

Universidade de Évora  
Mestrado em Políticas de Bem-Estar em Perspectiva:  
Evolução, Conceitos e Actores

**“YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT”: MODERNITY AND THE  
CONSTRUCTION OF SELF-IDENTITY IN HEALTHY  
EATING DISCOURSES IN A CASE OF DIGITAL MEDIA**

**Daniela Trocilo Tavares Genovez**

**Orientadora: Professora Doutora Maria Filomena Barros**

**Co-orientador: Professor Doutor Bengt Richt**

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*A minha família.*

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## **Abstract**

### **“You are what you eat”: modernity and the construction of self-identity in healthy eating discourses in a case of digital media**

The present study aims at the discussion of the contemporary forms of construction of self-identity through the perspective prompted by the transformations occurring in the health field. The increasing influence of the health promotional discourses in the media is reflected in the personal sphere, through the popularization of the “healthy lifestyles”. These are understood as supporting the construction of late modern identities. Within this phenomenon, we discuss the specific implications of the health eating discourse as portrayed in a specialized publication, attempting to the overlapping connections between lifestyle, food and discourse in the shaping of self-identities. Through this perspective, food is approached as bearing fundamental implications to the constitution of the individual. The present study is placed within the sociological theories on late modernity, the discourse analysis theories and the media as the provider of the symbolic content.

## **Resumo**

### **“Você é o que você come”: modernidade e construção da identidade em discursos sobre alimentação saudável em um caso da mídia digital”**

O presente estudo tem por objetivo discutir as formas de construção de identidade pessoal na contemporaneidade através da perspectiva das mudanças que ocorrem no campo da saúde. A crescente influência do discurso da promoção da saúde na mídia se reflete na esfera pessoal através da popularização dos “estilos de vida saudáveis”, que são observados como oferecendo um suporte para as identidades na modernidade tardia. Dentro deste fenômeno, discutimos as implicações específicas do discurso acerca da alimentação saudável em uma publicação especializada, atentando para as relações que se sobrepõem entre estilos de vida, comida e discurso como centrais para a constituição da identidade. A comida, nesta

perspectiva, é vista a partir de suas implicações simbólicas para a constituição do indivíduo. Este estudo posiciona-se dentro das teorias sociológicas sobre a modernidade tardia, as teorias da análise de discurso e o campo da mídia como provedor do material simbólico.

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## **Preface**

After majoring in Social Communication in 2003, in the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), in Brazil, I decided to follow the Social Sciences course in the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). There I had my first contact with health issues when I started training as a research assistant at the Social Medicine Institute (IMS). When faced with the opportunity of following a master in Europe, I quit both the university and the training. Pursuing an international master appealed as a great, enriching academic – and personal – experience.

With a background in journalism, my attention was directed to what was happening in the media. I noticed that, in the Brazilian context, there was a growing room for healthy lifestyles news and programmes. In the press, regular newspapers were introducing supplements about how to live a healthier life, and bookshops were filled with self-help manuals for healthy living, diet books and alternative medicine guides. With this master, finally I had the opportunity to turn a personal observation into a study.

## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary quest for perfect health, youth and general well-being is a fact that amounts to evidences that changes have been taking place in the past decades in the way health is perceived and practiced, both at the spheres of the institutional and at that of the personal life of individuals.

At the institutional level, the new public health's branch of health promotion beckons as an example of the shifting focus from concerns with *disease* towards *health* (Bury, 1996). The discourse that is created in health promotion policies finds its way into mass media in the form of an ever increasing room for healthy lifestyle news and of more specialized media on diverse and specific aspects on how to live healthily. In this process, new simbologies are attached to it (Castro, 2004), and the health sphere surpasses its merely biological implications (Crawshaw, 2007).

Thus, a text constitutes a discursive practice that, by its turn, will support and construct social practices (Fairclough, 1995). The media, as a major conveyor of dominant discourses is a powerful tool in the shaping of identities. Therefore, the contemporary discourses on healthy lifestyles must then offer some insights on what kind of notion is build up connecting an individual's construction of his self-identity and subjectivity with the way one manages one's health.

The relation between the construction of contemporary self-identities in media texts of health lifestyles magazines entails the contextualization within the backdrop of the discussions around modernity and postmodernity, due to the central place the issue of identity takes in such a context. Healthy lifestyles movements are no news since the nineteenth century or so (Porter, 1997; Sfez, 1996; Lupton, 1996), however, the unforeseen role of mass media in contemporary society in spreading the notions about healthy living, and the emergence of discourse analyses as an analytical tool to understand how identities are shaped through discourse – and how these identities are central to the reproduction and change of these discourses – are specific of the past few decades.

All this is intrinsically related to the alleged characteristics of high modernity, as Anthony Giddens (1990, 1991) would put it. Amongst deep institutional transformations, lies the individual with the task of constructing his own self-identity, something that only became an issue in modern times (Giddens, 1991). Since the idea of 'lifestyles' is that of a cluster of habits and modes of consumption that helps create and support a sense of self-identity, what healthy lifestyles might have to do with it, considered it is a powerful discourse overwhelmingly present in media nowadays, is the starting point of this work.

### **Aims of the study**

Our general aim is to see how matters of health entwine with the construction of self-identity in late modern context. Our specific aim is to see how a healthy eating discourse in a magazine raises a set of notions that builds up a model for the self. The specific choice for food is done on grounds that there is an overlapping of meanings concerning the construction of self-identity when food and healthy lifestyles are combined. Food, by itself, is already intrinsically related to the self, whether it is in post-traditional or traditional societies. Within a health promotional context, our intention is to see how this connection is heightened.

Nowadays, food emerges as a point where many of the contemporary anxieties converge to, going hand in hand with sex as the field that holds the truth about the individual (Probyn, 1999). The emergence of disorders such as anorexia and bulimia is an example of the changing relations between individuals, what they eat and how it defines themselves as a person (Turner, 1990). Thus, the particularity of healthy eating regarding its possible relations with the construction of self-identity is the notion found in the idea that you become what you eat (Lupton, 1996). Healthy eating is not a temporary practice such as losing weight diets, where the focus might not be at being healthy, but rather, in good shape. In the same line, body builders have been object of research in terms of how do they construct a sense of the self through their perceived “vibrant physicality” (Monaghan, 2001). In their case also health is not the primary aim. As Monaghan shows, body builders can get to extremely unhealthy levels of body fat in order to construct a body that accords to their ideals. This kind of focus on exercise or diet renders a different discussion, and we want to

mark the difference between this and the path we chose to focus. The aesthetical aspect, the external body cannot be disregarded, particularly when the issue of self-identity is at stake, but the attention will be put in the fact that healthy eating practices finds its relationship with the construction of the self because it entails a life commitment; it aims at a long range goal that requires a whole set of changes of behaviours, and therefore, the engagement of the whole individual in it. Although the relations with fitness are obvious and the relation between identity and fitness is one already studied (Glassner, 1989), we will not approach the issue through direct concerns with the aesthetical aspects of the body. Instead, we will give more proeminence to the questions of *being healthy* in itself, with healthy eating being adressed as a practice of self-care directed at the *inner body*, and the relations traced back to the formation of the self-identity. This choice is justified in the fact that health became a value in itself (Lupton, 1996), where its instrumental aspect is now entwined with its quality of being a commodity.

To consider that being healthy might be a high modernity's example of engagement in a long range goal imbued by a rationality typically modernist (Cockerham et al., 1993, 1997), that would contradict postmodernist assumptions that any long range goal is unattainable in an always changing environment such as ours. In Bauman's view (1997), ours is an age where the mainstream tendency is that by which individuals are overridden by an irrational pursue of pleasures, in a frenzy activity of consumption and experimentation – according to this thought, a commitment to a definitive turn towards a whole set of changes in behaviour makes no sense, since the current times are perceived as one in which identities are assumed and ditched according to what is “hype” at the moment. However, the rationality behind healthy lifestyles, by being a major concern nowadays, brings back some notions of asceticism and restraint (Ortega, 2003) that puts the deliberate postmodernist quest for new experiences to question. Some, as Lucien Sfez (1995) would go even further in stating that in the new utopy of the perfect health lies the end of postmodernity, and that the great narrative is possible again. For this reason, we will show how Anthony Gidden's approach to late modernity and self-identity renders a better framework for the discussion over healthy lifestyles and self-identity, due to his aknowledgement of the many contradictory tendencies within modernity that cannot be summed up only in terms of fragmentation, but are also accountable in terms of unification.

To ilustrate this discussion, the digital version of the North American healthy

lifestyle magazine *Prevention* was chosen. Its texts will be analyzed according to the methodology of critical discourse analyses as developed by Norman Fairclough (1992, 1995). This is a qualitative research focused on the production of discourses, thus this is not a work focused on its reception by the readers.

## **Structure of the study**

Chapter I: we will proceed to contextualization. First, we will take a brief look in the characteristics of pre-modern and modern times in order to understand why the issue of self-identity became so important in contemporaneity. In the current context, we will take into account the structural changes that will play a part in its formation, such as the media. After acknowledging the context, we direct our attention to the individual within this context. The issue of lifestyles will be central to understand how this individual supports his/her identity. Then, we focus on the changes happening in the health field as constituting the backdrop for the emergence of healthy lifestyles as supportive of identities.

Chapter II: we will take a look at one specific aspect within healthy lifestyles, healthy eating. We will see what are the possible connections that food already has with the self, and how these connections are heightened in late modern times. Food will be discussed from the perspective of an emergent subject in the theorization of identity.

Chapter III: we will discuss the methodology of the critical discourse analyses, as well as acknowledging the possibilities and shortcomings of the method. Plus, we will see how discourses shape identities, with a special concern on media discourses. In the second part of this chapter we will explain the methods used to do the research.

In chapter IV we will proceed to the analyses of the texts, attempting to answer the following questions: is the pursue of perfect health a project for the self in today's world? What kind of self is constructed in the texts of healthy lifestyles magazines? How an individual that does not follow the magazines advices is portrayed? How one that follows is?

# CHAPTER I

## **The general context**

In this opening chapter, we are going to introduce the concept that will be central throughout this study: self-identity. We will provide some contextualization regarding pre-modern times, and then move on to contemporaneity, and some of its key aspects that influence the self-formation nowadays. Finally, we will see how this context and its specific subject face the changing matters of health, with its institutional and personal aspects.

## **From pre-modern times to modernity: a brief contextualization**

It is impossible to talk about the possibilities of construction of the contemporary individual's self-identity without locating him/her in a social-historical context. There is a dialectical relation between what we are and how things are, between agency and structure, such that these higher instances will shape ourselves as well as we will shape them back, under both a movement of constraint and enabling (Giddens, 1984). Therefore, if we want to look at what is peculiar about this individual, we must keep in mind what kind of relation he/she has with the external world, its institutional spheres, its means of communication and to what extent external events affect his or her inner world.

Hence it is necessary to clarify what context we are talking about and what are the conditions of this context. In first place, we will look at the western, urban society. Those who are somehow excluded of any of these categories – western, urban people – are not likely to feel the impact of the issues developed here. Second, we will look at the latest phase of modernity, often called “post-modernity”, “late modernity” or “high modernity”, amongst less popular denominations. The first one is usually common between those who believe that our current moment represents a break with the modern period, the start of a new one; the latter is adopted by those who stick to the idea that, although much change has been introduced in the past 40 years or so, it is not reasonable to overlook the continuities between

modernity and its latest phase.

Giddens (1990, 1991) is an author that is particularly careful in avoiding absolute distinctions between modern and pre-modern times, modern and late modern. He will develop his discussion both about the emergence of modernity and its current phase watching out for radical oppositions and ruptures, for he does not believe that neatly defined distinctions are accurate enough. His approach is one that will try as much as possible not to overlook what persists and what does not disappear.

Therefore, the perspective adopted here is that the moment we live now is rather a phase of transition, that presents new elements coming into play, at the same time that it still retains much of the many originally modern ideals set a couple of hundred of years ago. Thus, we will outline some aspects that distinguish modernity from pre-modern times in what concerns the individual.

In general terms, modernity refers to “new modes of life” that developed in Europe, from the seventeenth century onwards (Giddens, 1990), instigated by a break with the political, social and economical order of the Middle Ages. These modes of life, according to the author, have deprived the urban beings from traditional types of social order, and are found in the core of what is considered the most profound change ever witnessed in previous eras.

Before modernity, the issues related to one's identity were primarily connected to his/her filiation to higher instances, such as social class, family and other ways of belonging (Giddens, 1991; Featherstone, 1995). One's identity was built up according to the expectations generated by his/her position regarding these categories. This means that there was a predominance of external forms of identity construction, in a movement that stemmed from socially established forms towards one's inner life. The pre-modern mode of identity would be then, according to Scott Lash e Jonathan Friedman (1992), externally determined.

The distinction between the pre-modern and the modern mode of construction of self-identity is often done without leaving any room for ambiguity. Kellner (1992) opposes the idea of identity between pre-modern and modern in the following terms:

“In pre-modern societies, identity was unproblematical and not subject to reflection or discussion. Individuals did not undergo identity crises, or radically modify their identity. (...) In modernity, identity becomes more mobile,

multiple, personal, self-reflexive, and subject to change and innovation”  
(Kellner, 1992: 142).

Although, following Giddens, sharp divisions might not be so accurate, there is a certain consensus that a fundamental breakthrough in this identity formation process followed all the changes that characterized what is understood as the shift from Middle Ages to the Modern Age. That gave way to the emergence of the individual as a single entity. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1998) put it, the old pillars of the pre-modern order such as God, the social system and nature were replaced by this individual, supposedly endowed with reason and freedom to choose.

However, the rise of this individual as a single entity on his/her own does not mean his self-identity was free to be shaped according only to his own will. As opposed to pre-modern ways of public and physical punishments, modernity witness the rise of a surveillance power, one that disciplines the individual from within, producing a person that is self-regulating and autonomous, throughout more pervasive and less visible ways (Foucault, 1987). A particular development of this power is the emergence and institutionalization of medicine in the late eighteenth century (Foucault, 2003), which embodies the shift from a religious mode of thinking of pre-modern times to a scientific, rational one, that is based on the production of knowledge about the individual and populations for means of control (Turner, 1997).

Following this assumption, Foucault, as Turner notes, gave one fundamental contribution to the understanding of the “emergence of the modern self through disciplinary technologies” (1997: xi), a process whereby the knowledge produced will generate discourses that will eventually be appropriated by the individual as means of knowing her/himself.

How this self will be constructed according to the knowleges that emerged as a result of more specific temporal events will be discussed in chapter II, where the issue of self-identity in high modernity will be seen within the symbolic connections prompted by contemporary food issues. In the next part of this chapter we will move to the specificities of the contemporary context.



## The contemporary context

Giddens will go further into how modern institutions affect our personal lives in his work *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991), and as it is clear by the title, he will take a more in-depth look in the relationship between the individual and his context, through the development of some key ideas. In this work, the author will claim that dynamism, the most distinguishable feature of modernity, and those sorts of global social connections are only possible due to what he defines as the three main pillars that make up for the fast pace of modernity: the *separation of time and space*, the *disembedding mechanisms* and the *institutional reflexivity*.

These notions will underpin Giddens' approach to the relations between modernity and self-identity throughout his work, and make up for the distinctions between pre-modern settings and modern and high modern ones. The separation of time and space, for example, is the very condition for the development of social connections that do not depend on the immediate, face-to-face contact. If, in pre-modern settings, as he argues, "time and space were connected *through* the situatedness of place" (1991: 16), the modern age introduces technological advancements that makes it no longer necessary for time and space to be tied up together. This is a process that starts with the invention of the mechanical clock and is completed, according to the author, with the integration of printed and electronic media. Through magazines and newspapers, distant events make their way into the "everyday consciousness" (Giddens, 1991:27).

The key to time-space distantiation is his following concept of *disembedding mechanisms*. They disembed precisely because they 'lift out' social relations from its local contexts. Giddens classify them as being of two types: *symbolic tokens* and *expert systems*. The best example for the first one is money – that brackets time and space together – whereas the latter accounts for "those modes of technical knowledge which have validity independent of the practitioners and clients that make use of them" (1991: 18). The idea behind expert systems is of particular importance for the forthcoming discussion because the term accounts for knowledge that is not restricted to the expert himself, but instead extended to social relations and, as Giddens puts it, "to the intimacies of the self" through the work of doctors, therapists and counsellors.

The third pillar is that of institutional reflexivity. The reflexivity of modernity, according to the author, refers to the fact that most aspects of social activities are subjected to a process of chronic revision as they come across new information or knowledge, what makes people have the impression that nothing that they know is safe enough to believe in, for the next news will always report a new breakthrough that dismiss previous certainties about any issue. This is one point where modern contradictions can be clearly observed: the Enlightenment proposal that knowledge would bring certainties against the lack of scientific foundation of lay beliefs and religion is undermined by the very dynamism with which this knowledge is revised.

In a scenario where doubt is institutionalized, Giddens chooses to call it a “post-traditional” order. Therefore, what he means is that tradition is no longer followed by its own sake. What changes is that in the greater awareness of worldly events, the status of knowledge in pre-modern times, where to know was to be certain, is no longer possible. What we could call the institutionalization of doubt expands reflexivity towards every sphere, including the individual one, to a chronic condition. It is not only the systems that govern our life that must be confronted with reflexively applied knowledges, but we, as pieces implicated in this process, are subjected to the same constant examination and monitoring of our own selves, and thus, to the same, frequent doubt. This constant monitoring and examination, will be argued by the author, is constitutive of the practices taken on by contemporary individuals in order to build up their self-identities.

The break with tradition and the institutionalization of reason as the guiding principle of modern institutions is a result of a wide range of complex events that are not supposed to be analyzed in detail here. After acknowledging that modernity gave rise to institutions that have been shaping individuals in a much distinct way from that of pre-modern times, what is important to the present work is to look at the specificities of self-identity formation in the contemporary age against the backdrop of some major institutional changes. That will reflect on how the individual is gonna see himself and his life trajectory without the traditional points of reference present ever since modernity emerged, plus the sharpening of some of these destabilizing influences in the contemporary context.

It is important to notice, though, that we can recognize in Giddens' discussion over the interlace between the institutional and the individual spheres echoes of Foucault's

extensive analysis on how institutions shape people's subjectivity, as a feature of modernity. Nevertheless, as noted by Fairclough (1992), Foucault was not concerned with "discursive and linguistic analysis of real texts" (1992: 56). Hence Giddens' contribution is that, by emphasizing modern life infinite possibilities and the role of the mass media as a textual source of discourses about the self, he acknowledges individual's agency<sup>1</sup> over their own sense of self-identity based on the relationship developed with knowledges made available by the expert systems, that are increasingly being dealt with through mediated experience. In that sense, by acknowledging the role of mass communication, Giddens underscores a major influence to the construction of self-identity in late modernity.

### **The role of the media**

Modern age, thanks to a series of mechanisms that shake the structure of traditional forms of social organization, puts the individual in connection with distant events in time and space, but important enough so as to affect his life in large scale (Giddens, 1990, 1991). If the pre-modern man knew only about the current events of his more immediate environment, the modern man finds himself in intimate relation with what goes on in the rest of the world.

Without the traditional instances around to support him, this human being supposedly rational, autonomous and enterprising develops another way of constituting himself as a person, of constituting his identity. That is where tradition loses its ground as the provider of symbolic notions that would help one build up his sense of identity.

One of those mechanisms mentioned above as responsible for these major transformations is mass media. One consequence of its rise is the increase in the *mediated experience*, that is, the way that our life is marked and referred to in terms of external facts. These facts make their way into our inner selves from their distant origin with the help of a

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<sup>1</sup> Although this agency might entail unexpected and unwanted results (Giddens, 1984), the individual in Giddens is more in tune with the "choosing atmosphere" of modernity than in Foucault, even though this does not necessarily mean more freedom.

communicational instance. By being connected to distant events through the media, the individual also started being exposed to other symbolic providers that are not only that of the immediate environment, and that will have a powerful effect over his process of self-formation (Thompson, 1996). This is possible only because modernity is intrinsically linked with the expansion of systems of communication. Since the emergence of printing industry in the fifteenth-century Europe, forms of “mediated quasi-interaction” (Thompson, 1996) has supplemented that of face-to-face interaction. Mediated quasi interaction, as Thompson explains, are forms of interaction that stand for those an audience has with mass media: one that does not require a direct and immediate response, constituting a one-way source of symbolic content.

The central role of mass media in the formation of self-identity in contemporary times is a vision shared by many authors (Fairclough, 1995; Giddens, 1990, 1991; Kellner, 1992; Thompson, 1996). However, in their analyses, maybe due to the fact that they did not have the proper time to realize such a recent phenomenon as the development of the world wide web, they limit their reference to electronic communications to television. Therefore, they tend to see media as a one-way source of symbolic content for the shaping of identities, but the fact is that since the last decade of the last century we have been witnessing a different possibility of interaction through the internet.

