



Vrije Universiteit Brussel

FACULTY OF ECONOMICS, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL  
SCIENCES AND SOLVAY BUSINESS SCHOOL  
RESEARCH GROUP TOR

# DESTRUCTURATION OF THE BELGIAN MEAL PATTERN?

Changes in the temporal, social and spatial aspects of  
eating practices by means of time use data

Ph.D. dissertation in Sociology

## Inge Mestdag

Academic year 2006-2007

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ignace Glorieux

Second supervisor: Prof. Dr. Peter Scholliers





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**APPENDICES**

## **Introduction: Observing the ruins of the “traditional” meal pattern?**

*‘Le repas est investi d’une sorte de mission de prévention qui noue un lien entre la bonne santé et la bonne morale citoyenne: une table bien remplie suppose une «vraie» vie de famille et la qualité de la communication entre ses membres. Ce moment et cette table deviennent port d’attache et de restauration, une arme contre la délinquance des jeunes et le cancer que le grignotage et les sandwiches à l’américaine (arrosés de boissons trop sucrées qui déclamineraient la plus ferrugineuse des tuyauteries) provoquent’* [The meal is invested with some kind of preventive mission that strengthens the ties between good health and good citizenship: a table that is well-filled assumes a «real» family life and good quality communication between its members. That moment and that table become a safe haven and a means of restoration, a weapon against juvenile delinquency and the cancer provoked by snacking and American hamburgers (washed down with too sugared drinks that mess up the most ferruginous pipes)] (Nahoum-Grappe, 2001: 50-51).

*Western diet is the subject of considerable concern and debate*

Nowadays regular (family) meals are often considered as an adequate way to avoid a series of behavioural problems. Governmental institutions and social organizations try to convince us to bring the (family) meal back to life by providing tips that help to get a (family) meal organized (ADA, 2006; Meals Matter, 2006). Since 1997, a yearly event is organized in the US in order to remind Americans to gather regularly to share a meal and in order to increase the awareness of the importance of family meals. This event is called the *National Eat Dinner Together Week* and is sponsored by the National Pork Board (National Pork Producers Council, 2003; Momcentral, 2004). In 2003, the *National Family Day*, a yearly national event in the US since 2001, was completely dedicated to sharing meals with the family. The *National Family Day* became ‘a day to eat dinner with your children’ (CASA, 2003). The *Eat Better, Eat Together-* programme by the American WIC (Women Infants and Children)-department also aims at promoting healthy eating by making families eat together (Washington State University, 2006). Initiatives to promote the family meal are also

found outside the US. In France, the *CIDIL* (*Centre Interprofessionnel de Documentation et d'Information Laitières*) issued a small book called '*Tous à table pour se nourrir, se parler et surtout se faire du plaisir*' [All gathered round the table to eat, to talk, and especially to have fun] (CIDIL, 1998). The aim of this little book is to promote the French way of eating through structured meals, which are considered as the cement and the symbol of family life. It gives practical instructions to eat healthily, but also in peace and with pleasure, in accordance with the French *art de vivre* (CIDIL, 1998). Similar initiatives also exist in Flanders and Belgium. Since 2002, the *Gezinsbond* (Family League) organizes regular meetings about the "model-breakfast" all over Flanders to promote breakfast both as a healthy and social event (Gezinsbond, 2002).

Not all studies on the beneficent effects of the family meal have a high validity. In fact, scientific research is ambiguous on the relationship between regular family meals on the one hand, and healthy eating habits in later life (De Bourdeaudhuij, 1997) and obesity on the other hand. The "moral" risks and the health risks associated with modern eating practices might be overestimated. It is up to nutritional and pedagogical scientists to assess the link between our modern eating habits and its health risks and if necessary correct public opinion on the so-called malicious effects of our contemporary eating habits.

#### *The contribution of social sciences to the debate on changing eating habits*

Social sciences can and indeed must also contribute to the debate on our contemporary eating habits. Western diet seems to worry us nowadays. In the minds of many people and in public opinion the decay of the family meal and the degeneration of our eating habits are a fact. The media mostly cover the views and studies of commercial and marketing agents and trendwatchers, who repeatedly come to the conclusion that we have wound up in a snack empire. Breakfast would give way to a fast bite or is simply skipped before going to work, due to our fast-paced lifestyles (De Morgen, 01/06/2005). Traditional meals would increasingly be under pressure and would be replaced by snacks (Het Laatste Nieuws, 12-13/07/2003). The dinner table is supposed to experience serious competition from the sofa and ready meals would make the kitchen redundant (De Standaard, 19/11/2004). Trendwatchers

predict that eating with the family will soon be replaced by eating alone (De Standaard, 19/11/2004; Het Belang van Limburg, 22/10/2002; Het Laatste Nieuws, 10/04/2000; Het Laatste Nieuws, 21/06/2005; VDAB, 2003). The message of a widespread change in our eating habits is very manifest in public opinion.

