* (Thea)

## Cooking procedures

This second empirical section takes a closer look at specific dynamics in how cooking activities are carried out, according to the enactments of the participating women. Hence, this section gives a number of examples on bodily/mental procedures.

### *Relations with tools*

In some of the women's enactments of cooking performances, tools occupy a central space in the procedures of cooking practices. When for example the first interview with Dorte was nearly finished, and I asked if there was anything about cooking she felt we had not covered, she said: "Yes, when are we going to talk about tools?" And then she talked about tools for a long time. Also some of the women (Thea, Pia, Birte and Dorte) on their own initiative dived into their kitchen cupboards and dragged out favourite tools and demonstrated them. The central place of tools in cooking procedures is slightly differently configured in various everyday lives and cooking practitioner trajectories, and here follows some examples.

One relation with tools is where the bodily sensation of the tool is the most important in order to perform cooking procedures. Tools have to "feel good in the hand" when being used: *"This is just a Rådvad (4) knife. Not anything particularly fancy or expensive but...it has a bit of weight in the hand, but it's not a particularly expensive design, oh no...(...)I work better with this, I think, it's a bit more good stuff than those light ones, right."* (Thea). And this also applies to how tools are being procured: *"I have ended up with that vegetable-thingy...I think it was at the local market where someone stood demonstrating it, and I said, can I please just try to get it in my hands, can I feel it...and getting it in the hands and see, you know these salesmen they stand there and they can chop and grate and everything looks so fine, but I was allowed to feel it and have it in my hands, and then I said, you know what, I will like to get this cause this I can really work with."* (Dorte).

Another relation with tools is where the history of the tool is the most important in order to perform cooking. *“There’s a thing about kitchen tools, I like very much you know old things, and actually some of these [pointing to the pictures] ladles are things Poul has inherited from his grandmother when she died, so it’s a bit like...they are worn in that way and you know completely different from a ladle from IKEA. So it’s quite old, and you cannot actually get such knives now...yes, it’s good old quality, so it’s mostly old bric-a-brac things in my kitchen. None of those what’s-it fancy Global knives and such things, no.”* (Ellen) Here the history of the tools seems to be linked to functionality, aesthetics and the sociality of the family. In the following, history seems more linked to functionality and experience: *“My mother thinks I am being a bit silly...my old parsley mincer broke down after 15 years or so, and I went completely hysterical, and then I got a brand-new one for x-mas, and it was a completely different model, and it could not at all mince parsley, and it had to be like I used to do, so my mother succeeded in finding it at a jumble sale, it had to be that, silly maybe, but when you have been used to use that piece of tool and it works for you, right...”* (Dorte).

#### *Relations with food stuff*

Across the many differences in social conditionings, the participating women enacted their relations with food stuff or raw materials for cooking as a configuration of mostly important taste, looks and feels, and then some understanding of what constitutes proper food stuff. I will only mention that the representations enacted are “natural”, “fresh”, “following the seasons”, “organic” and “healthy”. In stead, here follows a couple of examples on how the cooking practitioners know how to do, based on the bodily/mental configuration of raw food stuff.

Pia explains about how it happened that the auto-photography was never carried out in her case, because the family ended up eating sandwiches and left-overs: *“All right, Jane [daughter] was in full swing and making the salad and everything she was preparing for those shrimps...she had grated the orange peel and the lemon peel and everything. Then the shrimps were put onto the frying pan, and all of a sudden she thinks it smells weird, and so do Arne and I, we definitely also think so, so the shrimps are dumped in the bin.”*

(Pia). Pia uses her bodily experience with how raw seafood, such as shrimps, must smell to be edible, and it seems as if her daughter has incorporated this know-how too. Pia has involved both of her daughters in cooking activities already from their pre-school years. An example of a narrative about a similar experience with tacit know-how in relation to food stuff from the daughter perspective is Ellens' narrative as part of the biographic interviewing: *"I sat on the kitchen table or heard her[her mother] tell about how her mother used to make particular things and...I think, I have sort of seen how to do some things without actually doing them myself, but I can see that I know. And the reason why I know this is that I remember when I moved into a shared house after high school and began to study and so, I could see that there were some of these guys in the shared house, when we had to cook ourselves and knead dough and bake rye bread and make liver paté and such...to see such a guy, Jan who studied music, right? To see him stand with the dough and not knowing how to collect a dough for a bread for example. And I think, not because I have baked much bread as a child, but I have seen the movements, how to do it, and if it feels too greasy then you pour more flour into it and such."* (Ellen).