The intention of the present study is not to discuss these specificities, but to acknowledge the manifold and complex elements of the current context that play an important part in the shaping of the late modern subject. Besides, if we are to use media discourses on healthy eating as the example of one possibility of construction of self-identity in contemporaneity, we must acknowledge mass media as one structure for this discussion, rather than seeing it merely the field that provided the data.<sup>2</sup> This position stems from the fact that, according to Clarke (2005), we must be aware of the elements of every situation at stake, for the change in these elements will inform the changes in the discourse.

Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that with the internet versions of printed media publications, such as the one that provided the material of analyses for this

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2 The implications of media discourse for the shaping of self-identities will be discussed in more detail in chapter III.

present study, another kind of interaction will take place that allows for different kinds of agency from the reader, generating a multiplicity of feedbacks. If the emergence of media in general changed the process of self-formation (Thompson, 1996), its latest developments certainly bring other aspects to it that remains to be studied.

## **The Subject**

After considering some key aspects of the context at stake, we should now take a look at the central concept for this study. Although the discussions over identity are broad and include those of social, gender, national, and cultural identity, the focus here is on self-identity, as we have mentioned previously. Therefore, this is not the idea of identity as directly related to certain cultural specificities, but a discussion over a more universal phenomenon that concerns the general western individual, exposed to a range of globalized goods and mass media vehicles.

### **Self-identity in late modernity**

As Douglas Kellner (1992) acknowledges in his study on how contemporary self-identities are constructed in advertisements and tv series, this discussion is two times problematic: it is both a theoretical and personal problem. For Kellner, a society anxious about identity issues as the western society is can only witness an infinitude of discussions and debates over the problems and the crises of self-identity.

It is a personal problem, in first place, because, as we have seen, the traditional structures that were responsible for the shaping of our identities no longer have the legitimacy to do so. This is a task to be undertaken by the individual. According to Lash & Friedman (1992):

“(…)With the demise of both God and Caesar, social space opens up the way for an autonomous definition of identity. In modernity, we are fated to be free.  
(…)With God, Caesar and the certainties of Kant's categorical ethics swept

away, the onus is on us to forge our own subjectivity” (1992: 5)

The perspective adopted here is that developed by Giddens (1991), where the construction of a coherent self, based on a life-plan, is a very contemporary issue to the late modern subject. Therefore, in the context of late modernity, self-identity is basically defined as how the individual understands himself in a reflexive fashion in terms of his/her own biography (Giddens, 1991), or again, in the same line, as a sense of oneself as “an individual endowed with certain characteristics and potentialities, as an individual situated in a certain life-trajectory” (Thompson, 1996: 93).

This self-identity is one that is put together by the adoption of an attitude of chronic self-monitoring in order to verify constantly at to what extent choices are made in concordance with an idea more or less coherent that is established for oneself. That happens, in first place, because, according to Giddens, to be a human being means to know more or less all the time what one does and why.

To the intimate and individual activities that contribute to the development of a self-identity in this context are conferred exceptional importance for it took the place of traditional ways of identification. If, before modernity identity was a legacy, in first place, from the ancestors (Friedman, 1992), now it is a project restricted, in its greater part, to this activities of the individual to himself, which will give meaning to this trajectory. It is up to the individual to determine, among an infinity of possibilities, what he/she will be.

As for the theoretical problem that Kellner talks about, this is visible in the clash of two different approaches. Through the postmodern one, the experience of identity in the contemporary age is embedded in a perspective according to which there is a break between what we understand as modernity and its more advanced phase, namely that that starts after the Second World War. This is the position assumed by postmodernists such as David Harvey (1997) and Fredric Jameson (1998), where postmodernity is supposedly considered a phase of transcendence of modern ideals. In this reading, the individual must not be seen as the one guided by the rationalistic project of the construction of an unified, coherent identity, as supposedly was in earlier periods of modernity. In the most radical accounts, Lash & Friedman (1992) explains, they posit an end to history, to art and to the subject altogether.

For Stuart Hall (1999), for example, this contemporary subject is essentially pictured as one that does not hold any fixed, essential or permanent identity. That supposedly

allows him to adopt different identities – sometimes even contradictory and unresolved – at the same time. These identities are not understood as revolving around a “coherent self” (Hall, 1999:12). On the contrary, the contemporary self is an assembling of fragments and sensations, or, according to Bauman (1997), a “bricolage”.

Therefore, the individual constrained by the modern ideals of self-control and rationality would be replaced by this being that Bauman believes as being oriented only by hedonist aims, reached by frenzy consumerism. In that sense, the idea brought up is that of a multiplicity of identities, for they are flimsy and overlapping each other, unable to give a sense of coherence to the subject.

In this kind of approach to self-identity in contemporaneity, the guiding idea is that the individual experiences a constant call to switch identity all the time, due to the lack of a sense of personal narrative. That would be the consequence to the inner self of the accelerated pace of changes in the external world.

Zygmunt Bauman (1997), referring directly to Freud, does not claim the end of the subject, but aims to replace that notion of the rational modernist individual for a rather irrational post-modernist one as the dominant tendency. For that purpose, and using Freud's terminology, he claims that up until postmodernity, society was a group of people that accepted the principle of reality in order to live in society. Nowadays, according to Bauman's proposition, we are delving further into practices that challenge that former principle. Instead, we are supposedly adopting the principle of pleasure, giving in to our impulses, mainly through consumerist acts.

The world that Bauman paints stems from a rather pessimistic view of the changes in self-formation, a pessimism that also colors Lasch (1986) criticisms of what he perceives as the emergence of an age of narcissism and of increasing discontent in face of all the possibilities that are open. For Lasch, the contemporary idea of choice is one that is not consequential, a choice that can be cancelled any time and that allows other choices simultaneously. That is the logic of consumption, which, according to this author, have pervaded the self, subjecting other spheres of human life to the same logic.

Bauman builds up a more or less clear distinction between modernity and postmodernity, at least regarding the guiding principles for people's behavior. He states that, in Freud's proposition, accepting the reality principle meant giving up a considerable amount of freedom in exchange of some security. In postmodernity, Bauman states how is it

supposed to be:

“Ours, however, is the time of deregulation. The reality principle has today to defend itself in the court of justice in which the pleasure principle is the presiding judge. 'The idea that there are difficulties attaching to the nature of civilization which will not yield to any attempt at reform' seems to have lost its pristine obviousness. Compulsion and forced renunciation has turned from an irritating necessity into an unwanted assault launched against individual freedom” (Bauman, 1997: 2)

This description indeed holds a great deal of veracity with the current conditions of western society. This society of mass consumption has no precedents and its rapid changes are disruptive of every stability. However, there are some major emergent issues that do not fit into this interpretation. The fact that the individual is, nowadays, much more in charge of constructing his/her self-identity than ever before, that he is supposedly *free* to choose amongst the increasing pluralization of the environment, does not necessarily mean that his 'freedom will' is going to overwhelm any sense of teleology or coherence to his life. Also, *precisely* because the world out there is risky and unpredictable it can foster a reaction in which the pursue of some sense of security is directed towards both the body and the self, such that coherence of self-identity is not disregarded in name of the freedom to choose<sup>3</sup>.

The postmodern approach to the way of experiencing identity downplays individuals needs to establish a personal narrative that gives meaning to one's biography because it focuses only on *fragmentation*. Kellner (1992) opposes the approach that states that the subject is “disintegrated into a flux of euphoric intensities, fragmented and disconnected”, and that the discontinuous experience marks his life experience. According to that vision, this subject would not feel anxiety, and no longer possess any depth or substantiality.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Note that what is at stake is more a matter of how the *notion* of coherence of self-identity still matters, rather than the actual existence of coherence itself.

4 Although refusing the approach, he still speaks in terms of postmodernity, which colors his work as situated in an age that already have overcome modernity. Throughout this study we will see other authors using the term postmodernity in order to emphasize the aspects of change of our era, without really



Giddens' (1990; 1991) dismiss both the postmodern assumptions about self-identity as well as the very term on grounds that, to speak about postmodernity equals to speak in terms of a historical chronology that the very "postmodernity" itself denies. In his perspective, a sense of narrative – something abolished by postmodernists – is fundamental to manage the anxieties brought by the perceived instability of the outer world. Therefore, such fragmentation of the contemporary self, as implied in postmodern understandings cannot be assumed as a dominant tendency according to the author:

"Naturally, individuals adjust both appearance and demeanour somewhat according to the perceived demands of the particular setting. That this is so has led some authors to suppose that the self essentially becomes broken up – that individuals tend to develop multiple selves in which there is no inner core of self-identity. Yet surely, as an abundance of studies on self-identity show, this is plainly not the case." (Giddens, 1991:100)

For Giddens, modernity encompasses both tendencies of unification and fragmentation, for it is essentially a contradictory period, hence it can not be simplified into one single tendency, neither for the overall patterns of facts, nor for the general features that constitute self-identity in this context. Therefore, for him, it is not correct to see the 'disintegration of the self' as inevitable, instead, the contextual diversity can actually promote an 'integration of the self'. Here he acknowledges, once more, the role of the mediated experience, by stating that media, at the same time it offers fragmented images, it also constructs 'models' of personal narratives, conveying stories that are developed in such a way as to "create a narrative coherence with which the reader or viewer can identify" (1991: 199).

In face of this, declaring the end of narratives is complicated. The need to classify, organize and purify is a fundamental element in human practices, whether in traditional or non-traditional settings (Douglas, 2002 [1966]). This can be comprehended not only at the level of practical life, but also at the more abstract level of identity - and

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complying with the ideas of extreme fragmentation and death of the subject.

narratives constitute a way of organizing life experiences. Hence, the quest for a more or less coherent sense of personal narrative will give support for a sense of identity. Giddens states that:

“The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of biography which the individual supplies about herself. A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*” (Giddens, 1991: 54)

A narrative is possible when awareness about oneself in the present is increased, aiming at an achievement for the future. Present awareness or the act of routine self-observation is, according to Giddens' explanation, not a chronic immersion in the current experience, but, instead, “the very condition of planning ahead” (1991: 71). Within this perspective, choices and changes have a clear consequence to the inner self, and are not supposed to be deemed as superficial acts that leave no trace in the subject. Giddens (1991) uses the example of self-therapy, as found in a self-help book (*Self-therapy – A Guide To Become Your Own Therapist*, by Janette Rainwater) in order to illustrate how a discourse over the construction of a life plan is put out aiming at self-growth and improvement, thus reestablishing the idea of a certain teleology in one's acts. He finds in this example that one should proceed to continuous self-observation, attempting to answer questions such as 'what do I want for myself right now?'. This will generate the self-understanding necessary to “plan ahead and construct a life trajectory which accords with the individual's inner wishes” (1991: 71).

Reflexivity of the self is then a continuous and all-pervasive activity, and as Giddens explains, this same reflexivity is extended to the body. By being part of an action system rather than merely a passive object, the body is also implicated in the execution of a life plan. The requirements of exercise and diet are all part of this, where one is called upon being conscious of his bodily processes in order to *improve* them. Body awareness – and that also means being aware of the food and the way you eat – are presented, in this very contemporary discourse, according to Giddens, as “means of constructing a differentiated self” (1991: 77).

This attitude represents one important character of the expected position of the individual towards his/her own life. He is called upon 'taking charge' of it. Being the self a reflexive project, "we are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves" (1991: 75). That makes us completely responsible for every aspect of our lives. Giddens states:

"Taking charge of one's life involves risk, because it means confronting a diversity of open possibilities. The individual must be prepared to make a more or less complete break with the past, if necessary, and to contemplate novel courses of action that cannot simply be guided by established habits" (1991: 73)

This changes and courses of action aim at the achievement of authenticity, the pursue of the "true self". Through self-actualization – which implicates in a evaluation of the past – one is able to identify what in one's life is a compliance to elements that were passed onto oneself in earlier periods in life, and that should not make part of a differentiated self that must be attained through conscious changes and choices.

### **Lifestyles as supportive of contemporary self-identities**

The less tradition has an input in the making of the self, the more personal choices influence the construction of self-identity. Therefore, the idea of lifestyles gain a remarkable relevance in this context. A lifestyle is a cluster of habits and practices that is opted for, instead of being handed down. It comes as habits concerning the way we dress, eat, act or the places we usually go to meet others alike. As a more or less ordered set of practices and habits, it has a certain unity that is central to some sense of ontological security (Giddens, 1991). Its significance as collective and individual expressions of differences and similarities between people relates to wider changes in social, economical, political and technological areas in the latest decades of the twentieth century (Cockerham, 1997).

In face of those external transformations, the self undergoes huge changes as well. In more traditional settings, the concern over choices followed a different guideline. It is not to say that there is no choice in those settings, but the scope was way more limited than it is now. Also, the diverse opportunities for consumption makes choice an activity that

we have to engage in, on every tiny aspect of our daily lives. The difference between late modern and traditional settings is that, besides the wide diversity of possibilities of choices availables regarding what to eat, dress and who to be, there is no safe guidelines on what options should be selected. Then again, one must make the choices by one's own. The relevance of this cluster of choices that make up for lifestyles is explained by Giddens:

“The notion of lifestyles sound somewhat trivial because it is so often thought of solely in terms of a superficial consumerism: lifestyles as suggested by glossy magazines and advertising images. But there is something much more fundamental going on than such a conception suggests: in conditions of high modernity, we all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so – we have no choice but to choose. A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfill utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity” (1991: 81)

With the diversity of options for lifestyles available, choosing is not an easy task. Because of that, strategic life-planning becomes specially important. “Life plans are the substantial content of the reflexively organized trajectory of the self” (Giddens, 1991: 85). Lifestyles choices will be supported by a more or less clear idea of how do they fit into this life-plan. Hence the construction and maintenance of self-identity in late modernity depends on this activity of planning for the future, as well as of making sense of the past.

### **The Health Context**

Amidst the so-called postmodern fragmentation, with its celebrated irrationality and compulsion, with mindless choices and inconsequent acts, what can be identified is an increasing tendency that contradicts certain postmodern assumptions. The changes going on in the health field that are on the basis of the present discussion are a direct consequence of those changes brought about by late modernity. They manifest at both levels, institutional and personal. In the first one, these changes are represented in the emergence of health

promotion as a branch of public health. As for the latter, the importance attributed to healthy lifestyles has never been so great.

### **Health promotion, healthy lifestyles and the late modern subject**

Although the present work is not an approach to public health policies, it is important to take a brief look over some features of health promotion for it is a discourse that is not limited to the policies themselves. The health promotional discourse is one that makes its way to the media, as noted by Castro (2004), thus reaching a wide audience and influencing how people will manage their health – and, in our approach, what kind of self-identity is gonna be developed. Therefore, the importance given to healthy lifestyles nowadays, and the profusion of information about it is nothing more than another side of the same phenomenon.

The discourses over healthy lifestyles – within which healthy eating is included as a specific aspect of it – emerges as possible sources of notions for the *self* that are grounded on the rationalization of daily practices in search for a long term goal (Cockerham, 1993, 1997). If the general postmodern perception of contemporary identities as fragmented can account for certain tendencies, it certainly overlooks a major one that relates to changes happening to the health field in the context of late modernity.<sup>5</sup> The subject constructed in health promotional policies, for example, is the rational, self-controlled, autonomous individual.

There is a more or less clear historical moment for those changes. In terms of institutional transformations, we could, for example, pinpoint a 'postmodern turn' in health through the emergence of health promotion during the 1980's (Parish, 1995). Until the late 1970's, that concept was virtually unknown, becoming popular in the following decade and shaping a new form of how public policies would address the health of populations. That is

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<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, authors such as Kelly & Charlton (1995) and Cockerham (1993, 1997) will refer to this phenomenon as a 'postmodern' one. However, they will do it to point out to the contemporary character of it rather than to comply with the 'death of the subject' in these postmodern accounts.

because health promotion is based upon the idea of 'positive health': it is supposed to represent a fulfilled and functioning quality of life, 'lived to the full and to be enjoyed by all in a state of complete social, physical and mental wellbeing' (Kelly & Charlton, 1995: 83).

This aspect has generated a range of criticisms, remarkably those that follow a foucauldian perspective. The stress on being healthy above all else has prompted criticisms over the medicalization aspects of it. Lupton (1997) claims that this is manifested in the fact that people are frequently urged to live their lives so as to avoid disease and early death, which puts everyone, without exception (healthy and unhealthy people), under a medical regime. The medical gaze increasingly penetrates into the everyday life of individuals: everything must be evaluated as conducive or not to healthy living, whether it is "interpersonal relationships, management of stress, emotional states or lifestyles choices" (Lupton, 1997: 107).

The emergence of health promotion is not only a result of wider social, economical and political transformations, but also results from a medical fact. In that sense, it stems from what Michael Bury (1996) has termed as a shift of focus from *illness* to *health*. This has turned health into a matter always subjected to improvement, being more and more distant from the idea of a merely absence of disease. By its turn, this shift reflects an actual change in the disease patterns. From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, there was an epidemiological transition from acute to chronic diseases as the most important factor accounting for the death rates in most areas of the world. As medicine cannot cure these conditions, the focus to fight them has been put on individual's management of their health (Cockerham, 2005). It means that lifestyles rose as the area of one's life that will be determinant in avoiding or contracting a disease.

Deborah Lupton (1996) distinguishes our contemporary age from the previous ones by stressing the fact that, although worries with health have always existed, the "extent and intensity of health related concerns evident in many contemporary societies are remarkable". She also notes that the 1970's marked the point where a "proliferation of new knowledges and activities focusing on health status of 'populations'" took place (Lupton, 1996:1). It seems quite meaningful that during what is held as the transition period from modernity to late modernity (or postmodernity, as some would refer it) that is, around the 1960's or 1970's (Cockerham, 1997) the healthy lifestyles discourse begin to be institutionalized in public health policies, and a "healthy lifestyle" gradually became the

pattern to be followed by those who do not want to be deemed as individuals lacking the virtues of determination, self-mastery and perseverance. As Kelly & Charlton (1995) put it, 'sociologically speaking', health promotion is, 'with its tensions and confusions', the result of *postmodernisation*.

This setting prompts the development of a certain kind of subjectivity. In compliance with what we have seen within the description of late modernity, the health promotional discourse urges people to take responsibility for their lives: one's health nowadays is less a problem of the state than an obligation of the moral citizen (Lupton, 1995).

As Lupton (1995, 1996, 1997) and Nettleton (1997) stress, the placement of the responsibility for health entirely on the personal sphere prompts the adherence of personal virtues – if the individual succeed in managing his health according to the latest advice – or deep flaws in the personal character once the same individual does not. In Cockerham's words, health is no longer “a gift of God”, but in these secular times health has become “a task, an achievement, or a performance of responsible individuals” (Cockerham, 1997: 334).

Thus, as a task of the individuals, health implies in choices in the market. Bunton and Burrows assert that “under late modernism the dominant culture is one in which health, self-identity and consumption are increasingly entwined” (Bunton and Burrows, 1995:211), and observation that falls within Kelly & Charlton's (1995) perception of health as a new commodity. The recurrent connection between self-identity and health brings about the matter of consumerism as a bridge that makes possible the link between what one attempts to be and what is available in terms of cultural images and discourses that can be purchased for that purpose. Nettleton & Bunton (1995) will give a detailed account of these connections, attempting to build up a conceptual map of health promotion dividing it in cells where they identify several issues concerning the emergence of health promotion. The cells are divided in *structural*, *surveillance* and *consumption*. Within the consumption cell, a particular attention is paid to the question of identities:

“The consumption/identities cell alludes to the ways in which personal and group identities are engendered through the consumption of commodities – from health magazines to health farms. Glassner's (1989) account of fitness and the development of the postmodern self provides a good example of this process.

Health promotion is symptomatic of wider cultural change involving the fabrication of more reflexive late modern self-identities. This in turn demands of the self and the body a greater 'plasticity' which can only be achieved by the subtle calculation of appropriate patterns of consumption akin to those expounded by health promotion. Contemporary self-identities are largely constituted through role-playing, image construction and the consumption of goods and services with varying identity-values located in the spheres of culture, leisure, play and consumption (Kellner, 1992). The ubiquity of images of 'health' and 'healthy living' in these domains are thus important sources of contemporary self-identity. However, these images of health are strongly mediated by other cultural sources of self-identity which emphasize the glamour, danger, toughness, rebelliousness and sexuality associated with the consumption of unhealthy products such as tobacco and alcohol (Amos, 1992)" (Nettleton & Bunton, 1995: 56)

In face of so many issues that intertwine with matters of healthy living nowadays, some see the need of developing a theoretical approach to address the question. For that matter, Cockerham (1993, 1997, 2005) draws from Weber, Simmel, Bourdieu and Giddens in an attempt to develop an appropriate framework for healthy lifestyles that takes into account an intensification of the modern feature of rationality.

He views this process of search for self-identity through the engagement in healthy lifestyles as complying with a rationalisation that is typically modern, and that acquires more extreme features in our contemporary society. The formal rationality that healthy lifestyles represent are found in the act of redefinition of one's health situation according to strategic and well-defined aims that intend to achieve self-control. He is aware, though, that as a model of analysis, rationality cannot account for the complexities involved in this phenomenon – like the role played by the nonrational aspects of it.