The consciousness of change in eating habits is almost unanimously expressed in terms of a *de-era*. Any change in the current food situation is evidenced as a *degeneration*, a denial of a previously existing higher standard. '*La modernité alimentaire se déclinera donc sur le mode de la déstructuration, certains vulgarisateurs n'hésitent pas à parler de «système dé»: dé-structuration, dé-socialisation, dé-sinstitutionnalisation, dé-implantation horaire, dé-ritualisation* [Food modernity declines according to the manner of deconstruction, some vulgarizers do not hesitate to mention the «de-system»: deconstruction, desocialization, deinstitutionalization, temporal disinsertion, deritualization] (Poulain, 2003b: 52). Our present-day eating behaviour is considered as a total negation of what is traditionally considered as proper eating behaviour. The rigid, common structures that shape our food practices are believed to be on the decline, resulting in less formal and more deregulated eating habits (Poulain, 2003b: 192-193). Indeed, the discussion of the change in our eating habits does not happen in a moral void. This discussion is closely linked to people's moral concerns. The main aim of this study is not only to investigate to what extent present-day eating practices conform to the picture of deconstruction or degeneration, but primarily to assess recent changes –if any!– in meal patterns in the West, more particularly Belgium. It is on this level that social sciences can contribute to the debate on changing eating habits. Social sciences should assess to what extent the fear over our modern eating habits is justified. This means that we assess whether the messages on the *de-era* reflect reality.

*Social scientists do not agree on the level of deconstruction in our eating practices*

The ideas of modern upheaval and the waning influence of tradition are increasingly taken over by sociologists. Some social scientists believe that deconstruction has come into practice in Europe and that this trend has originated in the US. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, Fischler (1979) was one of the first to spread the idea of meal deconstruction in Europe, in the wake of America. Other social scientists do not

believe that our meal pattern is really subject to deconstruction. They believe that the deconstruction of eating practices is a rumour rather than reality. Some social scientists even suspect industrial lobbies of abusing marketing studies in order to promote snack sales (Poulain, 2002a). The traditional meal pattern, characterised by a limited number of proper meals, impedes the introduction of a continuous meal system or a chain of snacks (Poulain, 2003a). According to Michael Symons, ‘... it seems that the modern food marketer pursues the abolition of this grammar of meals perhaps in the name of freedom of individual choice and requiring time constraints on eating to be considered an obstruction’ (Symons, 1991: 210-211). The theory of the expanding “snack empire” is propagated in order to promote sales in the food industry, or at least in some of its branches (Aymard, Grignon and Sabban, 1996). It depicts the snack as liberating and defines the meal as limiting. Despite the nostalgic lamentation over the disappearance of the traditional meal, there is little or no proof of this romantic past, just as there is little or no proof of its disappearance today (Mennell, Murcott and van Otterloo, 1992).

Grignon and his colleagues point at the dire necessity of historical research. ‘By relativizing the “changes” and “ruptures” of today through comparisons with those of yesterday, history will help sociologists to resist the illusion of “modernity” and invite them to begin by fully exploring the empirical sources at hand, sources that allow one to describe the complexity of the contemporary evolution of foodways without resorting to the conventional but ill-suited notions of “upheaval” or “inertia”’ (Aymard, Grignon and Sabban, 1996). Historical research is obviously indispensable when assessing change. Grignon and his colleagues claim that, when taking history into account, it becomes clear that the ideas of change and upheaval in our eating habits are nothing but illusions. The three-meal pattern is not a universal, everlasting habit and snacking is not characteristic of current eating practices alone (Aymard, Grignon and Sabban, 1996; Grignon, 1996). A point of comparison in the past is the only possible way in which conclusions about change can be made. Without this, the question remains on how to interpret the present-day situation, as dramatic or reassuring, whether the glass is half empty or half full (Poulain, 2003b: 69). So far, there is little scientific material available to assess the thesis of the deconstruction of our eating practices. The information which trendwatchers and marketers mostly rely on (sales figures of various types of convenience food, snacks,

take-away or restaurant food) rarely takes into account contextual elements and are hardly representative for a whole population (Fischler, 1996c). We may conclude that little information is available on how food is and was consumed and how meals are and were organized. Poulain points at the urgency and need for empirical data, that reflect the structure of the meal (Poulain, 1999: 274; Poulain, 2001). This study aims at getting a better insight into how contemporary eating practices are organized, and to what extent these contemporary eating practices can be considered as deconstructed compared to earlier eating practices. In this study, the term “eating practices” will be used continuously to refer to eating habits insofar as they occur in practice and insofar as they relate to the temporal, social and spatial organization of eating. Eating practices do not refer here to (the contents of eating practices) what is eaten. Our research wishes to contribute to the scientific debate on the deconstruction of eating practices, by submitting new scientific material on this subject from Belgium and Flanders. Secondly, this study should contribute to the public debate by investigating whether the contemporary fear over our modern eating habits is justified.