#### *Relations with recipes*

In relation to cooking practices, recipes could be seen as a very explicit and rule-regulated knowledge for procedures. However, across the differences in social conditionings of the participating cooking practitioners there seems to be a clear pattern of recipes only being used for introducing new meals or when cooking for guests. Everyday cooking –as already described under some of the different cooking styles – is being done as either repetition of known-by-heart meals, by improvising on the basis of storage, by improvising with only a starting-point or inspiration from a recipe or picture, or as a mixture of these procedures. Here is a typical example: *"But much of what we make is something where we improvise, you know, just what we have, like you said before...if we for example make chicken in the oven, well then it will be the vegetables we have, right, we can fry the chicken first in some olive oil on the pan, and then we put it in an ovenproof dish, and then we put all the different vegetables we happen to have down there too, and then a bit of cream over and into the oven."* (Pia)

However, recipes are used widely as inspiration for performing new and untried cooking, also in the everyday cooking: “...*I have become better at not following recipes but also at looking at recipes and thinking, God that sounds interesting, you could do that, whereas before...you know, I have this recipe for a peach shrimp soup, I think all my friend know by now, and there is beef-stock in it and peaches and such, and straight when I read it I thought...that cannot be mixed together, right...but once you’ve tried a couple of things where you think, God, that’s really tasteful together, you become more brave...try different things...*” (Thea). Recipes are procured from many different sources: Family and friends give away recipes orally or written, recipes are found in cookbooks, torn out of newspapers, magazines and leaflets, and downloaded from the internet. But cookbooks and some of the glossy magazines seem to occupy a particularly enjoyable space for some of the women, as they are the only type of recipes to become included in bed-time reading!

## Cooking positionings

This last empirical section deals with an important aspect of the normative processes of cooking practices, how to do suitable cooking. Hence, the section presents examples of how the participating women positioned themselves in relation to the normativity of cooking. In the data material, many different understandings of “good cooking” are enacted, such as knowing your craft, having a feel for the result, knowing how to handle raw materials, keeping a good hygiene, taking the time necessary, using good raw materials, cooking meals from the ground, producing nutritious meals, being able to improvise, being able to “time” the different procedures, pleasing those who are eating, producing aesthetic meals, being able to cater for different eating-contexts etc. This paper focuses on one type of normative position of good cooking, namely the cooking of food and meals from the ground, for two reasons. First, this type of cooking practices tend to embrace many of the aspects of what is considered appropriate cooking conduct (and celebrated as such in the new media products). Second, this type of cooking is time-consuming, hence potentially difficult to include in busy female cooking agency.

Cooking home-made food and meals from the ground can in itself cover a variety of elements of cooking practices, and here is what is explicitly included by the participating cooking practitioners. A number of specific activities are associated with cooking from the ground, which is to cook old-fashioned meals, to *not* use semi-manufactured articles, to bake, to preserve, and to maintain a kitchen garden. All participating women bake their own bread, buns and cakes; Ellen, Dorte, Birte and Pia make their own preserves, including jam, pickles, syrup and schnapps; Ellen, Dorte, Birte, Pia and Tilde (5) maintain small or large kitchen gardens.

A number of representations are associated with cooking from the ground, and these are illustrated by quotes where the practitioners position themselves normatively in relation to a representation.

To cook meals from the ground can represent something completely taken for granted, not in any way questioned, which can be seen in this matter-of-factly positioning: *“About three weeks ago, we made soup, when we got that cow, or rather bought it, we had a lot of bones and...leftovers from this cow that I boiled, and we made...8-10 litres of beef soup...and then I have just frozen it as portions in plastic bags so it can be taken out and used.”* (Birte).

Cooking food and meals from the ground can however also represent something normatively expected, hence not performing in this appropriate way can produce expressions of offence, bad consciousness, legitimations. In the first example, Thea positions herself as detecting non-suitable cooking at x-mas in her parents' home: *“We were over there for x-mas, and she [the mother] had, yes she had bought rice porridge in one of those plastic bags, right, to make the ris a la mande [classical Danish x-mas desert], and it was really like this, when I opened the fridge, they were just lying there, and I was just like, okay we are going to have a good x-mas, I am not going to make a scene, and then I just went out to Erik and said, do you know what's in the fridge (laughs)...she obviously doesn't bother to make the porridge...it didn't taste too good either, that was really a bit of a miss, not stirred with love!”* (Thea). In the second

example, Ellen positions herself as doing non-suitable cooking in relation to her brother: *“I think when I cook for my brother, I am a bit more making excuses for myself, because he is just so...what to say...making food from the ground you know, and if I have bought something slightly pre-fabricated, I always feel I have to say, oh but you don’t have to eat those croutons to put on the salad, because I have bought them, and I know that he would stand and make them himself.”* (Ellen)

Cooking food and meals from the ground can represent something attractive at the same time as being positioned as normatively correct. In the following quote, Dorte positions herself as cooking practitioner in control of food by cooking meals from the ground: *“I like to make things from the ground, so you can see what kind of things you are using, right, decent raw materials and such...all those chemicals and stuff, things they come into...which is crap to say cause you don’t know, but...all those useless colours and...such things...I’d rather avoid it cause you don’t know about long-term effects yet.”* (Dorte). Marta positions herself as a cooking practitioner doing good for friends by making cakes from the ground: *“Its often I make a layer cake for my friends as a birthday gift...and I just think that that is the princess in me feeling so good about alle pink, the white and the flowered, you know, coloured sugar decorations and such...I love it and strawberries and such, and again because it’s manageable and simple, right, well you could say not many would find it manageable to bake their own layers for a layer cake, but it’s incredibly easy...and making it from the ground in stead of going out and buying one of those packages that just tastes of old cardboard.”* (Martha).