Besides being an expression of self-identity, he would add, again drawing from Giddens' discussion over structure and agency, that, although healthy lifestyles are a platform for choices, they are also structure: "(...) they also provide relief in a rapid changing world by reducing complexity" (Cockerham, Rütten & Abel, 1997: 330).

The contemporary healthy lifestyles are, therefore, the manifestation in the personal sphere of a health promotional discourse. As such, they encompass the coercive



features of control of populations, broadening the aspect of surveillance that result in the production of subjectivities (Lupton, 1997). However, the fact that, for many people, adopting healthy habits have absolutely no importance makes us understand this phenomenon as also voluntarily assumed by individuals, on the grounds that is one choice among many others that it is both a support for self-identities and a tool for management of late modern world anxieties and complexities. In the next chapter we will discuss one specific aspect of it: healthy eating. Food – healthy or not – is already a matter that relates to people's self-identities, thus we will see how this aspect is heightened in a context where being healthy assumes the features of a project for the self.

## CHAPTER II

### Relations between healthy eating and self-identity

The aim of this chapter is to look at one specific aspect of healthy lifestyles: healthy eating. That is necessary in order to properly frame the data analysis on this matter further ahead. The previous discussion over late modernity encompassed two major elements: its specific subject as one who struggles to find a project for the self amidst the contemporary uncertainties and infinite possibilities, and the institutional changes taking place within the health field that turns it into an increasingly individual matter. These elements ground the aspects about food in contemporaneity that will be approached here, namely the issues of self-control, constant monitoring, anxiety and guilt, all of them aspects that make part, as we will see, of the process of constitution and maintenance of one's self-identity today, against the backdrop of mass media. If food has always been, by its own characteristics, a core issue to the self, this aspect will be heightened in matters of healthy eating, underpinned by the role of specific elements of late modernity.

### **Food or sex?**

Before we launch into this discussion, it has to be made clear that food is by no means just a matter of nutritional importance. Just as any other sphere of human life, its practical aspect intertwines with others that do not belong to those of immediate biological needs, entailing a complex dynamic of associations. Thus, the value of food surpasses in many ways that of its biological qualities: symbolically laden, food is both an outcome and a mechanism of reproduction of cultural assumptions, bound with an infinite possibility of meaningful connections. That is so much a fact that every cultural environment has its specificities translated into the modes of choice, preparation and consumption of foodstuff. Hence when we eat we are not only consuming nutrients. Besides experiencing the gustatory side to it, we are, most importantly, “consuming *meanings* and *symbols*”

(Beardsworth & Keil, 1997).

Traditional environments are quite obvious in that sense, for the food system retains a great deal of rules managing prohibitions, taboos, what is edible or not, etc., so that food also represents cultural elements that define them as a group of people different from another cultural group. However, in the western modern urban environment, adherence to culturally defined modes of eating is not the order of the day. Instead, variation, choice and the exotic play a much different role they would ever play in traditional societies. Although the relations entailed around food in this context differ from those of previous ages or traditional cultures, they definitely play a role. This is what makes both Caplan (1997), Lupton (1996) and Beardsworth & Keil (1997) point out what they consider a flaw in the work of the French anthropologist Claude Fischler, from whom they draw mostly to debate matters of food, the self and identity. According to them, the French author's account on the current food landscape is one of "gastro-anomie", implying an idea of anomie concerning food matters in today's world; they all reject this idea, assuming a position that the modes of attributions of meaning to food today are different from the previous times, nevertheless, it does not mean they are absent. On the contrary, it is interesting to investigate where the symbolic connections made with food are heading to, and where they are bound to be found.

The importance of food habits in terms of its implications to self-identity is bound to be found in its necessary connection with other practices of constitution of oneself as an ethical subject. In his work, Ortega (2003) tackles the problematic of the contemporary constitution of self-identity through the rise of what he deems "bioidentities": the constitution of self-identities through the subjective concern over bodily, medical, hygienic and aesthetical practices. He compares the ascetic practices of previous ages with late modern ones to find out that, in our age, sexuality takes a back seat to healthy eating habits – amongst other healthy habits – as a field of human activity that is subjected to ascetic practices as conducive to a process of 'subjectivizing'. As noticed by Turner (1997), the shift of the placement of taboos and anxieties from sex to food in contemporary society reinforces matters of restraint in relation to the constitution of the self in connection to food habits.

In that sense, Probyn (1999) attempts to show how sex must be rethought as a "sole or privileged object within the theorization of identity" (Probyn, 1999: 217). She poses the question whether food is replacing sex as grounding identities, whether they are built up in terms of gender, nationality, collectively or – as it is the focus here – individually.

Whereas Ortega sees the replacement of sex for food, the question for Probyn is more complex than that: it is not a substitution of one issue for another, in a linear fashion; rather, the intertwining of matters of food and sex – considered all the food fetishism she is concerned about – tells much about food as playing a role that is similar of that of sex as it has been approached by Foucault (1988; 1999). For instance, all the increasing sophistication of the gastronomic media, with its glossy magazines stamped with well designed, eye-catching plates on the cover reminds the author that there is something going on that could almost be called “food pornography”.

Probyn's example shows how food and sex matters are closely related. This is due to an intimate connection between the dynamics of eating and sex-making that revolve around the issues of pleasure and restraint, impulse and guilt, the body and the self. This brief comparison allows one to speak about food as central to the constitution of the subject, without necessarily destituting sex of its role in that process too. This position follows the perception of increasing complexity attached to late modernity: when it comes to identity issues, more elements come into play, widening the scope of possibility of choices that both lures and haunts the individual.

That said, we move forward in the direction of the problematic of healthy eating to the individual's self-identity today, for it poses a question to the globalized being, bringing up issues around food that do not depend upon substantial specific cultural practices, but that leave the individual with a question to be worked out rather on his own, through individual consumption.

On Probyn's account of the increasing specialization of the gastronomic media she is inclined to assume that, nowadays, more than sex, it is food that sells. The dynamics of consumption and mass media, therefore, pervade this discussion. That is one of the possible examples of wider transformations that end up affecting the relations between individuals and food in contemporaneity, for matters of food are more and more a question of personal choice, for that is what the economic order is about: making available the greatest amount of novelties, then conditioning the subjects to define themselves in terms of what they purchase, for consumption entails not only the acquisition of goods, but also the 'acquisition of a relationship and a sign' (Bunton, 1997: 238), being a symbolic affirmation of who one is (Bauman, 1997).

This aspect is heightened when it comes to the consumption of foodstuff. As we

have already seen, the ingestion of food has always been invested with symbolic meanings, no matter if it is in a traditional or post-traditional environments. In the context of high modernity, where health, self-identity and consumption interlace (Bunton & Burrows, 1995: 210), food is saturated with meanings that stem from the fact that it is both a mean of feeding oneself and also a good that is subjected to the rules of the market.

In terms of healthy eating, this dynamic acquires a slightly different characteristic, for it brings into it the matter of asceticism mentioned right in the beginning of this chapter. In the context of a consumer culture, asceticism is somewhat 'refashioned'. Deborah Lupton (1996), in her work on the interplay between food, self and the body, sees that there is a "continuous dialectic between the pleasures of consumption and the ethics of asceticism as means of constructing the self" in food terms, and we could clearly see that in the act of going for the novelties of health food industry. One chooses, buys, always oriented by a frame of reference that is given nowadays by the media.

Although food, as Probyn concludes, cannot supersede sex in the constitution of the subject, nowadays it has just as much input in matters of constitution of subjectivities – reinforced by those matters of consumption already mentioned. For Probyn, food offers a way of "returning to questions about pleasure within restraint, sympathy understood as a means of respecting the situatedness of identity. It also returns our attention to the forces that regulate our everyday lives: in short to a very practical figuring of an everyday ethics of living" (1999: 224).

In a context where being healthy is stressed as one's duty in public health discourses, it is fundamental to envision the role played by the media in building up those symbolic connections, provided that media is nowadays the main source of symbolic materials that help to 'inform and refashion the project of the self' (Thompson, 1998: 97). Coupled to that, acting as mediators between medico-scientific and lay knowledges, the news media are also "important sources for the reproduction of dominant discourses and practices around food and health" (Lupton, 1995: 478). As Castro (2004) noticed in her thesis work, health promotional discourses make their way from policies to the mass media, which helps to "naturalize" the discourse, turning it into an issue of everyday life and softening the coercive perception that one might have from it as an official apparatus of regulation. Thus, those symbolic connections between food and self-identity are heightened by the fact that they are being constructed in a powerful source of discursive practices, which

underscores the fact of discourses as being constitutive of identities (Fairclough 1992, 1995)<sup>6</sup>.

Therefore, the mass media is quite a favorable ground for the construction of symbolic connections between the health-giving qualities of food and the personal features of the one who eats it. To the late modern, western and urban individual – uprooted from food practices traditions – it is an important source of notions that constructs a person in direct relation to how healthy he eats.

### **Hedonism x asceticism**

As we have previously seen, food is symbolically-laden. Therefore, we must understand it as one field that also reflects and is subjected to the particular developments that culminated in what we know as late modernity. By its own features, besides relating in an intimate fashion with one of modernity's great issue, the construction of self-identity, food is also central to health promotional policies, which make up for one side of the institutional transformations that affect people's inner selves.

The late modern individual, as described by Giddens (1991), is the latest version of a modern subject that has been being constructed by medical-scientific discourses since the emergence of modernity and its institutions of governmentality of populations – medicine as one of them (Foucault, 2003). In contemporaneity, the presence of mass media amplify those normative discourses, by translating the scientific language into lay knowlegde (Castro, 2004; Gough, 2006)

In the specific case of food, what has been constructed is what Coveney (2000) names both as the 'modern subject of nutrition' or the 'modern subject of food choice'. This subject will reflect a different problematization around food that will be peculiar of the modern way of constructing one's self. If the issue of food choice was not present in pre-modern and ancient times as a question that would adress the problematic of what an

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<sup>6</sup> The relationship between discourses and the constitution of identities and subjectivities, particularly in the media, will be further discussed in the next chapter.

individual is, for the modern subject, “the notion of food choice is normative” (Coveney, 2000: 53). As we have seen with Giddens (1991), we are doomed to choose in food matters as well.

Food choice in times of the 'imperative of health' bears a clear guideline. According to Coveney (2000), the concerns of this subject falls within the rationality of eating habits in relation to scientific and medical norms. To eat healthy is, in first place, to apply to food habits the ideal of rationalization as a mode of thinking that supported the rise of modern institutions. That happens because, in the author's perception, good food is now seen less in terms of the pleasure of eating rather than the health result it prompts. That entails a relationship between the individual and what he eats that is put in terms of self-control and restraint.

Nevertheless, the problem with Coveney's interpretation of the contemporary approach to food is that he downplays pleasure, almost to the point of exclusion, in the individual's experience of healthy eating, leaving that feeling as something one gets only when transgressing. That suggests a neat division between a pre-modern time that he describes as encompassing both the free indulgence in food pleasures and the development of pleasure within restraint, and a modern purely rational concern for food nutritional qualities. As Featherstone (1991) shows, when it comes to matters of the body, diet, and health within our consumer culture, it is neither hedonism nor asceticism that prevails, but a combination of both:

“Discipline and hedonism are no longer seen as incompatible, indeed the subjugation of the body through body maintenance routines is presented within consumer culture as a precondition for the achievement of an acceptable appearance and the release of the body's expressive capacity. Consumer culture does not involve the complete replacement of asceticism by hedonism, this shift occurs primarily on the level of cultural imagery; in reality, it demands a good deal of 'caculating hedonism' from the individual (Jacoby, 1980:63)” (Featherstone, 1991: 171)

Therefore, one important point in the relationship between an individual and healthy eating practices are marked by the experience of pleasure *within* restraint (Probyn, 1999). If radical versions of a restraining behavior regarding food can be observed in the

case of anorexia (Turner, 1992), following a specific diet relates to what Giddens (1991) and Shilling (2003) would refer to as another example of the practice of bodily regimes as means of influencing, reflexively, a project for the self. From this point of view, “anorexia and its apparent opposite, compulsive overeating, should be understood as casualties of the need – and responsibility – of the individual to create and maintain a distinctive self-identity. They are extreme versions of the control of bodily regimes which has now become generic to the circumstances of daily life” (Giddens, 1991: 104)

Thus, is it possible that extreme assumptions that applies to anorexic behaviour can be “softened” and observed in more common settings, such as the everyday life of those who want to pursue a healthy diet? This is not to include all the contemporary phenomenons in terms of food practices in the same category, once the case of anorexia implies in complex psychological developments that are way beyond the present discussion. But these phenomenons do share some aspects in common. If the main issue comes down to a matter of self-control and need to manage the disturbing contradictions raised by modern life, then that is possible. According to Lupton, what we can observe in anorexia is a quest for an authentic self, which promises to protect them from what the author deems as “the postmodern ambiguity around subjectivity” (1996: 135). Nevertheless, the quest for this authentic self is also a concern of non-anorexic individuals.

Whereas the relationship with food overwhelms every other source of the self in the case of anorexia, it does not in the case of those who do not display that condition. Nevertheless, control over food and eating is still “important to the construction and maintenance of subjectivity” (Lupton, 1996: 136).

### **'You are what you eat'**

One aspect of the changing character of the possibilities of attribution of meaning to food in today's world is the core of the hereby discussion, which is that aspect where food is found as one more element liable to the reflexive monitoring carried out by contemporary individuals in the process of construction of their subjectivities and identities. In late modern environments, with its loosening of traditional modes of belonging and the rise of the individual as a choice-making subject of his own, the cultural constraints found in



traditional environments are no more determinant in terms of food choices. With the production, commercialization and consumption changes that are peculiar of modernity, the realm of food practices acquire new meanings. Food choices nowadays belong much more to the individual sphere than in previous times. In intrinsic relation is the value attributed to lifestyles as a major support for contemporary identities (Cockerham, 1993, 1997, 2005; Giddens, 1991), becoming possible to envision that the cluster of choices regarding food end up raising the association between eating preferences and self-identity.

Thus, if food practices have always been a major conveyor of cultural identity, what happens to that within an environment in which culture, in its traditional sense, has lost much of its importance amidst the globalization of tastes and goods for the western, urban individual, confronted through the media with the often not-so-healthy novelties of the food industry, and at the same time, with the latest admonitions of the health promotional discourse? Information on food nowadays abounds, but there is a great amount of confusion and contradiction in it. What is more, food scares in the media are able to change population's behavior by fostering panic (Seale, 2003; Gwyn, 2002), making the question between the late modern individual and his or her food practices more complex than ever before: food nowadays necessarily implies anxiety about its origin and processing due to growing perception of matters of *risks* attached to it, whereas, at the same time, certain food practices serve the purpose of offering some possibility of regaining confidence (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997).

Part of this confidence can be achieved by awareness of the processess food goes through. As Lewis (2008) has noticed on her work on healthy cooking television programmes, there is a concern 'with reenchanting the contemporary everyday through promoting less alienated, more engaged modes of consumption' (2008: 232). That aims to recover people's awareness of all the stages of production, preparation and consumption, being an 'apparent alternative to the massified, supermarketized world of industrial food' (p.232). Healthy eating is confidence-giving because, in order to eat healthy, one must in first place get informed about the qualities and characteristics of the aliment. Our relationship to food is then one field that offers the notion that we can master one aspect of our daily lives, provided that we do keep actualizing our knowledge about it. Focusing on the perspective of food as confidence-laden, it is possible to think about that situation of a project for the self in connection to healthy eating, but through less radical means than

those implied in anorexia.

As we already know, the significance of food can never be limited to its nutritional side. Caplan (1997) questions the visions that classify modern western food habits as alienated, and somehow devoid of meaning due to an alleged decreasing importance of the meal as a social ritual. The example given by Lewis (2008) above shows that late modern settings also give rise to counter-tendencies, once contradiction is a major feature of our times. Therefore, Caplan claims that it is not likely that western, modern and urban people do not invest food with meanings. Changes in wider society, she states, “such as new ideas ranging from the relationship between humans and nature, to that between husbands and wives – may be powerfully symbolized by changes in food and eating” (Caplan, 1997:8).

The relationship between food and a sense of identity is already one remarkable in different societies of different times. Caplan explains:

“In his famous gastronomic essay *La Physiologie du Gout*, published in 1826, Brillat-Savarin includes the following, oft-quoted aphorism “tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are”. Somewhat more recently, Fischler, among others, has also argued that food is central to our sense of identity: 'because we are onivores, incorporation is an act laden with meaning (1988: 277). He notes that through the principle of incorporation – 'the action in which we send a food across the frontier between the world and the self, between “outside” and “inside” our body' – we become what we eat (1988: 279). In recent anthropological and sociological work on food and feeding in western societies, there is a preoccupation with food as a marker of difference (...).” (Caplan, 1997: 9)

As Beardsworth & Keil (1997) citing Claude Fischler would argue: “food is central to *individual identity*”. Such a statement can only have relevance in a context where self-identity comes to the fore, as a status that must be worked on throughout every choice of the individual, and that of course includes food choices. The idea is based on the notion that the process of incorporation of food involves the crossing of the barrier of the outside world

and the inside world of the body (1997: 53). When the aliment crosses this physical turned symbolic border, the authors argue, it triggers other strong culturally wide-spread assumption: that which says that the appropriation of certain food qualities, specially if done on a regular basis, can have the effect of transferring the food symbolic properties to the one who eats it. Beardsworth & Keil give examples:

“Fischler cites as a positive example the idea that red meat, with its high blood content, confers strength. As a negative example, he cites the belief among French eaters that consuming turnips induces 'spinelessness' or, literally, 'turnip blood' (Fischler, 1988: 279-80). Thus, for Fischler, the German aphorism *man ist was man isst* (you are what you eat) has both biological and symbolic dimensions. What is more, not only are the properties of food seen as being incorporated into the eater, but, by a symmetrical process, the very absorption of given foods is seen as incorporating the eater into a culinary system and into the group which practises it” (1997: 54)

As the same authors will argue, food practices are liable to have a wide range of symbolic connections in an almost infinite fashion. It is quite reasonable to assume, therefore, that different attitudes toward food stem not only from its biological perceptions, but actually have in its origin a previous set of ideas that relate to one's position as an individual and social being. They might range from radical positions, such as anorexia and vegetarianism to the everyday choice on healthy eating.

Willems (1997), in her work about vegetarianism in South-East London, finds out that to be a vegetarian involves less a commitment of never eating meat than a different perception the individual builds up for himself, even if means not following vegetarianism strictly. Therefore, she also starts from the importance food practices have in terms of the definition of personal identity:

“The saying, 'You are what you eat', is familiar to us all. While rather hackneyed, the frequency with which it is encountered within the social science of food is testimony to the importance of an approach it has come to represent. Food choice is seen as an integral

expression of who we are and what we believe in. Here, apparently mundane aspects of food choice are thought to symbolise not only identity on a personal level, but also culturally defined value systems” (1997: 111)

The case of vegetarianism is mentioned as one of the many examples that illustrate how far the matters between food and self-identity go, since it many times represents a “break” with an immediate social group, including the family, towards a highly individualized and particular attitude about eating that has the power to define the individual in terms of that attitude. It is clear that in that process of radical opposition to certain food practices lies the desire to affirm one's own identity. This opposition varies in terms of degree, from extreme forms of diets as mentioned above to an individual that chooses to eat only whole grain cereals instead of processed ones. That is because every choice entails the symbolism of a turning point: a moment where the individual takes charge of his life and define what he is going to do about it.

Besides already being central to the individual's identity due to its own ability to make the bridge between the inner and the outer worlds, food is also found as one more element of a dynamic of consumption that is typical from our age. In this context, the centrality of food choices to the construction of the notion of who one is is emphasized by the fate of the modern being: the individual is doomed to choose for himself out of a myriad of possibilities. His globalized culture is already too much detraditionalized to determine with accuracy what he should or should not eat – instead, this task is claimed by other agencies, such as state institutions, professional groups, advertisers or religious and ideological movements that deliberately try to change people's behavior (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997).

In times where the “health virus” has spread out, homogeneizing health practices around the world towards solutions that promise the perfect health (Sfez, 1996), these agencies act upon the individual resorting to a moralizing discourse that creates a binary opposition that also works as a guideline that offers some simplification to the chaotic contradictions of modern life. By dividing food in terms of “bad” and “good”, it is created a possibility of classification of the individuals within that category (Lupton, 1996), once the choice of food, as we have seen, implies in the idea of appropriation of its qualities. By

narrowing down the choices one can make to only two opposite poles, the multiplicity of choices is subjected to an evaluation that leaves no ambiguity in its wake, providing a less complicated approach on how one can define himself in terms of the choices he makes. This is definitely an attempt to manage the increasing complexities of late modern life.

Whereas Lupton (1995, 1996) sees a sort of 'dictatorship' of a new morality stemming from the new public health and its health promoting policies with the aim of controlling populations, her Foucauldian oriented approach conceives of external regulations as prompting the development of practices of the self: those rules and modes of behavior available in health promotional discourses are internalized and shape the individual self, becoming part of his project to construct and express subjectivity. Eating practices, in this sense, constitute central practices of the self, for they are directed at self care through the nourishment of the body. In a context where the body gains so much relevance as an unfinished project, an "entity in the process of becoming" (Shilling, 2003: 5) food is perceived as contributing to the development of this project, since the body is biologically supposed to manifest on its externality the food choices one makes. As Lupton will go on to argue, food act symbolically as commodities, helping to present a persona to oneself and others (1996: 16).