In order to assess to what extent Belgian eating practices reveal changes in terms of deconstruction, the concept of “deconstruction” needs to be defined. In the **first chapter** of this thesis, we go into the essence of the deconstruction of our meal pattern. Deconstruction assumes that the structure in our eating practices is disappearing. Several sociological food studies on the normative significance of the meal have pointed at the importance of the structure within our eating habits. Especially qualitative studies that have investigated the organization of eating habits in a domestic context, have time and again emphasized the importance of a clear structure guiding eating practices. These studies show that there is a clear structure to be discerned in people’s views on what a meal pattern *should* look like: there seems to be considerable unanimity in these studies as far as the structure of a “proper” meal pattern is concerned. A thorough examination of this structure is an essential part of this study. We will subsequently go into the various ideological rules that deal with the temporal, social and spatial structure of the proper meal pattern and investigate what is necessary for a meal pattern to be considered as temporally, socially and spatially structured. We are convinced that the study of the structure within our meal pattern requires a historical approach. Our eating habits evolve continuously. Although history and anthropology have amply shown that our eating habits differ

through time and space, they are what they are today for specific reasons. In the first chapter, we investigate where exactly this ideal structure of the meal pattern comes from. Our so-called *traditional* meal pattern does not appear to be as ancient or traditional as is often believed; neither is it universal and eternal. This, however, does not prevent the proper meal pattern from being an important symbol and model in Western society. It will be shown that the proper meal pattern is essentially part of the wider bourgeois family ideology and is invested with great meaning within this ideology.

The aim of the first chapter is to sketch an analytical frame, a point of reference for judging eating practices. The ideas on what a meal *should* look like, and how our eating habits ideally *should* be organized on a daily basis often remained ideas, as appeared from the studies on the normative significance of the meal as they are reviewed in the first chapter. The respondents in these empirical studies admitted they could not always live up to these ideals. Nevertheless, these ideals remained very influential. Yet, it remains unclear to what extent this ideology has been put into practice by the large majority of the population throughout time and whether this ideology, this proper meal pattern, is less respected nowadays than it was before. If we have a clear understanding of what the structure of a proper meal pattern looks like, then we also have a clear definition of what the temporal, social and spatial deconstruction of our eating habits is to mean. If the implicit rules regarding the structure of the meal pattern are transgressed, then we meet with a symptom of the deconstruction of our meal pattern. In the **second chapter** of this study we discuss how the deconstruction of eating practices should reveal itself in this study. The central aim of the second chapter is to define these symptoms: what type of eating behaviour can be considered as deconstructed and what change in eating habits is to be considered as deconstruction, as a further diverging from the ideal structure of the proper meal pattern. This entails a clear operational definition of the deconstruction of our eating practices.

In this study, time use data are used to assess eating practices. To study deconstruction and change in eating habits, we need of course more than only data on current eating habits. Eating practices are a private experience and they are therefore difficult to access (Poulain, 2003a). We assume that time use data provide a reliable

source to test the thesis of the deconstruction of eating practices. Belgian and Flemish time use data from three research years, namely 1966, 1999 and 2004, are used in order to assess our eating habits in terms of change. The use of time use surveys imposes a number of limitations for the study of meal deconstruction. Self-evidently time use data are best used to tackle the temporal structure within human behaviour, although these data also allow for assessing the social and spatial characteristics of (eating) practices in a reliable way. However, the nature of the data used in this study does not allow for tackling the deconstruction of the meal's contents. The general question of the deconstruction in our eating habits also entails the question of what is eaten. What we eat and how this is organized in terms of courses and dishes is also subject to clear normative regulation. However, the data available here do not allow to investigate the contents of the meal. Therefore, this study is limited to investigating the structure of our eating practices on a social, temporal and spatial level. In the second chapter, the potential and the shortcomings of the data, used for assessing the thesis of temporal, social and spatial deconstruction, are discussed extensively.

In **the third chapter** of this thesis, the deconstruction thesis is researched in practice. It is investigated whether and to what extent Belgian eating practices have changed between 1966 and 1999 and to what extent this change is symptomatic of the temporal, social and spatial deconstruction of Belgian eating habits. Contemporary Flemish time use data are compared to the Belgian data in order to see if they sketch the same picture of contemporary eating habits. First, it is studied to what extent our eating practices have lost their temporal structure. This means we deal with the evolution of the tempo, the timing and the duration of eating practices and to what extent these evolutions attest to the temporal deconstruction of our eating practices. Secondly, we deal with the social context of eating and its evolution over time. The changing importance of various commensality types within the general meal pattern and within separate meals is discussed in view of assessing the thesis of the social deconstruction of Belgian eating practices. Finally, the evolution of the spatial context of eating in general and separate meals is dealt with.