An interesting normative discussion in relation to home-made food and meals cooked from the ground is exactly *how* home-made and how much from the ground does a food item or meal has to be in order to be recognised as such and the cooking practitioner to be positioned as performing suitable home-made cooking. In relation to this discussion, the interview material is full of expressions of ambivalences, legitimations and negotiations around when food is sufficiently home-made, also relating to the everyday life conditions of the cooking practices of the women. Among the enactments of the participating women, there is a whole vocabulary of categories expressing more or less legitimate

deviances from what is considered “real” home-made food and meals. The most used categories are “popping over the lowest part of the fence”, “taking it on” and “cheating”. Thea expresses it this way: *“So a home-made soup is completely made from the ground, but preferably in an easy way, not like having to boil a chicken for 3 hours (laughs).”* (Thea). And Ellen tells a story that positions herself as ambivalent – both practising appropriate cooking from the ground, and at the same time distancing herself from the normative control of suitable cooking practices: *“Right, yes, I thought it was really funny when coming down to Anders’ school, and you knew that you had got this vegetable box from Årstiderne [organic box-scheme], very nice with recipes, and you had got those turnips, and then when we put all the food on a common table at the school, you could see that there where at least 3 who had made the same salad with vinaigrette and the turnips from the Årstidernes box, and it’s just...oh no (laughs)...it just becomes so politically correct and predictable.”* (Ellen).

## Conclusive remarks

This paper has presented the first empirical analysis from the research project “Cooking in Medialised Society”, where the main knowledge interest is in how cooking is performed by female readers of a lifestyle magazine which discursively and aesthetically celebrates everyday life practices, such as a normativity around cooking meals from the ground. The research project builds on a practice theoretical perspective, slightly supplemented with intersectionality. The qualitative empirical data are produced by individual re-interviewing, auto-photography and focus groups. The argument of the paper is that in order to say something valid about the normativity of “suitable cooking”, it is necessary at least to say something about the performances, procedures and positionings in the complex configurations of everyday cooking agency. As examples of cooking performances, five ideal typical cooking styles are analysed: Cooking as improvisation over pleasure, cooking as craft, planned cooking, manageable cooking, and cooking as healthiness. The examples of cooking procedures cover relations with tools, relations with food stuff, and relations with recipes. With regards to cooking positioning, the examples focus on the cooking of food and meals from the ground.

## Notes

- (1) “Isabellas. Enthusiastic about Everyday” is a glossy lifestyle magazine, targeted at women between 25 and 50, dealing mainly with cooking, gardening, and home decorating. As a magazine it is connected to a web-shop that sells a huge variety of cooking tools, kitchen décor, other types of home décor, cleaning devices, and gardening equipment. The title “Isabellas” is named after the founder and first editor of the magazine and owner of the web-shop, Isabella Smith.
- (2) The women are all readers of the magazine “Isabellas. Enthusiastic about Everyday”, and they display a variation according to age (20’s, 30’s and 40’s), according to education level (without and with high-school exam), according to family status (without and with children), and according to geography (city, suburb, village in Zealand, Jutland and Funen). See anonymised list of participating women after notes.
- (3) In this paper, only material from the individual interviews and the auto-photographies is used.
- (4) Rådvad is the oldest knife-producing firm in Denmark, located in and named after a locality in Zealand where production of various tools began already in late-medieval times because of the location of watermills along a small river.
- (5) Interviews with Tilde are not transcribed and analysed yet.

List of individually re-interviewed and auto-photographed women, names are fictive in order to anonymise them.

- Birte, 30's, high-school exam, job in the private sector, lives in the countryside, married and pregnant with first child.
- Dorte, 40's, ordinary school exam, job in the private sector, lives in a village, married and 9-year old daughter.
- Ellen, 30's, high school exam, job in the private sector, lives in a suburb to a big city, married and two sons, age 10 and 3.
- Marta, 20's, high school exam, student, lives in a big city, living with boyfriend.
- Pia, 40's, ordinary school exam, own business together with husband, lives in a village, married with one daughter still living at home (age 16), a daughter age 20 and a bonus-son age 23 living on their own.
- Susy, 20's, high school exam, unemployed, lives in suburb to big city, living with boyfriend (interviews scheduled for late August).
- Thea, 30's, high school exam, job in the private sector, lives in suburb to a big city, married.
- Tilde, 30's, ordinary school exam, job in the public sector, lives in village, married with a daughter age 11 and pregnant with second child.

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