Beardsworth & Keil (1997) make a slight shift in the perspective of a sheer 'imperative of health' and come up with another notion to the discussion. They believe that there is also a great deal of agency from the individuals in the adoption of healthy eating habits. According to the authors, food cults or movements provide its followers the possibility of "social revitalization", which means to radically "restructure their cultural affiliations and ideological postures in order to lead a more satisfying way of life", an idea that falls within Gidden's (1991) perception of the late modern individual as someone for whom to "reinvent" himself is necessary if he wants to have an authentic identity of his own. Health is directly implicated in the 'reinventing' self: having been turned into almost an exclusive individual matter, a person's health is at the core of the process of reinvention, by being a realm where the individual is called upon assuming control. (Lupton, 1995, 1997; Nettleton & Bunton, 1995; Kelly & Charlton, 1995; O'Brien, 1995; Nettleton, 1997; Petersen, 1997).

The process of reinvention of the self as focused on one's eating habits has the purpose of establishing a new self-identity through a clear-cut external mark that will

identify a person from that moment on. It is the turning point in one's life, where taking control of one's health is what follows from the unfolding of the condition in which it can be observed the extension of the reflexivity of the self to the body (Giddens, 1991), where the body is part of an action system, rather than a passive object (1991: 77). As the author points out, the underlying idea present in the very late modernity phenomenon of self-help literature extends this reflexivity through the act of awareness of bodily process, where the question “how am I eating” is a major one.

Caplan (1997) criticizes postmodern approaches on that matter on grounds of what she believes to be insufficient way of explaining all the complexities involved in the concepts of the food and the body. Mentioning Hall, she argues against what she calls “the abandonment or abolition of the 'subject' – rather, she continues, what should be done is a “reconceptualization that incorporates agency, intention and volition” (1997: 17). This point is interesting for this work for reminds us about the matter of media discourses on healthy eating as constitutive of the subject, but not as merely imposition; rather, as one more option that is constructed in the media for the individual in terms of a project for the self.

Eating, being a central practice of the self, according to Caplan (1997), have a heightened importance nowadays in terms of how they can symbolize personal characteristics. Mentioning Shilling (2003), she claims that keeping a healthy diet is connected to an attempt to avoid that negative events befalls the body, for in this context, the body is highly constitutive of the self. Managing a routine of healthy eating deploys high self-control, which, by the reason mentioned above, turns out to be an expression, through the body, of how much self-control, discipline and will power one has as part of his/her whole personality. Thus the need to focus on how to always improve health through healthy eating.

As Keane (1997) shows, however, not everyone wants to follow the admonitions of healthy eating discourse, instead sticking to their own notions on how should they eat, which is also shown by a study conducted by Lupton (1995b) on people's reactions towards the latest news on cholesterol. They might as well not be worried about being healthy either. However, it is clear that, by now, for many reasons beyond food itself, this is an issue that matters to a great number of people – the expansion of the publishing market for healthy lifestyles and food issues is a clear example.

## **Back to the 'natural': a reaction against modernity?**

Ironically enough, this late modern tendency towards increasing concerns with one's health might be seen by the individual as one possible reaction against the modern environment, considered unhealthy and disordered. Individual and collective attempts to restore a sense of order might go through a healthy regime, bringing back a “normative logic” into their eating (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997: 67, citing Fischler, 1988, 290-1). Thus, this tendency might not be seen only as a one-way powerful institutional discourse that shape the subjects and make them domesticated creatures that have learned well enough how to be healthy (and not costly to the State). As we have seen, this process might be more dynamic than just the idea of a surveillance apparatus might indicate. Placing the issue more within questions particularly exarcebated by late modernity, the individual might just as well identify in healthy eating one possibility of “ordering” the world, through the “ordering” of his/her self. Yet it is clear that, as Lupton (1995, 1996, 1997), Turner (1992, 1997) and Nettleton (1997) stress, a strong institutional surveillance apparatus exist and do have quite a great input in people's lives, the adherence to healthy eating is connected to other issues pertaining to the individual besides matters of internalized regulation.

As stressed by Lucien Sfez (1996), what is implied in the quest for perfect health is a desire of transcendence from the lack of order and multiplicity of the modern world. This new utopy taken as an aim by science resonates on the individual for it conveys an idea of a return to an initial state of purity and simplicity that have been supposedly destroyed by modern achievements. In this scenario, to be perfect healthy means to have an identity that overcomes contradictions and is coherent, unified, committed to only one choice and with a clear purpose. Healthy food is then invested the power of supporting this identity: the constant self-monitoring is exerted through food choices in order to make sure that this idea of an orderly identity is not disturbed, or polluted (Douglas, 2006), by the wrong choices. It is necessary then to stick to a clear idea of what is healthy in terms of food, and the easiest way to do that is turning to “natural” food.

Healthy lifestyle movements in general, and 'natural' food movements specifically, are no news. Since more or less the nineteenth century they have claimed that

modern life is potentially unhealthy (Porter,1997). Sfez (1996) identifies in the figure of Sylvester Graham, in the United States of the 1830's, a major representative of this mentality. Graham, a Presbyterian minister, attacked refined food and all the substances that caused 'excitement', such as sugar, alcohol, coffee etc, on grounds that good health had a correlation with good morality. As Lupton (1996) notices, the beginning of the twentieth century was also pervaded by healthy lifestyle movements that stressed the importance of "natural" food.

Food then started being increasingly divided in "artificial" and "natural". Everything that was man-made and processed represented a negative intervention on what should have remained untouched. Within this idea of purity, Lupton (1996) suggests that there is a strong connection between subjectivity and spirituality in discourses on "natural" food. For many people, she says "eating has become a philosophy, a secular means of attributing meaning and value to everyday practice" (1996: 87).

Healthy food movements are a recurrent phenomenon through the modern age. In late modernity, however, one does not need to follow a specific health food movement in order to be identified as concerned with the health-giving qualities of aliments. Since the rise and institutionalization of health promotion as a branch of public health in the late 1970's, the morality conveyed in these discourses of healthy food movements of the past made its way to the mainstream: instead of representing a sect or the philosophy of a group of people as it was before, health promotion took the ideal of perfect health as a task for every individual.

That explains in part why foodmaking and consumption nowadays are pervaded by a major tendency of heightened awareness of its origins. This "thoughtful practice" that Lupton talks about is possible if we think of the modern individual as one whose self is particularly reflexive, thinking, consuming: therefore, what discourses that reject processed foods seek to reestablish is the meaning of food and ultimately the subjectivity of the eater. Lupton goes further:

"The discourse of holistic health argues that the processing and refining of foods serve to detract them from their inherent 'goodness', rendering them 'non-foods'. The dominant appeal of healthy foods is their imputed ability to restore purity and idealized pastoral dream of



'good life'" (1996: 89).

Why should there be increasing concerns over this classification? As Lupton keeps on arguing in a line that draws much from Douglas (2006) emphasis on classification as a human activity, this is a response to uncertainty. If 'uncertainty' is the feature commonly perceived as pervading human lives in late modern times, healthy eating, with its features of confidence-giving, turns into a way to manage what threatens the security of the self. In a context perceived as being of risk and unpredictability, the binary oppositions between 'artificial' and 'natural' raises a set of moral associations which function as a guideline that makes everyday life easier to manage, narrowing down the choices available so that it becomes also easier to define oneself in connection to those choices.

Returning to a "natural" way of eating can be perceived not only as a moralizing attitude, but also as a shield against food-related anxieties. According to Beardsworth & Keil (1997), the modern setting is particularly effective in both creating anxieties and offering a range of solutions to ease them. As for how anxieties are generated in this context, the authors explain:

"Many of the cultural features of late capitalist societies also appear to contribute to the erosion of the traditional bases of nutritional confidence. The whole ideology of consumerism, driven by an emphasis on a ceaseless search for novel consumption experiences, is essentially antithetical to the maintenance of long term stability in eating patterns. This hunger for novelty is, in turn, fostered and extended by the mass media, most obviously through explicit advertising and less obviously through the assumptions built into the content of the messages which are conveyed to the various audiences being targeted." (1997: 158)

Coupled with the structural features of modernity, other contemporary phenomena are capable of generating anxieties and eroding the confidence people have in food. In this late modern setting, one can envision, very clearly, the role of mass media in changing relations between people and their food practices. The latest food scares, such as

the bovine spongiforme encephalopathy (BSE) have had a profound impact on the perception of the safety level of eating (Gwym, 2002; Seale, 2003; Beardsworth & Keil, 1997). The atmosphere of panic fostered by catastrophic news on the latest threat to health convince consumers that whatever manipulation there is, it is necessarily negative. That is to say that, when technology starts interfering with processes that have occurred more or less naturally so far, the popular perception is that problems arise (Lupton, 1996). The individual is then called to take control of his/her life through the rejection of modernity's artificiality generated by novel techniques of manipulation and production, which is clear when debates around genetically modified foods stir up so many controversies, whereas the organic agriculture is hailed as the healthiest way of producing foodstuff (Frewer, Scholderer & Lambert, 2003). The ideal of a 'natural living' in terms of food practices can be then finally understood as a typical outcome of modernity that is mistakingly interpreted as a response to it. This reaction is seen as an 'alternative' to a conventional, and proven failed, modern way of life, with all its processed goods and the harms brought by it.

The idea behind "natural" foods is that it can recover a sense of purity to the individual, and in that sense, helps bring back some confidence in food again. According to Beardsworth & Keil (1997), humans need to trust the food they eat. In the face of confuse advice, alarms and reports on 'risks', the emphasis on the choice of 'natural' foods, and the avoidance of those deemed 'unnatural' are part of a strategy of regaining that confidence, therefore making healthy eating practices a safe ground where to conduct a reflexive project for the self.

To the extent food is perceived as giving its qualities to those who eat it, we can presume in its 'naturalness' lies the promise of a return to an unspoiled way of living, where one would be truly authentic. Once one eats "pure" foods, he also becomes a "pure" individual, distancing himself from the fragmented kind of personality that incorporates every contradiction within him throughout mindless consumption. Yet consumption is necessarily entailed in this process, it is a "thoughtful" consumption, not one of mindless choices. The food industry then is called to adapt to an increasing demand for "re-identification" of foods: re-identification is a process where information about food must be available with the foodstuff itself, which implies in ever more detailed labelling, elaborate listings of ingredients, "and formalized guarantees of purity and quality, often sponsored by official bodies" (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997: 168, citing Fischler, 1988: 290).

What we can derive from the above discussion is that the late modern settings are essentially contradictory, and when it comes to food practices and its relation to the individuals, this contradiction is sharpened. Food, within a web of intense industrialization, consumption and information, is both a source of insecurity and a path one can follow when seeking some security in the world and about his own self. Within the realm of late modernity, a kind of individual is produced that, in the pursue of his/her self-identity – a typically modern concern – represents a contradiction, by seeking to withdraw from the phenomenon of modern life. Modern lifestyles are seen as disease-promoting due to its alleged fracture between nature and culture. A “natural” eating practice restores this connection based on a pre-scientific mode of thinking that attributes to healthy food the qualities of tradition and folk wisdom (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997), something that the initial modern project had thought had been superseded by science and rationality.

In late modernity, the so much hailed condition of freedom of choice might not always bring satisfaction. As Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1996) stated it might as well produce anxiety, for the constant need to decide also becomes a burden. Coupled to that is the perception of this multitude of goods, signs and contradictions as actually contributing to a sense that we live in a messy world. The idea that everything is falling out of place is constitutive of the feelings of those discontents with postmodernity, as Bauman (1998) describes. Hence is the need for permanent begginings so peculiar in postmodern accounts of contemporaneity: it derives from the need to put things constantly in order. Nevertheless, the external world is not amenable to that; instead, it is the innermost sphere of individual's experience that is subjected to this ordering impulse.

In Sfez's view (1996), when it comes to health matters, the postmodern “permanent begginings” is already old-fashioned. For this author, the utopy of perfect health brings back a teleological aspect to people's lives. A bit of a radical, he disregards all the postmodern persistant discussion on fragmented identities. For this author, the emergence of the joint venture between biomedical and technological sciences as the new providers of the contemporary utopies will reestablish the idea of a consistent self-identity narrative grounded on the aim for the perfect health. He chooses the Biosphere II and Genome projects as examples of how these disciplines are working towards the design of a human being that proceeds towards the elimination of the nature-culture gap that so much disturbs

the contemporary individuals who wants to live an idealized pre-modern life. At the scientific level that means manipulating all the biological aspect in favor of the highest rate of predicability.<sup>7</sup> It beckons with the emergence of what he calls “total health”, “the Great Health”, that is, health as a phenomenon that determines every other sphere of one's life, making up for the new possible utopy in a world were the idea of the great utopy is gone.

Therefore, when individuals actively pursue healthy eating habits they are looking for a sort of “final solution” at the individual level that can help them stand against an external world that they think they can no longer rely on. What solid healthy eating habits entail is a commitment to a more or less strict routine that has the function of bringing some order and security to the world.

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<sup>7</sup> However, as we have seen, there is one problematic point in this assumption. Sfez is looking from the point of view of medical-scientific sphere, whose techniques are essentially those of intervention and manipulation with the purpose of attaining a state of 'purity'. When it comes to the specific topic of food and the lay folk, resistances arise to the possibility of intervention.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodological approach**

So far we have discussed the construction of self-identity in late modernity through the general perspective of changes in the health field. As we want to approach a healthy eating discourse in a magazine as an example for these connections, we should now focus on the relationship between discourse and the construction of self-identities, while attempting to show the weaknesses and strengths of critical discourse analysis as a research methodology. Therefore, in this section we will outline some major approaches to discourse analysis, while also pointing out to the possible flaws that this method might entail.

### **Some considerations over the methodology**

We want to discuss how discourse analysis as a method is just as valid to account for the relationship between the construction of self-identity and the reflexive process it is grounded at, and wider social changes. If discourse, according to Fairclough, is “the language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view” (1992: 56), texts must be analysed in close, dialectical relation to discourse practices and sociocultural practices.

One first similarity of the works analysed here are based on this infinite possibility of analysis that the discourse theories and techniques prompt: a discourse analysis work is at the same time, a work that intends to offer one possibility of analyses, and a material that can be subjected to the critical perception of their discursive path by other texts or – in the ultimate act of reflexivity – be discursively analysed by its author at the same time it is constructed. This, according to Potter and Wetherell (1997), could just go on and on indefinitely, for reflexivity is a characteristic that entails a continuous act of comings and

goings in the text through the most different perspectives.

Clarke (2005) is the one that more explicitly refers to postmodern assumptions as a guideline to the way research must be done today, and how this wide perception of current context informs her work. Thus, it is no coincidence that she identifies in social sciences the turn to discourse analyses exactly at the moment that the alleged paradigm shift from modern to postmodern took place, around the 1970s. Although Potter and Wetherell did not refer to postmodernity in an explicit fashion, what they propose by deconstructing the notion of stable categories can only fit into a context where knowledges and power are descentered, and several overturns in long-standing notions and concepts have taken place, that is, a marked paradigm shift.

According to Fairclough (1992, 1995), one sign of this change in the place of knowledge and power is the increasing aspect of *conversationalization*. This is one of his categories that will be used here. This means that media communication, for example, is becoming more and more like an informal conversation, one which the place of the one who speaks with the one to whom the discourse is directed to is not based anymore in clear-cut roles. The authoritative aspect of the one who speaks because holds the *knowledge* is giving way to more informal relations. This can be understood as a way of making ideological aspects of the text more pervasive and powerful, for conversation might “naturalize the terms in which reality is represented” (Fairclough, 1992: 13, mentioning Fowler, 1991). Or, might as well be a move towards some cultural democratization, according to Fairclough. The actors from a discursive situation are brought to levels of interaction that allow both parts more balanced inputs in a discourse.

Coupled to that is the second category that is going to be used here, that of *marketization*. This accounts for the increasing entwining between the news fact itself and the promotion of new products and goods. This is a relevant category here for, as we have seen already, matters of health are entailed in a web of consumption that is central to the management of lifestyles.

All these changes go hand in hand with changes in the possibilities of perspectives. A context provides a certain type of information according to the perspective it is observed through, and nowadays, with the alleged crisis in authority (Taylor, 2001), different and unusual perspectives are likely to be just as legitimate as more authoritative ones. So we assume that the authors herein mentioned all agree upon the fact that the

development of their own theories cannot be claimed on their ability to see “the real picture”, but in developing “new forms of perception”. In short, in these accounts, there are attempts to incorporate wider social changes and what they result in terms of new appreciations in the design of theory, through the opening up for the role of other elements that were not taken into account before the “postmodern turn”, as Clarke would put it. Therein lies their interest in whatever variabilities comes out of discourses – a search for coherence is out of question in the three approaches, for what matters is the discourse itself, and how is it constructed, as a whole, with all the social instances surrounding it, and not only as an act performed by an individual.

Therefore, revealing the structures that inform the authors perspective, its strong points, as well as its shortcomings is necessary. That is where we can find how the perception of the interplay between researcher, his/her embodied knowledge, the object of research, and all the historical, geographical, and cultural context that surrounds, support and generate both the one who carries out the research and the researched object changes in this more recent conception. This leads to an awareness by the authors that, in order not to clash against their own theoretical aims, they should expose how their option for discourse analyses is informed by elements that cannot be attributed only to an alleged “scientific efficiency” of this very method. Following that, what is at stake is the researcher's subjectivity, position and perspective playing a crucial role. Not recognizing this would mean to incur in a fundamental contradiction between the ideas of reflexivity and perspective as grounding ideas for good discourse analyses, while complying with the positivistic and neo-positivistic approaches that they want to question and avoid in their own works.

It means saying that there is no possibility that, according to the perception regarding knowledge that has been developing in the past several decades, that just one part of the human agency is subjected to deconstruction and “unveilling”. It is implicated that once one part (say, the discourse of a certain social world regarding a determined topic), is made an object of research, the one who carries out the research must also have its presence and the effects of this presence clearly exposed. As stated by Clarke, while citing an art piece: “‘Language is not transparent.’ Neither are we. Instead of hiding behind method, I am proposing with many others that as researchers, we become more visible and accountable for, in, and through our research.” (Clarke, 2005: 13).

That goes back to a more fundamental question that pervades, according to the issues raised by the authors – more clearly though by Taylor (2001) – which is actually a quest for establishing certain regular assumptions on how to do research in social sciences in the current context of a crises of legitimation and representation, as the author puts it. In reading her text, it sometimes seems that it is not possible to engage in any research work without leaving a path of issues liable to criticism behind.

Then, reflexivity comes back again: part of how the researcher should deal with this situation lies in the recognition of possible flaws in the researcher's own work. Instead of assuming a positivistic assumption where the relation “research object – researcher” follows a definite, static and hierarquical structure, the ability to overturn those positional assumptions will be required in order to conform to this new perception on how to avoid major errors in social sciences research. If, according to Taylor (2001), every research falls short in avoiding flaws in a few or many possible points, the recognition of this fact ensure that, at least, more honest work can be done.

Nevertheless, although Taylor question the positivistic and neo-positivistic approach, she mentions Seale (1999) to give an example of one possible approach that claims the need of looking for negative or deviant cases, as part of a fallibilistic approach. That leaves a doubt whether the author has got over the need to aproximate the social sciences from, say, the hard sciences, with their clear-cut methodology and replicability possibility. This point is pretty clear in Clarke's account when she states that there are no negative cases: everything found in the research is part of a complex reality that is informed by many different instances that she denominates “social worlds”, described in the following excerpt:

“Social worlds are universes of discourse (Mead 1938/1972: 518) and principal affiliative mechanisms through which people organize social life. Insofar as it meaningfully exists, society as a whole, then, can be conceptualized as consisting of layered mosaics of social worlds and arenas” (Clarke, 2005: 46)

By the same token, and following her proposition that discourses are produced by non-human elements as well (and that non-humans, such as computers, affect human),



she claims that *everything* is worth analysing.

All the previous reflection entails fundamental changes in the place assigned to the researcher. The turn towards what is known, in Clarke's account, as postmodernity subjects all static assumptions to question, and the hierarquically superior position of the researcher is one that is substituted by the notion of perspective. As stated by Clarke, "there is no 'god's-eye view' position from which to write up research. Knowledges and knowledge productions are situated and noninnocent" (Clarke, 2005: p.18).

In basic terms, what the discourse analyst eventually does from his very unstable position is to produce a discourse stemming from his analyses of other discourses that is by no means static or representative of one "truth". As stated by Potter and Wetherell, the object of discourse is never the same for different people, for the object is not static – plus, society is in constant change. The object is being constructed at the same time an evaluation of the same object is taking place: "People are always constructing versions and re-describing events, not merely when prejudiced and stereotyped" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 36).