Once we have tackled the main purpose of this study, namely the assessment of deconstruction in Belgian eating practices, a second question comes up, namely what are deconstructed eating habits-if any- due to? So far, little is known on the factors that

promote destructured eating practices. Mc Intosh (1999) argues that many texts on changing eating habits are of a rather speculative nature with respect to the factors that lead to meal deconstruction. They mostly just indicate the changes that could provoke meal deconstruction (globalisation, mass media, microwave oven,... ), without really establishing their proper effect on eating practices. Various trends are often only linked at the collective level, convincing public opinion that the increase in fast-food restaurants, ready-made meals, and other societal factors have automatically fostered the deconstruction of our eating habits. Poulain (2003b: 69) also argues that the question of meal deconstruction has often been expressed in too general terms, without a clear distinction between eating practices on the one hand, and societal decisive factors on the other hand. There is a need for scientific research to establish a connection between destructured eating practices and their reasons at the individual level.

The **fourth chapter** is a literature review that grasps the second research question central to this thesis, namely the reasons behind destructured eating practices. It tackles a number of factors that could provoke or necessitate another organization of eating practices than the ideal organization embodied by the proper meal pattern. The importance of each of these factors in understanding destructured eating practices will be studied in the fifth, the sixth and seventh chapters of this study. These three chapters are aimed at answering the second research question in practice. The first factor that could explain for another organization of eating practices is another value-system guiding eating practices. The hegemonic value-system, as proclaimed by the respondents in the empirical studies on the normative significance of the meal, would be on the decline. Fischler (1979, 2001) puts the deconstruction of Western eating habits down to the disorientation of the individual eater regarding food matters. Western eating practices would to a lesser extent be the result of the values governing our eating behaviour. Other social scientists (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992a) have partly grafted onto this thesis, claiming that there no longer is a hegemonic ideology governing our eating behaviour. The lack of a connection between practices and values would exactly be due to the lack of a hegemonic guiding model: it is not clear which values are to be taken into account. However, eating practices not only depend on a person's values and ideals governing eating behaviour. Practical factors also affect practices and may impede a person to put ideals into practice. In the fourth

chapter, we make an analytical distinction between changes in norms and changes in conditions. Although there is a strong connection between both, we distinguish between the level of norms and ideas and the level of conditions for reasons of clarity. Changes in conditions are the second factor that could foster another organization of eating practices. By this we understand a number of recent societal developments that could limit a person's ability to put values into practice: the increasing female participation on the labour market, the decline of the "traditional" family, and the changing character of work. These changes are believed to create a new situation which compels eaters to model their eating habits in another way than prescribed by the proper meal pattern (Poulain, 2002a).

Next to investigating to what extent the changes in Belgian eating practices reveal a deconstruction, this thesis also aims at assessing which factors have the strongest impact on the way eating practices are arranged. Again the emphasis is on the empirical study of the reasons behind deconstructed eating practices. A large part of this study examines the validity of the presumed reasons behind deconstructed eating practices, rather than testing the validity of particular theories. In the fifth, sixth and seventh chapter, it is therefore studied which factors affect the organization of eating in practice. The **fifth chapter** investigates the factors promoting temporally deconstructed eating practices. The **sixth chapter** explores the factors promoting socially deconstructed eating practices. The **seventh chapter** assesses the factors which affect the spatial organization of eating practices.

The analyses conducted in this study hope to reveal how eating habits have evolved in Belgium and in Flanders over the previous four decades. We expect that this study will contribute to the scientific debate on the deconstruction of eating practices, by submitting new material from Flanders and Belgium. We also hope that these analyses will help putting the alarming news on the decline of the meal and the degeneration of our eating habits, as launched trendwatchers and marketing agents and spread by the media, into perspective. The historical study of the proper meal should allow us to take the idea of the eternal, omnipresent proper meal with a serious pinch of salt.



## **Chapter 1 The structure of the “proper” meal pattern**

The central purpose of this study is to assess to what extent Belgian and Flemish eating practices bear witness to deconstruction and what factors promote deconstructed eating practices. Before deconstruction in eating practices can be assessed, the concept has to be defined. The main aim of this first chapter is providing a point of reference for defining deconstruction theoretically. In the second chapter of this study, we define deconstruction in operational terms and eventually, in the third chapter, the deconstruction of Belgian eating practices is assessed in practice. This first chapter provides a frame of reference for defining deconstruction in eating practices by investigating its antithesis, namely the structure that ideally characterises our eating habits. By deconstruction we understand a process of change in eating practices, implying a decline of collective structure. The deconstruction process assumes that we evolve from a situation of highly structured eating practices to a situation where eating habits are less structured. This process assumes a collective basis. To define the deconstruction of our eating practices, we first need a thorough understanding of the structure in our eating habits that is at stake here.