It implies a challenge to the idea that there are preexisting entities and categories that inform discourse. Instead, the other way around is considered in order to set a new understanding of the discursive phenomenon: 1. descriptions are not neutral; 2. they build up the object at the same time they evaluate it. That is why, according to Potter & Wetherell (1987), the self is also constructed in that process.

According to the same authors, there is no pre-existing entity that prompts a certain kind of discourse, but instead, a context that constructs and reshape assumptions. To get to that point, the authors have to go back to the notion of the self, so that a contextual discourse could make sense. Then they deconstruct excessively coherent notions of the self, coming up with one in which the self is not seen as a constant, perfectly stable entity, neither as completely *liquid* material. The self's relation to discourse is that of a feedback one: at the same time it is constructed through discourse, the discourses it puts out are contextual and function-oriented. There could be added that, in the case of a healthy lifestyles magazine discourse that is characterized by conversationalization and that touches personal issues about behaviour and what one is depending on how he manages his health, there is a sort of self that is also produced *in the text*. As stated by Fairclough, "(...) questions of subjectivity,

social identity , and 'selfhood' ought to be a major concern in theories of discourse and language” (Fairclough, 1992: 44). The way this self is produced in the text is intrinsically related to wider issues. Just as we could previously draw from Giddens account on self-identity in late modernity, the conditions for “production” of this self are set by wider changes happening in our age. Media has a particular function in this context, as Fairclough puts it:

“The newspaper is mediating source events in the public domain to a readership in a private (domestic) domain under intensely competitive economic conditions. The maximization of circulation is a constant preoccupation, in a wider economic context in which the accent is upon consumption and consumers and leisure, and a wider cultural context of detraditionalization and informalization which are problematizing traditional authority and profoundly changing traditional constructions and conceptions of self-identity. These features of sociocultural context have shaped, and are constituted in, the complex discourse practices I have described, and the shift towards that discourse practice which has taken place over a period of time. The discourse practice mediates between this unstable sociocultural practice which has taken place over a period of time. The discourse practice mediates between this unstable sociocultural practice and heterogeneous texts.” (Fairclough, 1995: 73)

Although concerned with the constitution of the self through discourse, Potter and Wetherell's approach does not entirely fit the purpose of the present work. Their approach to discourses analyses appear in their account as mainly an oral practice – thus mainly a practice of *humans*. Other discursive forms, such as visual, historical etc, were not considered in this approach. Nevertheless, other aspects of their work are relevant to what is being done here will be enumerated in the following lines. For example, the authors close the gap between what could be considered more popular forms of discourse and, for example, academic and scientific discourse. They are able to do that because they identify in variability the characteristic that will unveil how discursive practices changes according to the circumstances and purposes. Therefore, a discourse is not a ready-made package that one

carries around according to his/her background; rather, it serves the achievement of an aim, and varies accordingly.

Their deconstruction of categories as an homogeneous instance prepare the ground for the appreciation of complexities and contradictions being part of the discourses within the same instance. As Clarke will discuss extensively within the concept of social worlds implies in a intertwining of categories. The maleability of categories was already a basic assumption for Potter & Wetherell in order to formulate their theory on discourse.

They will provide another formulation in order to account for that complexity, replacing the notion of categories for that of interpretative repertoires, that fits better into their proposal. Interpretative repertoires is an analytical tool that allows the researcher to observe how individuals or groups deploy different discursive resources depending on the circumstance.

Therefore, for the authors claim of discourse as varied piece of human expression to be legitimate on those terms, they have to revise all the elements that support the discourse making and that are, by their turn, shaped back by it. In what Clarke would classify as a typical postmodern activity, Potter and Wetherell expose the mechanisms of discourse. Language is not merely to speak about something, but it also constitutes something. It builds up the concrete world, since actions are taken stemming from what is said, and how it is said. There lies their strongest fundament for the study of discourse: to know how people speak is to know how do they act and how the world is as it is.

If discourses are consequential, they can also produce identities and subjectivities. For this present work, that is the main concern: how identity notions are conveyed on a discourse about healthy-eating in the media. The case of the media discourse is pretty representative of how it works as a connection between the wider social structure and/or culture and individual agency (Clarke, 2005). They constitute sites where a range of discourses is produced that can be appropriated by the individual, leading to substantive consequences in their daily lives, and those practices will act out in a dialogue with the discursive content ending up in those subjectivities and identities we are talking about.

With her proposal of multisite reasearch, Clarke aims to give a complete picture of the articulation of many different positions, the wide range of discourses and counter-discourses that inform a situation in interaction. For her, action is not enough, and there is

the need to go beyond the “knowing” subject.

However, her approach is also very ambitious. For my purpose of framing the discourse of a magazine as an *example* of a discussion over the changes that produced such a wide range of sources on how to attain the perfect health, and what connections that might have with the idea of self-identity as a project in late modernity, her scope of action is way too broad. Therefore, the intention is to look for the appropriate framework to account for discourse of the magazine not as a central question in itself, but as an example that might illustrate the connection that I am trying to make: the possibility of a project for a self-identity that draws from the mediated experience.

## **Media discourses**

Although Clarke's approach is specially adequate to work with the intertwining between institutional changes – which is hereby contemplated in the rise of health promotion as influencing changes in the way people manage their health, and how its discourse makes it way to the media – it demands a great amount of time and investment in mapping all the actors and positions involved in a situation. That places the discourse itself as the main focus of a work. The main aim here is to use the discourse as an illustration, by locating in the the form and content of these discourses the notion that might contribute to think of the dimension of the issues above mentioned.

The focus on how the media discourse builds up identities is more appropriate to the present aim, and Norman Fairclough (1995) gives special attention to the media as an instance that makes the connection between the institutional and the individuals throughout discourses. Therefore, the “knowing subject” is not overcome in this discussion, for this is a work that focus on a particular part of a whole situation, and although the surrounding conditions are not disregarded, they will not be accounted for in terms of discourse interaction, just as a enabling conditions.

For the author, media texts are “sensitive barometers” of social and cultural change, and the tensions between transformations and permanences should be apparent in an infinite set of contradictions and heterogeneities encompassed by texts. If so, then media constitute a good field for reflecting how the conditions for the constitution of self-identities

have changed. However, they not only reflect, but also stimulate general process of changes.

However, and except for Clarke, due to the time of the publications, none of them could have realized the changes that internet communication would introduce. Fairclough statement that audiences are mainly receptive, since they cannot interact in a discourse situation, such as a consultation, for example, no longer sounds adequate in our current situation. In that case, using an example of a medical consultation in order to make a comparison, he says that the patient might as well give his own opinion, disagree or not, but most importantly, he can give a *feedback*. As a faceless audience from the other side of the text, individuals are silent in the public space of media. As we will see in the field, due to a wide range of virtual tools, internet enables a higher degree of agency concerning the text. Clarke speaks timidly of the idea of “shared discourses”, which are a category of discourses that do not depend upon the sociocultural and geographical contexts because they are shared virtually. That is an idea that would fit the discourses generated in internet, for the kind of virtual structure prompted by internet tools enables a different kind of agency from the individual. Different mechanisms of producing discourse also affect the content of it, as Clarke recognizes.

Fairclough (1992) develops his approach against what he deems as a narrow and marginal position attributed to subjectivity and identity issues by language studies. He then makes the link between linguistics and social theory, by taking up Foucault's position. That means that at the center of his textual oriented discourse analysis (TODA) lies the question of the effects of discursive practices upon social identity, both in theoretical and methodological terms. Discourse analysis, as a method of social research, is then apt to privilege social aspects of change, struggles and resistances within a text. The overturn allows discourse to be seen “as a secondary and marginal dimension of social practice, whereas a constitutive theory does not” (p.45). Therefore, what comes to the fore is a rather expressive theory of subjectivity within the method, which will be a guideline here for an analysis that approach the constitution of a “model” for self-identity in texts that are objects both shaped by and shaping social practices. Changes in discursive practices are also important agents of broader social changes, since, according to Potter and Wetherel, language talks about action but is also part of the same action.

Critical discourses analysis then is an adequate method to analyse how the

restructuring between the public and the private is taking place. Media discourses serve as a bridge that brings institutional changes into the lifeworld. This approach by discourse is then in compliance with the already seen presupposition that broader institutional changes deeply affect the way one constitute his own identity. Thus, the analysis start from the idea that discourse practices are the link between texts and social practices, and bearing in mind that social practices are constitutive of individuals, we can find notions about identity in the material amassed. However, as Fairclough puts it,

“Thus the discursive constitution of society does not emanate from a free play of ideas in people's heads but from a social practice which is firmly rooted in and oriented in to real, material social structures” (1992: .66)

With that in mind, and in order to frame the analysis of the data, we will resort to Fairclough's textually oriented discourse analysis as the methodology that will be applied here. He set up a desiderata for discourse analyses constituted of several points, from which some were picked up and privileged as guiding the present analyses:

1. Focus on how “wider changes in society and culture are manifest in changing media discourse practices
2. Analysis of texts and practices should be “mapped on to analysis of the institutional and wider social and context of media practices”
3. The relationship between texts and society should be seen in a dialectical fashion. “Texts are socioculturally shaped but they also constitute society and culture, in ways that may be transformative as well as reproductive”

Having defined the methodology, the next section will be dedicated to the methods, followed by the data analysis.

## **Methods**

### **The choice of the magazine**

Nowadays, healthy lifestyle news and discussions have taken over a significant part of the regular news media. Newspapers have increasingly extended their health sections into supplements, whereas there is a clear boom of healthy lifestyles publications in the form of magazines. With the expansion of the internet, the information is spread much more easily and quickly through the digital versions of these mass media to audiences that would not have access to that content if it was not for the web. It overcomes geographical distances, prompting the spread of 'shared discourses' (Clarke, 2005). One can identify with and be influenced by a certain discourse even if in their immediate cultural environment that sort of discourse is not the most common.

The choice of a digital version of a magazine as the source of the data to illustrate the present discussion was motivated by several reasons, namely the fact that magazines aim at a more specific audience, therefore constructing a characteristic and recognizable style of discourse. As Castro (2004) observed in her thesis work, each media vehicle has its own style and strategy to attract a certain audience. Those who form the audience of an specific magazine are people for whom that information is searched for, in first place; they differ from the random public of that same kind of information in newspapers, for instance. One who buys a newspaper will not necessarily do it because he wants to know the news on healthy lifestyles. That is why, as noticed by Bunton (1997), magazines are ideal locations to observe the fabrication of the health promoting, rational self that is the focus of the present discussion, for the individual who looks for these magazines are already inclined to accept that information and follow it – and the language of these media takes that into account.

After extensive browsing over the internet, I came across the digital version of the *Prevention* magazine. At first, its title calls attention for being rather old-fashioned: in the era of health promotion, something titled 'prevention' send us back to a time when public

policies were still focused on *disease* instead of *health*. However, that is explained by the fact that this magazine was launched during the 1950's, and its longevity also tells much about its popularity. According to the information made available on its own website ([www.prevention.com](http://www.prevention.com), visited on 03/03/2008), *Prevention* is the number one healthy lifestyle brand in United States, holding the tenth position amongst all magazine publications in that country. In their paper version, they have allegedly 11 million readers and a estimated 1.6 millions visitors every month in their website.

*Prevention* is another publications of *Rodale Inc.* (<http://www.rodale.com/> visited on 03/03/2008), a publishing house specialized in health magazines an books. Rodale Inc. was launched in 1930, by J.J. Rodale. They also publish *Men's Health*, a popular magazine in many countries, that has also received attention from researchers on its discourse around identity and masculinity (see, for more details, Gough, 2006; Newman, 2005; Boni, 2002; Crawshaw, 2007). According to the information extracted from the website, Rodale Inc. starts out of its founder perception that there was a connection between the mishandling of the soil and the poor health of the population, and its magazines are supposed to be an encouragement for people to take an 'active role n achieving and maintaining good health and fitness(...)'.(extracted from <http://www.rodale.com/1,6597,1-101,00.html>, visited on 03/03/2008)

The choice of a north-american magazine is justified on two main reasons: as Lucien Sfez (1996) and Glassner (1989) have observed, concerns over fitness and health amounts to a major feature of the north-american culture to the extent it can be considered an obsession, and are specially heightened in times of emergence of New Right, with its enterprising, individualistic and autonomous subject coming to the fore (Lupton, 1995). In the specific case of food, Sfez underlines this particularity of north-american culture in the personality of Sylvester Graham, who founded the “natural food movement” back in 1930.

Thus, north-american publications on healthy lifestyles have as their background a long-standing tradition of food and general healthy lifestyle movements. As such, it would not be too much to say that they are the providers of the most definitive discourse over the modern 'healthy subject'. Coupled with the second reason, that of the far-reaching scope of anything written in english, there we have a massive source of discourses on healthy lifestyles that can be reached almost anywhere.

Discourse analysis can be done both as an open exploration of a field or as a



pursue of a couple of specific questions (Fairclough, 1992). The intention here is to do the latter. Thus, the specific focus will be on how matters of food intertwine with matters of self-identity. Therefore, some possible questions to be raised are: is the pursue of perfect health a project for the self in today's world? What kind of self is constructed in the texts of healthy lifestyles magazines? How an individual that does not follow the magazines advices is portrayed? How one that follows is? What values and symbologies are conveyed by this discourses to be adopted by the readers that can help define what they are?

### **Data gathering**

After a preliminary analysis of general aspects of the magazine, we are going to focus on the specific material for the analysis: the reports. In this section, we are going to clarify the procedures of data gathering. To start with, amongst several other food-related topics, the focus was limited to healthy eating. One item of the magazine is titled “Eating Healthy” and is found within “Nutrition Basics”, a subsection of “Nutrition and Recipes”. This was, of course, the main focus of the research. Nevertheless, other sections in the magazine featured reports that could easily be assembled in the item of “Eating Healthy”, but were not included in that by the magazine, instead being organized in other topics.

This was the first difficulty of the field research, for, although the item “Eating Healthy” comprised a very tiny portion compared to the huge amount of features encompassed by the magazine, still there were interesting reports related to the theme that could not be left aside just because they were not exactly found in the item chosen to have its articles analysed. Hence I picked up some articles that fell out of this classification according to organization of the magazine, but that somehow comprised the characteristics to be classified as such and contributed to the discussion around healthy eating habits and the construction of notions of self-identity in the text.

Available at the website are the editions published in the past 8 months. One can click on them and find exactly what was published on paper in those editions. However, within the items one can find single articles that date back to 2001. The date of the articles by the magazine was also not very accurate. The articles that could be found in the past eight editions had their full date of publication clear. For those which were published out of

that time span, only the year was given as a reference. For matters of keeping a pattern, and once most articles do not have their full date available, I chose to put only the year as a reference.

The research was conducted between march and may, 2008, therefore covering all the articles published until that period. By the time the research was done, 104 reports were available at the section, spanning from 2001 to 2008. The content of the reports were widely varied: they ranged from notes on the latest breakthrough of the healthiest food possible or on the latest threat to health, to lenghtier features on bad and good eating practices and how to change our behavior in order to make them healthier. In that sense, we can say that, within this section, both 'food' and the 'individual' are objects of scrutiny, description and classification. Although the reports on eating behaviour are good sources to observe the construction of notions regarding the individual self-identity, it is also important to look at how food is described, for, according to the perspective adopted here, food is invested with characteristics that are supposedly assumed by he/she who eats it. Therefore, in order to frame it correctly, we consider that is not enough to look only at the individual in those reports, but also to how the food he/she is going to consume is described.

For that matter, fourteen articles were selected. Amongst the articles read, the criteria for their selection was based on them being able to condense the highest amount of references and notions that one could link to the issue being discussed here. They are going to be listed below (the sentences in italic stand for ocasional sentences that appear on the top of the articles, not constituting the main title, neither the subtitle):

1. “*Diet Tips: Listen & Lose* – Turning into your normal hunger signals will ensure that you never overeat again. Follow this 6-step plan.” ('Eating Healthy, 2007)
2. “Five Reasons for Overeating – We're *all* guilty of these. Learn what triggers your impulse to indulge and take control” ('Eating Healthy, 2007)
3. “Quick Tips for Healthy Eating – 5 easy ways to stick to your diet” ('Eating Healthy', 2005)
4. “*Healthy Snacks? The nutritional Benefits of Chocolate , Coffee and More!*: Not-so-Guilty Pleasures – the good news about chocolate, carbs, coffee, and many other seemingly decadent threats” ('Eating Healthy', 2006)
5. “*Guide to Food Labels and Nutrition Facts*: Eat for Perfect Health – where to look

on a food label, whether you want to protect your heart, lose weight or build bone” ('Anti-aging', 2007)

6. “*All about food cravings and how to stop them*: Outsmart Your Cravings – what is behind your all consuming desire for a cupcake, and the science that puts you back in control.” ('Eating Healthy', 2007)
7. “Are you a supertaster? - If you hate vegetables, blame your parents” ('Eating Healthy, 2004)
8. “Great news: Being Bad Is Good! Find out how these forbidden foods can make you healthy” (Eating Healthy, 2004)
9. “*Weight Loss Success Stories*: I Changed My Fate – Determined not to end up like her dad, Maureen Harris overhauled her eating habits – and her life” ('Success Stories', 2007)
10. “*Diet and Weight Loss*: My Dieting Days Are Over – Eating what she loves helped Adrienne Scordato lose 30 pounds” ('Success Stories', 2005)
11. “*Diary Of A Carb Phobe*: I avoided bread and pasta like the plague. Soon my friends avoided me like it, too” ('News and Voices', 2008)
12. “The Blood That Makes You Fat – Another reason to lower your triglyceride levels” ('Eating Healthy', 2004)
13. “*Four Reasons To Never Drink Soda Again*: The Case Against Soda – Why the sweet stuff might be as bad for your health as smoking or drinking excessive alcohol” (Eating Healthy, 2007)
14. “*Healthy Eating Tips From Top Nutritionists*: 12 Eat-Right Rules That Work – Four top nutritionists share their real-world, study backed healthy eating tips. Eat, drink and be merry!” ('Eating Healthy, 2007)

## **Ethical aspects**

All the content analyzed here is public and can be freely accessed in the magazine website.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Analysis

#### General analysis of *Prevention.com*

In the following section we are going to describe the main features of the magazine. Although the focus will be specifically on the discourse produced on the reports, we consider it is useful to take an overall look over some features that are not “pure” text so to speak, but convey a great deal of notions regarding production of knowledge about oneself, self-monitoring, control etc., therefore being part of the discourse that constructs the individual. Thus, we are going to take a look at the general structure of the magazine, with all the mechanisms that support and make more effective what was written on the reports.

*Prevention Magazine* covers a wide range of topics related to health, from mental health and relationship issues to beauty tips and recipes, news on both alternative and alopathic medicine etc., such that virtually all health-related issues are covered by the publication. Its tagline is “smart ways to live well”, written right on top of the title, thus framing the character of the texts that we are going to find, and luring the reader into something that looks beneficial but not dull; by being 'smart' one aims to combine the best of both living a healthy life and deriving pleasure from it.

Still on the top, the reader also finds the opportunity to participate in their 'virtual community', by becoming a member. As such, the reader can take part in the many forums of discussion, to 'blog' – that is, write his own health-related virtual diary to be available to other readers – and most important, to 'track' his own health. The digital version allows for a more active role of the reader over what he reads. The communication runs both ways here, for there are many tools one can use that can bring his/her personal stories into the magazine or to give his/her input on what is written.

In that sense, there are several ways that the reader can interact with each article. On the top of the articles there are always three options: one can “share”, “print” or “email” it to other people. The option “share” is particularly in tune with the latest trend of behavior

in the internet. By clicking on it, one can choose amongst a range of relationship network websites, such as Facebook, Digg, Magnolia, etc., importing the article from the magazine directly to these public personal profiles on the web, spreading the information out of its original source. At the bottom, two more options: one can either recommend the article or make a comment on it. The comments will be available right down the article, and the number of recommendations one article gets will influence it being featured in the section “most recommended articles”.

The magazine is divided into a wide range of thematic blocks. In order to try to make it clear as to each part of the publication I am referring to, I should organize them in terms of “sections”, “subsections” and “items”. Each section covers a thematic group, and the subsections presents issues in a more specific fashion within that group, by its turn unfolding into a range of related “items”. The major sections are nine: “Health”, “Weight Loss”, “Fitness”, “Nutrition and Recipes”, “Lifelong beauty”, “News and Voices”, “Flat Belly Diet”, “Video” and “My Health Trackers”. The daily top stories are shown on the first page through slides, and many features are depicted through animations, including advertisements. As we can observe from one of the sections, “Video”, the magazine also expands its discourse to other media, where the 'expert voices' of the magazine deliver tips on how to be healthier. Besides the videos, the 'expert voice' is heard through the presence of seven different specialists, in blogs and regular columns, that range from psychologists and nutritionists, to personal trainers and cardiologists.

As we browse through these sections we come across more and more ways of enhancing the participation of the reader. For example, the readers have a space where they are called upon sending photos. One can find it within “Community photos”, an item found within the “News and Voices” section. The choice of having a section that underlines the plurality of voices encompassed by the publication through the use of the plural mode in its title gives us a clear example of the multiplicity of voices coming into a text that is characteristic of mass media (Fairclough, 1995).

That is an indicative of what Fairclough (1992, 1995) would describe as a trend towards some sort of democratization in the production of discourses in general: in the magazine, for example, this is not a task assigned only to those who hold the authority of their positions, both as an expert or as the media professional. Instead, the idea that one section of the magazine clearly indicates that there are “voices” at play amounts to evidences

of democratization as a feature of mass media nowadays (Fairclough, 1995). Therefore, this is one important point to consider when thinking about the construction of the “healthy subject” in this magazine. The discourse that constructs it is not an homogeneous one, say, from the medical expertise. On the contrary, because it is a media text, the construction of notions of self-identity gathers from many different standpoints, including the subject at stake himself.

### *Tools*

Apart from the articles and its admonitions, and the health tracker where one is supposed to monitor her/his health, there is an infinitude of quizzes one can take in order to know how one is managing her/his health, such as “Do your eating habits need a makeover?”, “Is your diet heart-smart” or “What is your nutrition IQ?”. By looking into his/her attitudes towards health, one produces knowledge about his/her own self that will be filtered by the categories set by the magazine, and the individual will be classified accordingly.

Coupled to mechanisms of knowing oneself through their health attitudes, other mechanisms aim at helping the readers to live a healthy life by offering practical advice on how to do it in their everyday life. In the section “Nutrition and Recipes”, there are several of these tools that relate specifically to healthy eating. They simulate real products through the use of visual and interactive resources. The tool “Healthiest Food Finder” and “Heart-smart Food Finder” delivers the latest novelties on the health food industry, serving as a bridge between the market and the consumer. After picking up the goods he/she wants, one is told to print it and take it to the store. The “Fiber Up Food Finder” works in the same way, displaying colourful images of fruits and vegetables. The next tool is the “Meal Balancer”. In this one the reader is invited to set a virtual plate by choosing the ingredients and their amount, which will be evaluated and approved or not by the interactive tool. The other tools follow the same logic of self-monitoring: the “Calorie Calculator” and “100 ways of cutting calories”, the first one evaluating how many calories one can eat a day according to height and weight and the latter by giving tips on how stay away from them. All of these tools have a colourful interface in which the words “Find out now” follow right above the animation, as

if indicating that before coming across those tools, the individual had little or no information on how to proceed in order to be healthy, being the magazine the source of it.

As we have noticed in the previous section, the reader has the opportunity and the internet tools available to act upon what is written to a certain extent. Nevertheless, this can never be taken as a statement of individual's 'liberation' of the normative character of discourses. The technological changes brought a different level of agency, in the sense that the internet devices work as the structure that enables the individual to act. His action will take place within that framework, affecting it, specially considering the aspects of discourse. However, as Giddens (1984) notices, the results of this dynamic might as well not be those intended by the agent, or in this case, to end up even reinforcing the structures of surveillance and power that there is.

Through the tools, the knowledge one has is put to test, then an impersonal digital instance will retrieve an answer that evaluates the quality of that knowledge. Based on that answer, the reader will gain insight on what he lacks or not, thus constructing a knowledge about his own self that is going to ground his own idea as being a healthy, rational, informed subject or, if he fails, as someone who was cast out of the latest trend in health, thus, morally inferior (Lupton, 1995). It is a reflexive practice of the self (Giddens, 1991): one confronts the knowledge one has through one question: is that knowledge enough? Should I make actualizations? Being that knowledge based on food facts, there we have an example of the process that Coveney (2000) names the construction of the 'modern subject of nutrition'.

Again, besides being the object of scrutiny and regulation as those mechanisms mentioned above suggest, in the subsection "Success Stories", found within the section "Weight Loss", the reader is also assigned a space where he can somehow make a slight shift from that position of objectification to one where he is the one who speaks, although his voice is 'filtered' by the magazine text, unlike the forums of discussion and commentaries, where he writes directly on the magazine. For that reason, legitimated by the written text, his/her life story gains an authoritative tone. In this item, the reader now turned into narrator of his own life story, organizes a narrative where crucial, defining moments of his life revolved around some action taken concerning health. From that standpoint, the reader's stories are assigned a space in the item "Success Stories", thus also sharing the space of the magazine with both the journalists and the experts.

What is particularly noticeable about this publication, more so because of the internet facilities, is the fact that it does not limit itself to convey news and information through the texts. Instead, it aims to actively offer ways and tools of intervention on people's daily lives through interactive mechanisms one can only have access through the web. If regular printed mass media was already an influential instance in terms of replacing the traditional sources of symbolic content (Thompson, 1996) that will help shape self-identities (Giddens, 1991; Fairclough, 1995; Crawshaw, 2007), with the internet, this is enhanced due to the fact that it ends up intervening from a much closer distance in people's everyday activities, broadening the aspects of surveillance related to health (Lupton, 1997).

Following that, other structural differences between the digital and the paper media calls for a rethinking of the changes brought to the discourse through the possibilities of agency from the reader. The appeal to become a member right up at the top of the page in order to "track one's health" suggest an active participation on the virtual space of the magazine. That is, the reader is closer and more visible than he used to be in the conventional printed media. This increased visibility could be thought of as bringing to the fore what has been embodied by discourses on the individual and his/her relationship with his/her own health. The healthy, reasoned subject of this health promotional discourse is constructed in the private sphere and his/her self-identity as a healthy subject is exposed publicly through the media itself, both through his own image and the discourses he provides about his/her healthy self.

Regarding the target gender, the magazine does not address itself as a women's magazine, but the cover pictures already set the audience for this publication: all the editions one can visualize the cover online are stamped with women, who are invariably fully dressed, perhaps as a marker of difference from specific fitness magazines. The pictures that illustrate the articles and the advertisements are by far mostly constituted of females.

The web page is already saturated with a number of other items organized at each side of the page, and added to that there are advertisements of all sorts and sponsored features, that is, reports produced by producers of, say, a particular kind of meal etc, which amounts to Fairclough's (1995) observation on the increasing marketization aspect of media nowadays.



## **The Textual Analysis**

The following analysis is supposed to be rather an example for the discussion held in the first two chapters, for an in-depth discourse analyses, encompassing all the questions brought up by the field, demands much more time and sources than what was available. As already made clear in the last chapter, we will pay attention to those matters concerning the creation of notions around self-identity and healthy eating.

Self-awareness, for example, is one of them. According to the magazine, there are several things one must know about oneself so that his/her eating habits become healthier. That is to say that self-awareness precedes any successful attempt to rationally intervene in one's own behaviour towards food. Following that, we should start looking at one report titled "Listen & Lose – turning in to your normal hunger signals will ensure that you never overeat again. Follow this 6-step plan (2007)".

Right from the title we can envision the imperative voice demanding that one turn his attention to him/herself. However, that is not a process one should do according to his own rules; instead, the magazine uses the imperative voice again to demand that the reader follow their own ready-made strategy for achieving self-awareness. The aspect of conversationalization (Fairclough, 1992; 1995) is present throughout the text, with the author, a registered dietitian, referring directly to the reader through the use of the words "you" and recalling situations that are familiar to most people.

At the top of the article, a drawing shows the image of a woman holding what emulates a telephone device with one hand, next to her ear, while the other end of the line is placed on her stomach, thus summing up the idea of 'listening to the body'. Then, the article begins with justifying our behavior regarding hunger based on a 'instinctual nature' that was developed back at pre-historical times when there was no security concerning food. According to the text, this primitive reaction have remained, although the conditions have changed. According to the text, that must be overcome through rational action.

"If you want to lose weight, however, you must tune in to your body's signal to eat. 'Hunger is a physical cue that you need energy', says Dawn Jackson

Blatner, RD. It can be your best ally; if you listen to your body, you'll instinctively feed it the right amount. But fall out of touch, and hunger becomes diet enemy number one: You may eat more than you need or get too hungry and stoke out of control cravings”

The solution comes in “tuning in to the body signals”, alluding to the idea that what is behind our overeating problems is a disconnection between the body and the self. We can envision here the turn inwards of the medical gaze as embodied in the individual: the contemporary subject is one who has internalized the medical care within his daily conduct, but placing it *before* any state of imbalance between health and illness can subject him to classification, which accounts for an expansion of the medicalization process, as seen by Lupton (1997). This entails the constant awareness of his internal organic processes, observing the slightest variations. The text warns that not doing so might imply in being out-of-control. It also makes clear that this is not so much about 'dieting'; this is more about a behavioral change, and just as we could see from the title, it is a life commitment to this new attitude regarding hunger that is grounded on self-knowledge. What is more, it is based on a plan, another indication of the rationalization of health practices.

The text avoids framing it in terms of 'diet', a word that assumes a rather negative feature in this discourse. They prefer to lean towards a discussion that is centered on change of behavioral patterns, which promises that it will last. This is also underlined in the title, with one part saying that he/she who gets in touch with his/herself will 'never overeat again'. This negative aspect attributed to diet will appear in the following sentence:

“These six tips teach you to spot your hunger and eat to stay satisfied – so you control calories and shed pounds without 'dieting'”

Then the text poses a question on something that up till now might have appeared quite trivial: 'Do you really know what hunger feels like?'. What even seems to be an obvious thing to know is called to revision: knowledge can never be taken for granted, instead, its foundation must be constantly revised, for there may always be something we do *not* know about we thought we knew.

The text proceeds into explaining the six different stages of hunger (starving – hungry – moderately hungry – satisfied – full – stuffed) and balances it with six strategies,

such as 'refuel every 4 hours'. A metaphor appears: that of food as fuel.

In this text we can see that humans are constructed as having a 'primal nature' that manifests itself every time they feel hunger. Therefore, there is a tension between this image and a rationality that should have taken place due to the fact that life has changed and we do not necessarily need to rush into satisfying our hunger before we miss the opportunity to do so.

This rational self that is the ideal of these discourses is one that should ask him/herself regular questions about states that involve his/her bodily processes (Giddens, 1991; Lupton, 1995), in a clear example of what Giddens identifies in the late modern discourse of self-help manuals a tendency to present body awareness as 'means of constructing a differentiated self', which happens because the 'reflexivity of the self extends to the body' (1991: 77), where the experience of the body is a way of making sense of the self as an integrated whole.

However, bodily processes, when not properly acknowledged, appears as being always on the verge of disrupting this balance with the self. In "Outsmart your food cravings – what's behind your all-consuming desire for a cupcake and the science that puts you back in control" (2007), our food cravings are depicted as a powerful physiological phenomenon in the following sentence:

'In a recent study from Tufts University, 91% of women said they experienced strong food cravings. And willpower isn't the answer. These urges are fueled by feel-good brain chemicals such as dopamine, released when you eat these types of foods, which creates a rush of euphoria that your brain seeks over and over. What you need is a plan that stops this natural cycles – and helps prevents unwanted weight'.

Although 'willpower' is dismissed in the beginning of the sentence as an answer, some kind of personal ability to organize oneself and follow a set of decisions implied in the need to have a 'plan' does not let the matter of rationality in terms of eating habits be disregarded as one could think at first, as the article conveys the idea that we cannot do much when faced with food cravings. In this case, the tension between the idea of self-motivation and the biological 'whims' are constructed through the opposition created by the words

'willpower' and 'food cravings' / 'urges', but the solution to one's problems regarding this is given resorting to characteristics of personal strength that seemed to be dismissed in the beginning. Therefore, the individual is called to be rational and take control, even when the text point out to a phenomenon we apparently have no power against. Notice that the subject of the research used to exemplify the issue are women.

The structure of this article presents the main questions one should ask in order to monitor him/herself, followed by an imperative voice, 'Do this!'. Here, it is not the magazine asking the reader, but instead, it is proposed that one should make to his/herself the questions formulated by the magazine. The self-directed questionnaire is a reflexive practice that scan many of the individual's activities in order to find the root of problems that will surface in terms of unhealthy eating habits.

Therefore, concerns with eating healthy start much before matters of food themselves come into play, thus broadening the scope of the surveillance (Lupton, 1997) and extending it to more and more early stages of issues connected to health. The questions are directed to many areas of one's life: 'Am I stressed out?', 'Have I been eating less than usual?', 'Am I getting enough sleep?' and 'Am I a creature of habit?'. In the latter, the threats to health are pictured as lying off one's scope of perception: 'You may not realize it, but seemingly innocent routines, such as eating cheese popcorn while watching TV create powerful associations'. If risks for poor eating habits are all around, one should not disregard every tiny aspect of one's habits, for even when they look 'innocent' they may entail major threats to health. The solution to avoid certain poor eating practices crystalizing into habits are three, and one of them holds a particularly clear connection to being healthy as a project for the self. 'Picture yourself healthy' is the establishment of an image to be attained and maintained in terms of health that is directly implicated to how an individual will see him/herself as a whole person. Also, by saying one can control food cravings by resorting to mental images is an idea that falls back on the notion that health *is* a matter of willpower, which again dissolves the supposed rule of biological process stated in the beginning of the text. A similar construction that evokes the opposition between one's strength of character and biological mechanisms appear on a short news. In 'The blood that makes you fat – another reason to lower your thriglycerides levels', the text starts as follows: 'if you just can't stop eating, your thriglycerides – not your will power – may be to blame.' In that sense, it goes almost exactly like the previous report, but without contradicting it in

the end. Thus, the magazine discourse tends to oppose one's personal character to biological demands, but sometimes using ways of recovering the idea of self-motivation through other words, suggesting a slight contradiction.

However, while the short news will not go further, the previous report will end up finally connected as depending of an issue of personal character. As the individual aspects of health are reinforced again, whichever relations health might have with environment, social settings, class etc are overshadowed by it. This is a strong feature of the magazine discourse as a whole, one that derives from the assignment of personal responsibility for health in a wider health promotion discourse conveyed by public policies (Parish, 1995; Nettleton & Bunton, 1995; Kelly & Charlton; O'Brien, 1995; Lupton, 1995).

Thus, the discourse of personal responsibility over one's health does not go without displaying some points of tension. A certain struggle between biological determinism and personal responsibility over health choices appears when the discourse engages in the construction of a subject in its texts in a more direct fashion. This issue pervades the text "Are you a supertaster? If you hate vegetables, blame your parents" (2004). In order to illustrate one scientific information on how our food tastes are supposedly a genetic trait, the magazine focus on the construction of a sort of 'food identity' right in the headline. Besides focusing on a category one should include him/herself in, a direct question invites the reader to know for himself what he is. The text start as follows:

"If you are a vegetable hater, go ahead and blame your parents: how intensely we experience bitterness in our brocolli is genetic".

According to the text, there are three categories one can be included in: supertaster, medium taster and nontaster. The 'supertaster' is the focus of the text for it could be a trait that is behind some people's inability to eat healthy. A 'supertaster' would supposedly feel bitter tastes much more intensely than the others, leading to an avoidance of many vegetables, for example.

After explaining how the scientific study was conduct in order to identify the participatants within the three categories above, the text will offer this possibility to the reader:

“You don't need to check into a lab to measure your own sensitivity: Just stick out your tongue and look in the mirror. The more plentiful your fungiform papillae (the little structures that house your tastebuds), the more sensitive you're likely to be. You may have to check out the tongues of a few friends for perspective”

The suggestion of a practice of body awareness by the text such as the one described above is coherent with the interrogation done right in the beginning. Then comparison with 'a few friends' as suggested reinforces even more the construction of the category, for one should be aware not only of what he is, but what the others are as well, therefore making the category something that includes other people from an individual's social circle, and not only a matter that applies to him/her because he/she read it on a magazine while in his/her privacy.

The article attracts the reader with a question and must offer ways for him/her to answer it. Nevertheless, that is unnecessary in terms of the structure of a report. It could just limit itself to talk about the findings in the research. But the discourse of the magazine is characteristic for that: it brings out information, mixing it with attempts to approximate the individual to what is being discussed through techniques and evaluations that he/she can carry out on his/her own.

The statement right in the beginning of the text could have prompted a reconsideration of one's eating habits as something of a rather fixed quality, not liable to intervention from the individual, and with power to define oneself in terms of their food likes and dislikes. In that, the individual is clearly exempted from any responsibility, for he can blame his parents for what he likes or dislikes now in terms of food. Genetic features could, for example, be the main reason for why someone adopts healthy eating habits and other does not. This notion will be kept all along the reading of the text, to be finally dismissed at the end, when it is stressed that genetic features are no excuse not to follow a healthy diet:

“So even if it is genetic, there's no excuse for hiding behind your supertaster status to spurn veggies”.

In this final sentence we see the need to emphasize that there is no biological

determinism in our food choices, for we are responsible to manage our genetic features, even when they do not seem to contribute to 'positive' behaviors towards food. In that sense, the magazine discourse, although based on scientific information, partly rejects the tendency that Lucien Sfez (1996) identifies as becoming dominant: that in which our self-identities will be increasingly defined by the information that is produced by science on our genetic feature. Interesting to note, though, is that is widely spread in the discourse of the magazine the emphasis on biological determinism when it comes to gender differences in the approach to food. The researches used to illustrate the biological foundations of certain conditions are most of the time referred to the results found in women, as if their behavior was ruled by their biology, a deep-seated notion in medical discourse (Laqueur, 2001).

As we have seen, this text prompts the reader to identify or not with a category of individual that depends directly on how he tastes food, and how it will imply on whether he is healthy or not. The category comes directly from a scientific definition that is translated to the average reader.

### *Life narratives created upon food-related decisions*

In the next report, the construction of the subject according to how he eats will stem from a personal experience that is reported by a male journalist, Gary Taubes. "Diary of a carb phobe – I avoided bread and pasta like the plague. Soon my friends avoided me like it, too" (2008, 'News and Voices' section) is one good example of the creation of a life narrative based upon eating practices.

In the title, the choice for the word 'diary' sets the frame for the issue: a personal narrative as constructed from its connection to food. Then, the category of 'carb phobe' sets the identity of the narrator as constructed in relation to eating habits, at the same time also suggesting a new category of phobia, as related to food, which bring eating habits even more into the discussion where it appears as the current source of anxieties for the individual (Probyn, 1999; Turner, 1992).

The account will go on describing how the author gave up carbohydrates altogether and then how it affected his social image, such that he became increasingly identified within his social group with what he was *not* eating in order to stay fit and healthy.

Here what appears is that a self-identity that is constructed around food choices that can be both inclusive, making the individual conform to a certain social expectation of one as being 'obliged' to be healthy, which would classify healthy lifestyles as a mode of governmentality (Turner, 1997; Lupton, 1995; Crawshaw, 2007; Petersen, 1997; Nettleton, 1997), but as well as having exclusive effects, as we can see in the two following sentences:

“Aside from its many benefits, I've learned there are indeed some side effects to this dietary regimen – primarily social and marital ones. First of all, gone are the days that my wife and I will be invited over for a simple meal”

“After the main course, I have to deal with the specter of dessert, or rather my desire to abstain. Nobody likes an overt show of moral superiority, and that's how my abstinence is often perceived”

Through this discourse we can envision that the choice for certain modes of what is believed to be healthy eating has implications not only for the health of the person at stake, but to his/her whole spectrum of social relationships. That is a key point in order to understand how this discourse evokes the construction of a narrative, since it starts as a personal account of to what extent food choices interfere in terms of an image that is constructed around the individual and how he will see himself based on that.

In order to support one's option, there are, as well, modes of construction of sentences and the choice of the words that make several connections between food and other issues, which also helps to emphasize the differences between individuals that choose to eat in a certain way. The construction of the sentences in the second excerpt talks about 'abstinence', which aproximates food of other things one can abstain from, such as alcohol and cigarettes – or sex. The use of this word is helpful to create an identification with the engagement in certain food practices as a direct avoidance of certain aliments that could carry the meaning of something that is harmful to health, (or, in another reading, to one's morality) so as it is the case of the substances mentioned above.

The reflexive project for the self needs to be supported by a more or less coherent life narrative (Giddens, 1991), and this example gives a good idea on how one, by oneself, constructs an identity as a 'carb phobe' individual in the text even against the



disapproval of his particular social settings, which underscores the strength of commitment necessary to keep going. The author also shows in the text that this identity must be continuously worked on to make sense for the others:

“Perhaps the worst aspect of following a diet that most of your peers consider a 'fad' is that you may often feel a compulsion to prove that you're justified in doing so. This requires not just slimming down but actually living longer and remaining healthier than any of your friends”

The magazine discourse of certain lifestyles as one choice for a cluster of habits and modes of consumption that sustain that identity (Cockerham, 1993; 1997; 2005) is exemplified through the voice of a person constructing his biography on the text. Notice that this is depicted as a lifetime commitment according to the excerpt above, specially because it must be proven to other people that it is a valid choice. Therefore, the idea is that the individual is so much identified with his food choices that it becomes an integral part of his personality, something that will be crucial in his biographical narrative, as well as the way others will perceive him.