The concept of the deconstruction of eating habits was first introduced by professionals in marketing. The concept was however quickly adopted by social scientists (Fischler, 2001: 214; Grignon, 2001b: 18, Herpin, 1988: 503, Kjaernes, 2001a, Poulain, 1998). Fischler (2001: 214) considers the deconstruction of eating habits and meals as a process of increasing flexibility in the regularity, the composition and the course of meals. This process assumes that the traditional grammatics, governing the meal and food consumption, are ignored. Poulain defines the deconstruction of eating habits as a transition from commensalism to vagabond feeding. The first pole of the continuum of food practices, commensalism, is described as ‘a system of structured meals that are eaten in the company of other people 2 to 3 times a day and according to a strict ritual’(Poulain, 2002a: 54). The other pole of the continuum, vagabond feeding, assumes ‘a splitting up of food intake, into a combination of structured meals taken in a social context (i.e. where the individual seeks social contact) and regular solitary food contacts throughout the day’

(Poulain, 2002a: 54). The concept of destructureation includes a shift in the social organization of eating habits, assuming more flexibility instead of structure.

The above definitions of destructureation presume that our eating habits show a clear collective structure on a number of levels. In this study, we focus on the structure of our eating habits regarding time use, use of space, and social contact. We generally do not eat whenever, wherever and with whomever we like. There are cultural norms that tell us how to organize our meals. These cultural norms result in a collective structure, a collectively shared frame of reference, used to model eating habits. This collective structure, this set of conventions, provides daily life with a lot of predictability (Rotenberg, 1981: 25). In this first chapter, it is our aim to describe this collective structure in our eating habits. In a first section, we tackle the concept of the proper meal pattern. When eating habits take into account a clear structure on a number of levels, a clear meal pattern is believed to exist. A meal pattern reveals a structure on a number of levels. The temporal, social and spatial structure within our meal pattern are consecutively tackled in the second, third and fourth section of this chapter.

## **1.1 The “proper” meal pattern: the ideal structure within our eating habits**

### **1.1.1 The cultural embeddedness of the meal pattern**

Our eating habits are to a large extent modelled by cultural norms. As human evolution progresses, eating habits become more deeply embedded within cultural systems (Rozin, 1998b: 59). In modern Western societies, eating has even become a form of utmost refinement (Symons, 1995). Eating habits are highly organized. The first sociologist that was struck by the cultural embeddedness of eating was Simmel. According to Simmel, eating is both the most communal and the most selfish activity of humankind. On the one hand eating is a very egoistic pursuit, since anything an individual eats, cannot be eaten by another. On the other hand as a bare necessity of life, eating is an activity common to all humans. Moreover, eating is a shared event in the form of a meal, a socially structured event (Symons, 1995). The socializing power that emanates from eating together exceeds the egoism that is associated with everyone eating his individual portion. The social organization of the meal elevates it from a primitive event to an event focused on social interaction and supra-personal

meaning. It is exactly the sharing of the meal that asks for a given structure. According to Simmel, 'each step that leads the meal upwards into the direct and the metaphoric expression of the higher, synthetic, social values lets it thereby gain a higher aesthetic worth' (Simmel, 1994: 348). The meal stylization has no external purpose but to raise a materialistically egoistic event to the level of a social event. As such, Simmel considers eating from an individual plate as non-individualistic behaviour as everybody has the same plate. There is no room for individuality here and because of that, eating as an individual activity is raised to the level of a formal community (Simmel, 1994: 347). The meal's social character therefore entails its stylization and esthetization. Once our eating practices become a social event, they are governed by rules (Simmel, 1994). Analogously, Douglas and Nicod distinguish between food events and meals. Every occasion when food is eaten is a food event. And it is only when food is eaten as part of a structured event that we have a meal. Consequently, a meal is always a structured event, a social occasion, which is organized according to rules prescribing time, place, and sequence of actions (Douglas and Nicod, 1974: 744). According to Simmel, it is these structures, with whom we eat, when, how and what we eat that turn eating into a meal, turn it into an action of a higher level and therefore a subject worth of sociological study (Symons, 1994).

### 1.1.2 The meal pattern

Our eating habits are organized in a structured manner regarding time use, company and location. It is this highly structured ensemble of eating habits that we call the meal pattern. The concept "meal pattern" has been used regularly in the field of food and nutritional studies and it has been used differently by various scholars. Axelson (1976: 96) used the term to refer to the number and the timing of food contacts, their location and the company present. By means of this concept, Aymard, Grignon and Sabban (1996: 161-169) refer especially to the chronology of meals. The chronology of meals (within the day, the week or the year) is compared to the grammatics of a language: this structure has to be respected if eating wants to be a meaningful and intelligible activity. Bugge and Doving (2000) also equate a meal pattern with the temporal structure of eating through the day and through the week. In his book on food choice from a consumer's viewpoint, Marshall (1995: 269) refers to the daily