The question of a healthy lifestyle being a lifetime choice that helps support one's biographical narrative is seen in the next two articles: “My dieting days are over – eating what she loves helped Adrienne Scordato lose 30 pounds” (2005) and “I changed my fate – determined not to end up like her dad, Maureen Haris overhauled her eating habits – and changed her life” (2007). They are both reports found in the subsection 'Success stories', which belongs to the section 'Weight Loss'. However, they stand out for their structure that emphasizes a biographical narrative, the stress over personal choice and taking responsibility for one's health. They are stories that are more about the choice for being healthy through changes in diet than merely weight loss stories.

They are both reader's stories that have their discourse filtered by the magazine. They also share a basic structure, marked by a 'turning point', which is the point where the narrators at stake took responsibility for their own lives. Just as described by Giddens (1991), the late modern self is one that at a certain point of his life, if he wants to live authentically, he will have to refashion him/herself. Giddens describes the case of people who reconstruct their own selves after a disruptive moment, in his example, divorce.

Divorce represents a moment where lives that used to run together will run separately from them on, and one has to adapt him/herself to live as an entire entity, and not as the other half of someone else.

Just as divorce, other situations might disrupt someone's world and prompt a refashioning of the self. In the case of the stories above, it is disease. The virtue in question that must be developed by someone who lives in circumstances where risks and lack of uncertainty surround is *autonomy*. If one cannot rely on the immediate environment, he must then rely upon him/herself.

In the case here, two life narratives show how that state is achieved. In that discourse, life is depicted how it was until the disruptive moment: the disease. The disruptive effect of a disease in someone's biography should be viewed, in this discourse, as the moment to take hold of one's life, develop autonomy and be active in constructing a self-identity that is based upon a rational choice that aims for a long term achievement. Therefore, the people in question are depicted in terms of how healthy they were not before and how healthy they are now, with that implying and marking a change in their self-identities.

The first story, that of Adrienne Scordato, starts depicting how life was 'fun and fast', full of mindless entertainment, ready made foods and high fat meals when she moved from her hometown to start a new job in a big town. She then put on weight and decided to go on a diet:

"First I tried Weight Watchers, but all that tracking, weighing and measuring drove me nuts. I felt my whole life was about the food I was or wasn't supposed to be eating".

She then tried to fix the problem herself, by creating a fat-free diet of her own. The first part of her account finishes with us learning that her several attempts did not work.

We can notice how, in the discourse, food habits were depicted as reflecting the general lack of control of her whole life. The result was weight gain that she did not know how to fight against. Then, all of a sudden, the disruption: all her frenzy life stopped when she found out she had a cancer. The experience of the disease corresponds to the second phase of her account (in the text represented by an intertitle, 'Life interrupted'), one in which

the individual is confronted with a 'fateful moment' (Giddens, 1991). The cancer remitted, but her weight problems got worse. However, the experience of the disease changed her views on how she should go about losing her weight in a healthy way:

“Life is too short to eat only fat-free foods or cabbage soup – or to track and measure everything I put in my mouth”

As a personal account, although filtered by the magazine text, this shows a certain opposition to a trend, of which the magazine is a major conveyor. The personal account allows for a partial disagreement with, for example, the 'tracking' of calories, as she mentions. As we have seen, this is a major feature in the tools found in the magazine to help people know how much calories they are eating. However, this same personal opposition only shows that this partial refusal to follow certain procedures is a sign that they are quite present and overwhelming, to the extent that some clearly cannot handle them.

As we move ahead, we see that the account draws to its third phase, titled 'A new approach'. The narrator now assumes the identity of a survivor: in late modernity, as Giddens (1991) describes, an individual will be asked much more often to master ways to overcome those fateful moments and rise out of it as an autonomous being. The narrator appears as someone who refashioned her life:

“I started with just one rule: eat only what you truly desire – and cut the portions in half. Figuring out what I really wanted to eat was harder than it sounds. I'd spent years eating what I 'should', not what I was hungry for. I had to slow down and listen to my hunger cues.”

Although there was a refusal to a 'tracking trend' in the previous paragraph, in the latter it fits into the preachings for self-awareness as a characteristic of the late modern self. If, early in her discourse, she had little awareness of her organic processes, now she started 'listening' to her body as a result of 'back-on-tracks' effect of the cancer. She refused the tracking obsession to engage in a process that would grant her greater awareness of herself, thus indicating how she should eat :

“(...)Because I was eating what I really wanted, I felt more satisfied with

smaller portions. And I actually found myself craving fruits and veggies. As I became more and more aware of my eating patterns I no longer ate when bored or stressed – and I stopped when I felt satisfied, not stuffed.”

Moving away from overindulging to cutting portions in half, Adrienne's discourse closes up with her acknowledgement that she became a self-regulating individual. She states: “I've learned how to take care of myself.”

If, in the first part of her account she was unconscious about her eating patterns and how to change them, her discourse shows how she emerged from a fateful moment (the cancer) to a different way to approach life. There are no detailed explanation on how that change took place, being generally attributed to the fact that she got sick.

This discourse is a good example that, even if all the characteristics supposedly attributed to the late modern self might not be found coherently assembled in the discourse of one individual as transformed into a magazine text, some characteristics are fundamentally constitutive of a discourse around this late modern subject. Such is the case of the idea of autonomy. This article is particularly keen on showing that. When it comes to food matters, it implies the need of being an autonomous individual in order to take control of eating habits. It is possible to observe that in the opposition made between the first part of the text, in which the narrator had a fun, but wrong life, with the third part, where she still had fun and pleasure, but with discipline. She did not have the knowledge to manage her eating habits correctly before, but she figured this out after the disease, stressing the need to have pleasure, above all else. Also, to get to know oneself is a task that is depicted as rather difficult, and that requires that one stop and act reflexively, recognizing his reasons and its roots in everything one does so as to come up with solutions for what is not working properly. The solution comes through actualization of knowledge – in this case, knowledge about oneself.

All of this ends up meaning a lifetime commitment represented by the sentence in the title: 'my dieting days are over'. Healthy eating is then an attitude one takes that must remain with him/her for life, for it represents not an external attitude of controlling only what one eats, but instead, represents a different approach to eating that requires a whole set of changes within oneself.

The type of individual that constructs such a discourse about his/her own self is

one that learns to establish his/her own rules: discipline does not come from the outside, but instead, it is internalized (Foucault, 1988;). All the advice and information coming from the magazine helps 'educating' people into achieving autonomous, health-promoting self-identities and, he/she who successfully internalizes the content will be granted a place in the publication as a voice that is legitimated by the magazine as a role model.

The second example is the story of Maureen Harris. In this story, what is emphasized is the break with a pattern of disease that is described as familiar and the construction of the individual's own story stemming from the adoption of different health habits. She refuses her past and engages in the construction of a "new self".

In this case, the narrator (Maureen) describes herself as leading a healthy lifestyle, practicing exercises and keeping shape. The 'fateful moment' happens right in the beginning of her account: the severe endometriosis that resulted in infertility, which caused her depression. Demotivated to exercise, she gained weight.

The family history is recalled to show how she felt regarding herself in the next section of the text, titled 'A Family Affair':

"I felt powerless: my dad died of heart disease at age 52, and my brother had triple bypass at 48 – I was simply falling in line with my family history. Then in early 2006, 16 years after I should have taken action, I saw a picture of myself and something finally clicked. I looked so large and unhappy – like someone I didn't even recognized. For the first time I clearly saw what I'd done to myself and realized I could choose not to let the fate of my relatives become my own. Three days later, I signed up for NutriSystem, a low glycemic plan based on foods that don't spike blood sugar"

She speaks of herself as completely responsible for what had happened, assuming the health promotion discourse without any resistance. She reflexively organizes what she could have done and finally what she ended up doing, exerting the late modern subject's capacity to 'discursively interpret conduct' (Nettleton & Bunton, 1997: 53).

Finally, NutriSystem<sup>8</sup> worked, and she lost 25 pounds in 2 months, but then she says:

“I feared what would happen when I had to make my own meals, so I started printing out lists of low glycemic foods and recipes from people I met on the plan's message boards”.

Although less obvious than it is in the previous text, here we can figure that this is also about reaching autonomy. Now she had to learn how to 'take care of herself', something that at first made her feel insecure. She explains how she did it in the third part of the text, titled 'How I did it'. A major boost to her achievement of autonomy in that matter was a friendship developed within the healthy eating program message board (NutriSystem), for both, according to her, would support each other in their aims to become self-sufficient individuals in terms of how they eat. She says: “(...)We've formed a friendship that will last a lifetime – and what a long, healthy life it will be!”.

In her discourse, committing herself to eating healthy shows that it is a life-changing experience. Her close relationships are both a result of that decision and the external effect of an inward change. The relation is depicted as being based on being healthy and an indication that her change will be identified not only in herself, but also reflected upon others. She continues:

“My mantra was...'I can choose.' My whole life changed once I realized that I controled my eating decisions. Instead of having a pie at Easter this year, I asked for strawberries with fat free half-and-half. I felt truly empowered”.

Her decision is depicted as having affected not only her most personal life, but the professional as well. She will finish her account acknowledging it. She will say:

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<sup>8</sup> Here, one example of marketization: specific products and programs for losing weight are advertised, taking advantage of the story line and topic.

“Unexpected gain: a new career path. This fall, I hope to return to school to become a registered dietitian. I want to help other people – especially my brothers and sisters – live longer, healthier lives”

In her account, her eating habits and the other spheres of her life intertwines in a determinant fashion. It appears as if everything in her life depended on her decision to eat healthy: her personal relationships, her professional life and, in first place, the way she saw herself. Healthy eating appears less as a consequence than as a decision that will trigger other important changes; things in Maureen's life happened *because* she changed her eating habits, constituting a central point in her discourse. This discourse complies with Bunton & Burrows' perception that, “under late modernism, the dominant culture is one which health, self-identity and consumption are increasingly entwined” (1997: 211).

A great emphasis is placed upon her ability to choose. She finally acknowledges that choosing was a real possibility, and that taking responsibility for her health would free her from the shackles of a doomed family history. Although she felt “powerless” in face of her family health problems, she worked that out in order to have enough autonomy to change her *fate*. It is clear here that, in this context where health promotional discourse attributes such a great responsibility to the individual when it comes to health, nothing is determined previously. Everything is open to revision and the active participation of the individual, even when his/her own biology points towards another direction.

Particularly in Adrienne's account (“My Dieting Days Are Over”), more than that of Maureen's, the discourse balances the previous frenzy, 'fast life' of many possibilities, translated into easy but unhealthy choices in terms of food, to that in which there is one major choice – one that is more difficult to do and that requires that one gets to know oneself – but that will determine the following ones. In the first phase, life runs in the rhythm of the consumption market for fast food, with its many and varied goods, but with no direction; in the second phase, that of autonomy, life runs according to the rhythm of individual choice; it is not dictated by the intense propaganda of fast food, but instead, by the individual's resolution over what fits into his/her aim in terms of health.

When it comes to being healthy, the postmodernist complaints that we are all trapped in a ceaseless choosing activity in terms of what we are as individuals face the challenge of the new utopy of the perfect health: you can make a life-changing decision that

is only effective if you stick to it throughout your whole life, identifying your whole self with it, or you can abide to deep-rooted aspects of your own self that are not put to question. Choosing to be healthy is a lifetime commitment that will determine the future choices one makes.

The idea of showing one particular character with a life trajectory that is marked by decisions over food choices is also extended to regular news over healthy eating. The next text is a report on the harmful effects of soda that is structured around one person's life experience with it. Back to the 'Eating healthy' item we find "4 reasons to never drink soda again – The case against soda: why the sweet stuff might be as bad for your health as smoking or drinking excessive alcohol." (2007), which creates a dramatic discourse over those who drink soda.

Right in the title, there is a clear association with the addiction caused by legal drugs, such as alcohol and cigarettes. Following up, the status of soda as a drug is emphasized by the introduction, right in the first line, of a real character, Abbey Arndt: "For most of her life, Abbey Arndt, 33, has been a soda addict."

This introduction sets the tone of the text over soda rather as a personal account over addiction than as a report on soda characteristics. The text continues with the presentation of her life:

"In the middle of the morning, she'd indulge her first craving of the day with a trip to the office refrigerator to grab one of the free sodas her company supplied. Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Mountain Dew, cherry soda – it didn't matter, she was an equal opportunity drinker. In the afternoon, she'd snatch another can, and dinner often meant a third. 'If I wasn't drinking soda, I was thinking about it', says Arndt, a corporate consultant who lives in Grafton, WI"

The structure of the description recalls that of an account of a drug addict's life, with her voice appearing in the excerpt as to confirm and to add drama to it, by saying that the addiction to soda had taken her whole self, such that even her thoughts were dominated by thoughts of drinking soda.

The text will continue by describing the weight problems she had due to her habits and the overall numbers of the soda market. It will reach the central point to the



confirmation of soda as a drug. It will pose a question to the reader:

“Most people would agree that their love affair with the sweet stuff – whatever flavor it might be – isn't all that healthy, but no one would put it in the same class as a truly bad habit such as smoking or drinking alcohol to excess, right?”

The final categorization of soda as a drug helps establish those as not healthy-oriented people, or people that even occasionally indulge in “non-healthy” aliments as potentially liable to be categorized as addicts. As the article claims right in the beginning, one should *never* drink soda. It is not even the discourse of the moderation, but that of complete abstinence, which helps even more the approximation of soda to illicit substances, or legal drugs that cause dependence.

Following the structure of the articles we have just discussed above, this text then uses its character to address something everybody should do, incurring in what Giddens (1991) had envisioned as the act of the media of making available certain models of personal narratives that can be adopted or not by the reader. The personal stories we have seen so far are all examples of that: personal narratives in accordance with a model that privileges the definition of a lifestyles stemming from one major, defining choice, the turning point. That will color and determine every subsequent choice one makes.

Following the structure of such a model, the report on soda finally hits at the turning point of Abbey Arndt's life:

“Arndt, for one, is convinced that soda was the primary cause of her problems: 'I tried to eat somewhat healthy, but my doctors weren't happy about how much I drank, and they would attribute my weight, in part, to that. And going to the dentist was never fun. The dentist would always say: 'Lay off the soda'. In December 2005, she made the decision to get healthy. With the help of Jenny Craig and Curves, she licked her soda habit and lost 90 pounds in 7 months.”

The turning point is made so neat that even the month is referred to. Again, if everything in one's life revolved around the changes brought by healthy eating in the previous accounts, in this, everything in Arndt's life also revolved around her soda drinking habits.

The next paragraph is a statement on her decision to change: “‘I feel incredible’, she says”. Her story is then hailed as an example that should be followed. After illustrating the issue with Abbey's story, the text will launch into an extensive depiction of the possible harm to the body that soda can cause, item by item. This second part of the report, with the description of the soda effects could have been the whole report; however, the illustration of the matter in terms of a personal experience in the life of Abbey Arndt makes it much more appealing to the readers, for it constructs a subject with whom one can identify. It first shows two phases of the character in question, making available two possibilities of identification: one, coming from those who might now see themselves as addicts, after reading the text, and two, coming from those who have overcome the habit and, as Arndt, Maureen and Adrienne, “changed their lives”.

By resorting to the aspect of conversationalization (Fairclough, 1992; 1995) and illustrating the issue with a personal account, the discourses emphasizes the creation of identities. If the health-promoting self-identity is what we can see being constructed in their texts, an identity that is classified as opposed (non-healthy) is also necessary for the reaffirmation of the first one. The opposition between a health-promoting self and one that appears classified in terms of addiction widens the gap between these people; the classification of soda as a drug make its consumers liable to the morality of the health promotional discourse (Lupton, 1995).

### *The expert voice: lay folk and specialists in the magazine discourse*

The voice of the authority is present not only as the providers for information on the regular reports or blogs. The nutrition expert also appears as an ordinary individual rather than only the professional. These aspect accounts for the democratization of the discourse (Fairclough, 1992; 1995), once the experts are asked not only to give nutritional orientation, but to expose the way they manage their own eating habits in their private life. The next text is, therefore, one example of the voice of the expert shaped as to be approximated to that of the reader: “Healthy Eating Tips from Top Nutritionists – 12 eat-right rules that work: four top nutritionists share their real-world, study-backed healthy eating tips. Eat, drink and be merry!” (2007).

In the article, each of the nutritionists give advice that they claim they follow themselves, even when they do not sound as 'orthodox' as it is expected from a professional on the science of food and eating. That is reflected in the 'real-world' of the title, that allows one of them, Judith Stern, for example, to hail chocolate as a necessary aliment. It also amounts to an attempt of the magazine to differentiate itself from the beaten 'no-no' discourse, introducing here and there certain elements that create a certain tension between what should one eat or not.

By refusing too strict rules, and introducing the personal figure of the expert, this is a discourse that tries to approximate the reader to the scientific world, but it is also a good example of what could be interpreted as the widening of the scope of scientific discourse on healthy eating as shaping identities. The scientific discourse loses its aura of a distant knowledge and gets incorporated into daily life more easily if the hierarchical differences in places assigned by media discourses between reader and the expert diminish. The expert is not hidden behind a text, but instead, is shown in a picture at the top of the page. The fact that they are all women is also an important point of identification, since women are depicted in the magazine as the ones who should care most about health, not only because they are “naturally” more affected by their own biology (Laqueur, 2001), but also because they are the ones in charge for the health of their husbands, partners and children.

The discourse that comes from the scientific side actually hails whatever is not “man-made” and not manipulated. The quest to go back to a simpler and more authentic life (Lupton, 1996) is perceived in admonitions to rescue cultural traditions and 'natural' ways of eating that existed before modern life made everything ready-made. One of them, Kibe Conti, says:

“Our ancestors ate off the land they lived on, so we try our best to do the same.  
I pick up fresh fruits and vegetables at the market whenever they are available,  
and I keep organic milk and eggs on hand”

Judith Stern also emphasizes the search for the natural. Before her sentence, one intertitle:

“**Go au naturel:** ' I never put sugar on food – not because sugar is evil, but

because fruit is already so sweet. And I don't use salt. I appreciate the real taste of food. Adding anything else is just gilding the lilly”

Therefore, when it comes to eating healthy, 'real' is only that which is originally provided by nature, without human intervention. By using the expression 'gilding the lilly' she also emphasizes the unnecessary character of this intervention.

Another nutritionist, Cheryl Forsberg, also points out the refusal to incorporate to her diet any processed aliment:

“What you won't see anywhere in her Napa, CA, kitchen is refined flour or sugar. 'I don't cook with or eat any of them', says the 51-year old chef. 'They are nothing more than calories, so I don't make them part of my diet’”

The last one to give her tips, Claudia Gonzalez, will bring up the tension between dullness and fun of following a healthy lifestyle (Bunton & Nettleton, 1995). She will counsel people to “make 75% of meals healthy – and save room for fun”. With such a structure, her sentence makes a direct connection between healthy as boring and unhealthy as fun, in a clear example of the contradictions one can find within the magazine discourse, that strives to show that, most of the times, fun is found *within* healthy practices. In this aspect, the 'modern subject of nutrition' will be addressed within the rationality that he is supposed to dispense to his eating habits, evaluating food according to its benefits, rather than its taste (Coveney, 2000).

The presence of the experts in such a fashion allows for an easier identification between the ordinary reader and the authority on nutrition. The visibility of the expert, their gender and the framing of the discourse as coming from the 'real world' helps constructing an ideal notion of how someone should go about their eating habits.

### *Guilt, taboos and transgression*

Other issues are found in the text that can be potentially related to the construction of a discourse over self-identity and food choices. In “Five Reasons for Overeating – We're *all* guilty of this. Learn what triggers your impulse and take control ”

(2007), a recurrent structure: the text presents the problem, and the supposedly unlearned individual gets to know how to proceed given the solution that is provided by the magazine. Here, irrationality concerning food takes on a stronger tone, and the emotional aspect is emphasized right in the beginning through the use of the word “guilty”. Feeling guilt regarding food behavior is a clear indication that there is a component of transgression attached to certain eating habits that will result in one feeling bad about crossing a border afterwards. In that sense, the taboos created around food resemble those traditionally associated with sex (Probyn, 1999; Turner, 1997), entailing prohibitions and prompting the “confession” of “sins”.

However, it seems there is a tension in the discourse of the magazine the matter of “taking control”; if, in these two previous articles, not taking control would imply in one being 'guilty', in the next article analysed we can envision a rather softer approach to this discourse. In “Not-so-guilty pleasures – the good news about chocolate, carbs, coffee, and many other seemingly decadent treats” (2006), an exclamation sentence in small letters preceeds the main title emphasizing the good news “Healthy snacks? The nutritional benefits of chocolate, coffee and more!”. In first place, the pick of the words shows there is an idea being conveyed that we live now in a new era regarding food. A food that is 'decadent' (this word appear three times throughout the text) means that it no longer belongs to the current times, representing resistant elements of an era when there was no proper concern regarding their harmful effects. If we are identified with what we eat, through the fact that food has qualities that we appropriate when we incorporate them into ourselves (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997), the denomination of the food as decadent can easily lead to a denomination of *someone* as decadent.

However, if science breakthroughs were behind this new concern over food, now they appear as bringing news that should ease the feelings of guilt of the reader. The article reads:

“All too often we feel guilty about eating foods that actually aren't all that bad. In fact, some of these guilty pleasures can actually be healthy snacks. So with a glass of wine and a handful of nuts in hand, savor the news you're about to read – and put those worries to rest!”

The subject they address is one whose concerns go hand in hand with scientific guidelines for healthy living (Coveney, 2000). The news bring them both the concession to lay off worries every now and then or to be watchful regarding what they eat.

Then the magazine points out, for each substance, recent studies that prove they are not as bad as they have been pictured. However, the instigation to relax and enjoy the food that the title promised lives shortly. When referring to chocolate, they use a nominalization (Fairclough, 1992), “chocolate-eating tactic”, that brings up again the issue of self-monitoring. The 'tatic' must go as follows:

“Focus on the taste in your mouth. Allow yourself to notice how it feels on the roof of your mouth, your tongue, the sides of your cheeks, and in your throat. Notice whether it tastes like you thought it would. Enjoy it thoroughly”.

Implied in the word 'tatic' is the idea that modern life requires certain techniques of living in order to manage the complexity of it. As we can observe from the extract, to eat a chocolate in times of the imperative of health (Lupton, 1995) demands a trained individual, one whose awareness of his/her senses makes it possible to maximize pleasure, and as a reward, can keep it within healthy levels. However, his/her knowledge is never enough. When addressing “salad dressing”, the text, always marked by the aspect of “conversationalization”, goes: “Feeling proud of your commitment to fat-free salad dressing? Reconsider.” Again, we can see that the type of individual constructed is one that cannot have any confidence as to what he/she knows when it comes to eating, and depends on the magazine information for that. Whatever knowledge it is, it is always open to actualization.

That supposedly fosters a constant need to be updated. The construction of the category of the informed consumer is on the other end of what Lupton (1996) has identified as an increasing tendency for information on foodstuff being sold together with the food itself. The ideal healthy-eating individual is a fact-sheet freak, thoroughly looking up food labels to decide whether to buy it or not. According to the magazine discourse, being informed is the point that marks the difference between one person who eats up a lot of extra calories and the one who does not. At the bottom line, this follows the idea of the constitutive power of knowledge, combined with the position of food as central to issues of

self-identity. If one is exhorted to know oneself he has got to know what he is eating.

The next text is titled “Great news: being bad is good – find out how these forbidden foods can make you healthy” (2004) and the theme is similar of that of the previous one, that is, the 'concession' given by science to eat not-so-healthy foods once in a while. The pick of the words is different, though. If foods were addressed as being 'decadent' in the text analyzed previously, here they become 'forbidden', 'bad', 'naughty' and 'luscious', all words that amount to evidences of connections between sex and food (Probyn, 1999), therefore evoking one's morality regarding their consumption. In the following excerpt we can see how the issue is presented in the introduction of the text:

“Why is it that everything you love – from chocolate to cheese to roast beef – is bad for you? Too much fat, too many calories, 'death on a plate!' Yet deep down inside, a little voice keeps crying, 'But I want some!' Well, now you can have some – along with the utter joy of knowing that you're doing your body some good. Science really has rescued some of our 'naughtiest' foods from the taboo list. New studies suggest a luscious list of former no-nos that actually add to better health and longer life. In effect, some of our vices have turned into virtues!”

This morality in this discourse is supported by religious metaphors found in the structure of the text. For every item discussed, there are four topics that explain the properties of the food: 'body bonus', 'downside', 'healthy indulgence' and 'avoiding sin', the latter clearly accounting for the metaphor mentioned, as if suggesting that it is possible to 'transgress' within the 'dogma' of healthy eating. Then the magazine give tips on how to enjoy everything one likes without incurring in risks for obesity and several diseases.

What is noticeable about this approach is that the vocabulary of transgression is used to give meaning to a 'healthy' habit, as if to circumscribe the scope of transgressing possibilities: an individual can transgress, and should do it from time to time, according to the magazine discourse, but this is an act that does not happen without following risk-free, 'safety' guidelines, and the religious reference might suggest the importance of complying to some 'health' dogma.

### *Why food information matters*

This late modern self is particularly receptive and liable to change his behaviour according to the incoming flow of information, as suggested in the magazine discourse. Keeping up-to-date with media content is a rather necessary activity, but less to be healthy than to, more importantly, identify as someone who follows the healthy lifestyles admonitions. In the report “Eat for perfect health – where to look on a food label, whether you want to protect your heart, lose weight, or build bone” (2007), the first line of the text is a question addressed to the reader/consumer: “how often do you look at the labels and nutrition facts on the products you buy?”. The answer goes:

“If you said frequently, you are being smart about your health: Adults who read food labels and nutrition facts slash twice as many calories from fat as those who don't give them a look, according to a study published in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association.”

The preference for addressing those who keep themselves informed as 'smart' works both as a reinforcement of the magazine tagline ('smart ways to live well') at the same time it helps constructing notions regarding both the informed consumer and the individual who does not care so much about it. Instead of just naming them as 'cautious', for example, or anything else, saying one is 'smart' might suggest there is an underlying judgement about the intellectual capacities of those who eat up extra calories because they do not get informed when they should.

The text then talks about 'health goals', and turns into a very specific discourse on what to look for on the labels to achieve what. Thus, to 'strengthen the bones', to 'preserve memory' or to 'lower cholesterol' require an attention to different elements in the label. We can see that being healthy in this discourse is much more than achieving a *general* sense of well being. Instead, it is a matter of setting up *specific* 'goals', that require information, planning and commitment. In that sense, the strategies to be healthy present the late modern individual with a discourses that is highly complex in its proposals.

Following the same 'pedagogical' style, the next article stresses the aspect of rationalization of daily life. In “Quick tips for healthy eating – 5 easy ways to stick to your



diet”, the individual is exhorted to plan ahead and stick to the plan. Then, all his daily routine will be on account of his concern over healthy eating, since he will have to organize himself to have everything done so as to avoid that the lack of organization induces him to eat unhealthy, as if he was always on the verge of committing this 'transgression'. Therefore, what is implied is that eating healthy is a matter of how much rational one can be in his everyday life so as to keep an eye on his impulses.

However, it seems that, in explaining how to achieve that state, the magazine incurs in a slight contradiction. If, in the title, the shift to a healthy lifestyle is constructed upon a discourse that underlines how easy it is, throughout the text we come across notions that the individual must exert control and have enough self-discipline in order to manage the temptations that can easily derail hard-won success, such as planning meals ahead of time and writing up lists before going to the store.

### **Some reflections upon the discourse of the magazine**

By being a sensitive barometer of social and cultural change, these mediatic discourses show the tensions between transformations and permanences in society in the form of heterogeneities and contradictions. They constitute the bridge that brings institutional changes into the lifeworld, restructuring the spheres of the public and the private – and therefore, affecting how one constructs his/her self-identity (Fairclough, 1995).

Throughout the texts we could see reflected how a self that is constructed in the magazine discourse holds intrinsic connection to major changes happening in the external world, such as the changing ideas in the health field. A basic characteristic of this subject constructed in the texts is self-awareness. One must know oneself before taking any decision regarding what to eat. By teaching techniques to get “in tune” with one's body and self, in order to do the best choice, the magazine attempts to construct a self that is autonomous in terms of health.

One could also think that the increasing awareness of food issues entwines with awareness of the self as part of the same tendency as an estrategy to master aspects of one's life, provided that the complexity brought by modernity has deprived many of us of knowing basic aspects of our daily activities, for knowledge about them were appropriated by the

expert systems (Giddens, 1991). However, these expert systems invade the intimacies of the self exactly through a translation of its technical knowledge to the language of magazine medicine, in the form of the specialist that speaks directly or through the voice of the journalist to the reader. In that movement, technical knowledge about health is appropriated again by the individual, confirming Bunton's (1997) notion that popular health in magazines are an ideal location where we can observe the position of the "contemporary subject of health discourses and the acquisition of the techniques for fabricating the healthy self" (1997: 238).

Thus, eating healthy depends on how knowledgeable one is; besides the need of being aware of internal bodily processes and emotions regarding eating practices, one must amass the greatest amount of food information. According to the magazine discourse, failing to do so can easily lead one to be *out-of-control*. Clearly underlying the texts is the notion that one who pursues a healthy living is a rational individual, whereas one who does not is *irrational*. Related to that is the recurrent notion of being healthy as being "smart". Binary oppositions pervade the magazine discourse, classifying both food and individuals, making it easier to address one person as identified with what he or she eats. Following that, certain foods are constructed as "decadent", "forbidden", "naughty" or, in the case of soda, as a drug in the same category of cigarettes and alcohol, thus, approximating one who consumes it to the image of an addict.

A range of reflexive practices were fostered in the texts. Reflexivity will build up the knowledge that will lead to self-awareness. As we saw previously, this is a basic practice of the late modern self, and aids the construction of some coherence to self-identity. The fact that it appeared in the form of self-directed ready-made questions in the texts leads one to envision that it can be easily translated into a social practice, as Fairclough (1992, 1995) would put it. Those practices aim to confront the knowledge one has with possible actualizations, always calling attention to the fact that this knowledge is never enough or not secure enough. Plus, one is also asked to track everything one eats and to gather as much information as possible on the qualities of the food, in an attitude of chronic self-monitoring, typical of those in late modernity who, with the establishment of a lifeplan for themselves, are drawn to verify constantly the coherence of their choices.

The construction of the self in the text goes through the creation of "food identities". We saw the example of the "superstaster" and the "carb phobe". In the first

case, one is identified with his/her supposedly biological predisposition towards certain kinds of food; in the latter, a narrative is constructed upon how a food choice impacts on the social life of the individual, on how he sees himself and on how others see him. This discourse combines both genetic features and personal choices in the making of this subject; nevertheless, one's biology can never be accounted for one's health choices, which makes the reasoned side of this balance outweighs by far its *instinctual* side. That is to say that rationality is the most emphasized virtue in the subject that is constructed.

The construction of this subject is anchored in the idea that a personal narrative can be derived from health decisions. The recurrent idea of narrative, whether it is a story told by a reader or a report on a certain foodstuff that uses the life of someone (as an illustration to explain the effects of it) attempts to construct a role model for self-identity in a linear fashion. This model shows how one can make sense of the past, reformulate one's life, drop everything that is not “authentic” and formulate a plan of action for the future that will support a biographical account of one's life. In the magazine discourse, this explains why health is increasingly a matter that involves the innermost aspects of the individual. In this discourse, external events that might hinder one's possibility of leading a healthy life are overlooked in favor of the “empowerment” of the individual, and they never appear as determinant of bad health in one's life. In these personal narratives, *fate* is something one can change.

The idea of positive health, of health being something one can always *improve* and *enhance* – whether or not one has enough of it – complies with Sfez (1996) perception of the rise of the ideal of perfect health not just as the only possible contemporary utopy, but also as a result of a cultural imagery in which health appears as supposedly the only area where one can take charge of and be reasonably successful – even though we know that external events can hinder this project. This is suggested when the text indicate specific aims that can be attained through the planned ingestion of certain aliments (“Eat for Perfect Health – where to look on a food label, whether you want to protect your heart, lose weight or build bone” , 2007), or more directly, through the personal accounts of individuals who “changed their life” when they took a health-related decision. This constant, overwhelming concern over monitoring oneself and one's health through what one eats is a marked feature in the discourses produced in all the texts selected, thus overstating the eating issues in one's life. Food and how one eats become such relevant matters in this “perfect health” context

that one's whole self is devoted to it. One “becomes” not only what one eats, but also the way one eats, think, talk and act upon food and health in these mediatic discourses turns out to be conducive to considerations over one's self-identity. And, as we saw it with Potter & Wetherell, the consequences of the description of a subject is the construction of this very subject.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In pre-modern times, self-identity was not problematic. This was a matter primarily connected to a person's filiation to higher instances, such as social class, family and other ways of belonging (Giddens, 1991; Featherstone, 1995). Self-identity was then externally determined (Friedman & Lash, 1992), not being up to much reflection, transformations or crises, and being more or less fixed throughout a lifetime.

Nevertheless, the emergence of modernity brought new modes of life with it and the problematic of self-identity. The subject that emerged out of this period is marked by a new concept: he is supposed to be autonomous and rational. Different from the pre-modern individual, he has the task of constructing his own self-identity. No longer supported by tradition, religion or the constraints of social and family kinships, he is *free to choose*.

The modern settings where this individual dwells is marked by dynamism. Rapid changes and uncertainty, coupled with great institutional transformations, constitute the features that are seen as directly affecting the way this subject constructs his/her own self. Modernity is intrinsically linked with the expansion of systems of communication. Plus, thanks to the printed media, human beings are put in connection with distant events in time and space, as opposed to the pre-modern man, who was mostly only aware of the events happening in his immediate settings. New subjectivities that develop in this context are a direct response to the external influences that make their ways into the intimacies of the self (Giddens, 1991).

In the past four decades or so, these modern features were sharpened. Changes happen in a much faster pace and new kinds of media have emerged. If the printed media had already shortened the time and space gap, these new electronic communication means can almost extinguish it. In face of the waning powers of traditional ways of constituting

one's self, media will take over this “task”, providing the symbolic content that will ground the constitution of one's self-identity through “shared discourses” (Clarke, 2005), that can be appropriated by anyone, anywhere, who has access to digital media.

In this contemporary context, issues over self-identity abounds. In face of the contextual diversity and intense transformations, two different views debate the constitution of the contemporary subject. For postmodernists, this is a new era, thus, with a new characteristic individual. The modern ideal of the reasoned subject is gone, being substituted by a subject that is consumption-oriented and driven by hedonism. The fragmentation that is characteristic of this latest phase of modernity extends to the way we construct our selves, in such a fashion that it becomes impossible to talk about it as a project. In this view, “postmodernity” creates a kind of individual that is understood as an assembling of fragments and sensations (Hall, 1999), a “bricolage” (Bauman, 1997), where the euphoric intensities mark the discontinuity of his life experience (Kellner, 1992), hindering any attempt to organize one's life trajectory in terms of a more or less coherent narrative that gives meaning and support to one's self-identity.

The second view does not see a break between modernity and our contemporary age. Instead, it sees it as a moment of sharpening of modern characteristics, at the same time that new elements are introduced. It is rather a phase of transition, for that reason named “late modernity”, instead of “postmodernity”. This is the position assumed by Giddens (1990, 1991), the author that offered most of the theoretical guidelines for the analyses that was developed here. That is so because Giddens acknowledges the many contradictory tendencies of our age, being able to see that modernity encompasses both tendencies towards unification and fragmentation.

With Giddens we saw that the rapid pace of modernity and all the insecurity produced by it does not necessarily mean that the kind of self that will surface as the most common reaction to conditions of late modernity will be one marked by fragmentation. Instead, faced with the increasing perception of the world as insecure and unpredictable, the contemporary individual will turn towards his/her innermost sphere in order to build up some sense of security, his own health being a major area for that. Without the traditional forms of attribution of self-identity, this individual will construct it through personal choices.

These choices will characterize a *lifestyle*. Lifestyles are a cluster of habits and modes of consumption that, in conditions of late modernity, serve the purpose of supporting

self-identities (Cockerham, 1997). Hence, a healthy lifestyle is that same set of practices mentioned above, but now in terms of health.

The present discussion was approached through the discourse of a healthy lifestyles magazine, *Prevention*, due to the already mentioned position of mass media in the constitution of late modern self-identities. Bearing in mind that lifestyles are contemporary forms of grounding and manifesting self-identities, our general aim was to see how being healthy could be perceived as a project for the self. For that purpose, we had to acknowledge what kind of institutional backdrop we have that might influence that idea. In first place, as a direct consequence of the transformations typical of late modernity, we have the emergence of health promotion in the late seventies, as a branch of public health. It represents a turn from concerns with disease towards concerns with health (Bury, 1996). Health is now something to be worked on, with continuous effort. It is an individual responsibility and, as such, a moral duty (Lupton, 1995, 1996). Healthy lifestyles also represent the rationalization of daily practices in search for a long term goal, and are also a structure that provide relief in a rapid changing world. It has the power to do so for it establishes a guideline for choices, therefore reducing the complexity conferred to contemporary life by the multiplicity of opportunities available (Cockerham, Rütten & Abel, 1993).

This health promotional discourse makes its way to the media (Castro, 2004). The media is a powerful source of discourses; discourses, as we learned with Fairclough (1992, 1995), are powerful tools for the shaping of self-identities. This is so because a text constitutes a discursive practice that, by its turn, will support and construct social practices. Plus, as Potter & Wetherell (1987) would argue, words equal action, for they construct an object (or a subject) at the same time they describe it.

Healthy lifestyles encompass a wide variety of practices, ranging from fitness to alternative medicine. Therefore, our specific aim was to look at how the previous issues discussed would be developed in a healthy eating discourse within a magazine. This is due to the fact that food, by itself, is an issue that has long been addressed as having implications for self-identity, both in traditional and post-traditional societies. That is so because it is symbolically-laden. Eating is not only a biological act, it is also the consumption of *meaning* and *symbols* (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997).

In the context of late modernity, we saw that food has emerged as an issue surrounded by anxieties and taboos that were, previously, attributed to sex (Probyn, 1999; Turner, 1997). In face of that, we saw that food appears as one big issue in the theorization of identity (Probyn, 1999). Therefore, the modes of attribution of meanings to food do not disappear in post-traditional societies. As Beardsworth & Keil (1997), Caplan (1997) and Lupton (1996) confirm, they assume different features. Food, in their accounts, is central to personal identity, for the crossing of the barrier by an aliment between the outside world and the inner body triggers the assumption that we appropriate in our inner selves the symbolic qualities of it. Plus, eating practices constitute, according to Lupton (1996) central practices of the self, for they are directed at self care via nourishment of the body.

In times of imperative of health (Lupton, 1995) and of the emergence of the perfectly healthy life as the possible utopy for contemporaneity (Sfez, 1996), food assumes a strategic position in matters of self-identity, as we could see in the many references to the constitution of someone's life based upon healthy food-related decisions. For the late modern, urban, western individual, uprooted from traditional cultural food practices and seeking a project for the self, these discourses in the media have a great impact, for they account for the symbolic content that construct a subject according to how healthy he/she eats. What is being constructed is what Coveney (2000) calls "the modern subject of nutrition" or the "modern subject of food choice". For this subject, concerns for eating revolve around its rationality in relation to scientific and medical norms, which entails a relationship with eating that is grounded on self-control and restraint. Rationality was constantly referred to in the texts, appearing as the basic feature of this "healthy subject". However, in the context of consumer culture, as Featherstone(1991) states, this feature is not detached from pleasure; rather, ascetiscim and hedonism are recombined and refashioned (Lupton, 1996), as it was clear in the interplay of these notions in the discourse.

The question between this late modern individual and his/her food practices entails an ambiguous relationship. Food, in a context of risk and uncertainty, is a favorite target for panic, as the latest food scares on the news media show us (Gwym, 2002; Seale, 2003). However, as contradictory as it might seem, it is also confidence-giving. This is found in the possibility of mastering one aspect of daily life through the awareness of the processess food goes through. The tendency towards awareness is explicited in what Lewis (2008) deems as an attempt to "reenchant" everyday life through less alienated modes of

consumption. The stress upon the importance of being an informed individual in order to be healthy is marked in the texts, coupled with the orientations on how to get to know oneself through techniques of self-monitoring.

What healthy eating offers is the possibility of “ordering” the world, through the “ordering” of the self, by bringing a normative logic to a modern environment that is seen as disruptive, chaotic (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997), and essentially harmful to health. This ordering activity is pervaded by a division of food in terms of “artificial” and “natural”, “good” and “bad”, etc. This classification is a response to uncertainty, in the sense that binary oppositions raise a set of moral associations that function as a guideline for easier management of everyday life, by narrowing down the choices one must make. Thus, by choosing to eat healthy, one decides upon a lifestyle that offers a clear guideline on subsequent choices.

In contemporaneity, all this contributes to a pursued sense of ontological security (Giddens, 1991). Through the commitment of oneself to the choice to eat healthy, one takes control of his/her health, a sphere that has increasingly been regarded as of individual responsibility (Lupton, 1995). This implies a revision of one's conduct and a possible reinvention of one's identity: the change, as focused on one's healthy eating habits has the purpose of establishing a clear-cut external mark that will identify a person from that moment onwards, as it appears in the “success stories” of two characters that “changed their lives” because they changed their eating habits. Managing a routine of healthy eating practices deploys high self-control, discipline and will power, all virtues that turn out to be an expression, through the body, of one's self (Lupton, 1996). Thus, to eat healthy demands commitment, one which results are only accountable in a long term perspective.

The analysis of the healthy eating discourse in the magazine confirmed, as an example, the previously discussed notions of the interplay between food, healthy lifestyles, and self-identity in late modernity. The construction of a “health promoting self” in the magazine discourse as an ideal model for self-identity is based upon the creation of a personal narrative that revolves around the decision to “get healthy” as one that structures a lifeplan. Food appears in this discourse as loaded with meanings for the individual: it is not only about its usual connections with self-identity represented in the recurrent idea of “you are what you eat”, but also the overlapping meanings that the associated idea of a healthy lifestyle implies to the construction and support of this self-identity.



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