meal pattern as a ‘skeletal structure for the day’s activities’. Meal patterns relate to the organization of food and drink and can include the time at which the meal was served, the frequency of the event, where it was eaten, who was present, the order of the dishes and the food served at the meal (Marshall, 1995: 264). The concept of meal pattern is also used as an equivalent for meal format, which relates to the structure of the meal in relation to the courses and dishes served (Mitchell, 1996: 22; 1999: 874, Kjaernes, 2001a). The epidemiologist Neumark-Sztainer and her colleagues use the term family meal patterns to refer to the frequency of family meals (Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, Story et al., 2003: 318), but in a later study the concept is also used to refer to the priority of family meals, a positive atmosphere at family meals and a more structured family meal environment (Neumark-Sztainer, Wall, Story et al., 2004: 353-354). Prättälä (2000: 192) and Rotenberg (1981) use the concept of the meal pattern to refer to a daily pattern of a fixed number of meals, each characterised by a specific timing, composition and significance. Nutritionists Roos, Quandt and DeWalt (1993: 295) use the concept of the meal pattern to describe the organization of food and drink intake. This includes how often people eat, the nature of the foods they eat, the order of courses, the timing of the eating occasion, with whom they eat, where they eat, where they get their food and the process of meal preparation.

The abovementioned definitions reveal that the concept “meal pattern” mostly refers to the temporal structure of food intake. The daily meal pattern concerns the organization of eating throughout the day. Within a day, eating is organized in terms of meals. Meals are central to meal patterns and refer to eating occasions that are organized in a structured manner and to which a variety of rules apply (Marshall and Anderson, 2002). The structure in the meal pattern is to be found in the cultural rules that apply to eating habits. These cultural rules tell us how to model eating practices. They convey the picture of a proper meal pattern and tell us what our eating habits should look like. Eating properly refers to a complex of rules, among which ‘commitment to times, places and other people’ (Marshall, 1995: 274). A proper meal pattern assumes that eating is organized in terms of meals, i.e. structured eating occasions. In contrast to a meal, a snack is a spontaneous, unstructured event (Mäkelä, 2000) and it is not considered as an important part of the daily meal pattern (Roos, Quandt and De Walt, 1993). There are no rules with regard to company, content or temporal organization that apply to a snack (Douglas, 1979: 150; Douglas and Gross,

1981). One of the respondents in Charles and Kerr's study clearly expressed the difference between a snack and a meal as follows: "A proper meal is an occasion, for want of a better word, where everybody will sit down together and take time for eating a meal and do it properly, whereas a snack is something that you could just eat while you were doing something else and on your own, whereas a meal is, I think, an occasion" (Charles and Kerr, 1988: 20). A recent study in the UK showed that although there was a difference in meaning between snacks, snacking and snack foods, the three concepts all seemed to share a meaning that put them diametrically opposed to the concept of the meal. When respondents were asked to name a food or drink event that was no snack, snackfood or snacking, almost all named a meal (Chamontin, Pretzer and Booth, 2003).

### 1.1.3 The "proper" meal

Although the various cultural preconditions that turn an eating occasion into a meal are highly interconnected (Grignon, 1992), we have tried to classify these conventions into three broad categories, namely rules concerning the temporal structure, rules concerning the social structure, and rules concerning the spatial structure. The tripartite structure used here aims to be as inclusive and surveyable as possible, which is especially relevant for the empirical part of our study. Successively, the temporal, social and spatial structure of the meal pattern is tackled. We start by describing the temporal structure of the meal pattern, as this is the most essential structure within a meal pattern. In fact, there is no meal pattern, when we do not temporally - depending on the different timing throughout the day - distinguish between the various meals in the daily meal pattern. Each of these meals is then further characterised by specific cultural rules governing social contact and use of space, which are tackled in the following sections on the social and the spatial structure of the meal pattern.

Within sociological literature there are numerous references to the concept of the proper meal and its importance to a proper meal pattern. In this study, by a proper meal we understand an eating occasion to which rules apply, more particularly with regard to time use, social context and location. The idea of the meal as a structured event governed by rules of different types, is corroborated by various sociological studies. These studies are mostly aimed at grasping the normative significance of the

meal. They emphasize the socially constructed nature of the meal and its meaning for the people sharing the food (Marshall, 2000; Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 189). An overview of the most important empirical studies used here may be found in appendix A. Given the emphasis put on grasping the normative significance of the meal, these studies are mostly qualitative studies. Qualitative studies allow for deep investigation into the meaning of practices. In this chapter, these studies will be seen for what they are: a profound, enlightening description of the structure in Western eating habits. These studies will not be used to assess to what extent a particular practice can be generalized to the population. Instead, these studies are used to visualize the prevailing arrangements, to grasp the ideology, the set of conventions, governing Western eating practices. These studies approach the proper meal as an institution, rather than as a factual practice. The respondents in these qualitative studies admitted that they could not always live up to the ideals of the proper meal and the proper meal pattern. However, they strived hard to realize these ideals. Although the respondents in Charles' and Kerr's (1988) study could not always guarantee an ideal meal setting, they did their best to achieve this ideal and attached great importance to it. Analogously, De Vault's (1994) study showed that although the details (timing, place, conversation and informal and formal rules applying to the meal) of the daily meals varied between families, most people's ideas seemed to reflect the idealised versions of family life. In her interviews with respondents on eating habits and meals, Sjögren-de Beauchaine (1988: 22) noticed how easily a discussion on personal practices became an occasion to construct a model on how respondents would like their family life to be. These studies are used to reflect the ideal structure, how it should be, irrespective of how it is at a particular time.

Besides grasping the prevailing arrangements governing our eating habits, we also aim to tackle the non-arbitrary nature of these arrangements. This means that we pay attention to the way the proper meal pattern was institutionalized in Belgium through time. This involves historical inquiry. Unfortunately, scientific research on the temporal, social and spatial structure of the Belgian meal pattern is almost non-existent. This lack of material concerns sociological studies assessing the normative significance of the meal as well as historical studies on the institutionalization of the Belgian meal pattern through time. For that reason, the following sections are mainly based on scientific data from other Western, industrialized nations. The

institutionalization of the Belgian meal pattern and the temporal, social and spatial characteristics of this meal pattern cannot be disconnected from the specific social, economic and cultural circumstances in which this meal pattern has developed. Therefore, attention will be paid to the specific Belgian situation wherever possible. Nevertheless, we believe that the use of foreign studies is justified to sketch the development of a general Western European meal pattern. The Belgian meal pattern shows considerable similarities with the institutionalization of the proper meal pattern in other Western and European countries, particularly after 1950. These similarities concern both the temporal, social and spatial structure of the meal pattern as well as the social and economic circumstances that have promoted the development of such a meal pattern. In the following sections, we consecutively tackle the temporal, social and spatial structure of the meal pattern and how this has come into being in Belgium and in Western Europe in general.

## **1.2 The temporal structure of the meal pattern**

*‘Between breakfast and last nightcap, the food of the day comes in an ordered pattern. Between Monday and Sunday, the food of the week is patterned again. Then there is the sequence of holidays and fast (sic) days throughout the year, to say nothing of life cycle feasts, birthdays and –weddings’ (Douglas, 1997: 37)*

### **1.2.1 The meal structures time**

The temporal structure of the meal pattern assumes that food is taken in a regulated manner with regard to time use. This is mainly a matter of cultural convention, although first of all, it depends on the physiological needs of the body. To live, humans need to eat regularly, but the brain’s need for constant glucose supply does not require the human body to be fed constantly. With a glycogen stock that can bridge 24 hours at most, man’s biological rhythm has an influence on the temporal structure of the meal pattern. Such a long food cycle allows *culture* to model the timing of eating habits. As a result, the temporal structure of the meal pattern is to a large extent a matter of social conventions. In this respect, it is useful to distinguish between hunger and appetite. Man is biologically programmed to eat when he is hungry, that is when a biological sensation in the brain or the digestive system

announces an energetic deficiency. However, in contemporary Western society we hardly ever eat when we are hungry, but rather when it is time to have a meal. It is at these moments that our appetite arises. Appetite is not simply a biological sensation, but rather a general attitude towards meals (Rigaud, 2004: 5). ‘An individual’s appetite is his desire and inclination to eat, his interest in consuming food’ (Mennell, 1985: 20-21). In contrast to hunger, appetite is a psychological state, acknowledging that we should take care of our bodily needs, even when our body is not craving for food. Hunger, appetite, and eating do not necessarily succeed one another in a logical chain. Despite the fact that the human biological rhythm does not really ask for a very regular food supply, we are struck by the regularity of human eating habits. The temporal regularity in eating habits is a matter of convention, rather than a matter of nature (Camp, 1989). Not all societies are characterised by a collective temporal regularity in eating. For the Plains Indians of North America and the Mandan Indians, eating together was not part of the daily routine (Lowie, 1935 and Catlin, 1857 in Rotenberg, 1981: 27). The importance attached to eating at set times is not an eternal and universal characteristic of our meal pattern. The need for set mealtimes grew as social complexity increased and was again proclaimed by the higher social classes who wanted to distinguish themselves by their level of self-control and moderation. Set mealtimes were considered as a sign of an increasing emphasis on moderation and self-control (and hence, civilisation) (Mennell, 1985: 34; Elias, 1990; Mennell, 1996: 202).

#### **1.2.1.1 Timing: meals occur at set times**

In Western society meals are considered as delimiting activities. This means that meals separate other activities from one another and structure time. According to Arnold Palmer, meals are ‘the hinges of the day’ (Palmer, 1984: XI). It is not our watch that tells us what moment of the day it is, but rather the meals we eat. Therefore meals are considered as *Zeitgebers*, literally “time givers”. They exert a structuring influence on time and give meaning to time. Meals are social *Zeitgebers* that occur at collectively defined times and, as such, give rhythm to the course of time and, more particularly, to the course of the day. When dinner was taken in the early afternoon, it was morning until dinner was over (Palmer, 1984: XI). The meal has always been assigned an important role in the determination of time and even in the genesis of the

concept of time itself. According to Symons, it is highly likely that the human concept of time has a gastronomic base. The original meaning of the German word for meal, *Mahl*, is a set time. Prehistoric man is supposed to have eaten very anarchistically. Modern man, on the contrary, is believed to have a strict order of meals that divides the day in several parts (Symons, 1994). The meal's location at a set moment in time, that is the meal's timing, is very closely connected to the meal's social character. When people want to gather to share a meal, they need to time their meals- that is they need to fix a set time for the meal. The social skill of timing has developed throughout history to help people coordinate their separate time schedules. In order to bring their time schedules together for a given event, i.e. to synchronise their agendas, people need to give an answer to the 'when'-question (Glorieux, 1985: 3; Mennell, 1996). Meals can only function as a demarcator as long as they have a social character, more specifically as long as they synchronise people's agendas (Rotenberg, 1981).

While it seems to be characteristic of primitive societies to eat whenever a sense of hunger arises, the meal in a civilised society presupposes a fixed regularity as people can only gather for a meal at set times. Simmel (1994: 347) considers the attribution of fixed times to the meal as 'the first conquest of the naturalism of eating'. Temporal regularity is considered as an important sign of civilization. Zerubavel (1981: 6) refers to Lewis Mumford (1963: 269) who put it as follows: "The first characteristic of modern machine civilization is its temporal regularity", that is the institutionalization of proper times. The human subjection to collective temporal boundaries is the founding act of culture and 'The molding of biological tensions -especially hunger, thirst, and fatigue- by the social constraints of "proper times" for taking nourishment and sleeping is commonly one of the earliest phases of socializing the young, that is, securing their adaptation to the requirements of a social order' (Moore, 1963). The fixed timing of meals is thus an essential aspect of the temporal structure of our meal pattern. 'Eating whatever, whenever is a certain sign of savagery, once denounced by the prefects of the July monarchy in their reference to the farmers of the Perigord, who would boil a large pot of chestnuts in the morning and continue to partake of it at will throughout the day with no respect for any particular schedule nor any hierarchy by sex or age' (Aymard, Grignon and Sabban, 1996: 171). 'The major factor that determines when you will eat your next meal is not your blood sugar level, stomach rumblings, or something happening in your hypothalamus; the major determinant is

your wristwatch. Somebody sticks their head in your doorway and says “How about lunch?” Do you make a quick check of your body state? No, you consult your wristwatch’ (Bolles, 1990: 8).

#### **1.2.1.2 Rate: three meals per day**

If the temporal structure of the meal pattern assumes that the meal is fixed on collectively set times, only a limited number of such collectively set times can exist on a daily basis. People cannot gather to share meals twenty times a day. Such a high number of collectively shared meals is practically impossible. A society is not liveable if a very large number of times has to be reserved for the social sharing of meals. As a result, when a daily meal pattern exists, it is most likely composed of two to five daily meals (Rotenberg, 1981: 27). In Belgium, as in most Western European societies, a three-meal pattern is believed to exist. Eating “normally” in modern industrialised nations particularly means to eat all three meals, without skipping one (Rotenberg, 1981; Grignon, 1996: 226). A proper meal pattern assumes one takes a limited number of meals at set times, which entails the disapproval of eating at other times than those reserved for it (Fischler, 1986; Grignon, 1996: 226). We are very intolerant towards temporal anomalies, which occur at times other than the times they are normally expected to happen. This reflects the strict collective temporal structure within our lives (Aymard, Grignon and Sabban, 1996). The meal is anticipated exactly by the prohibition to eat at other times than mealtimes. The meal’s anticipation and its temporal delineation point to the meal’s importance. The limitation of food consumption to meals means that it is not done to eat between meals, and definitely not just before a meal (Camp, 1989; Grieshaber, 1997). Snacks in between are widely assumed to spoil one’s appetite (Fischler, 1996c), and therefore they spoil the importance attached to the meal.

#### **1.2.1.3 Sequence: first breakfast, then lunch and finally dinner**

In Belgium, the three-meal pattern is considered to consist of the sequencing of breakfast, lunch and dinner (Mebis, 1995; Mertens, 1997). It is the syntagmatic relationships between the various meals through the various units of time that give them their meaning and their name. It is the sequence, that is the order in which the

meals occur through time, that provides each meal with a name and a meaning. One can say: “It can’t be lunchtime. I haven’t had breakfast yet, and at breakfast itself cereals come before bacon and eggs. Meals in their sequence tend to be named” (Douglas, 1997: 40). Each of these three meals is characterised by a specific timing and a specific duration. Again, this has little to do with the physiological needs of the body, but rather with cultural conventions (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 105). On weekdays, the three meals come in the following order: breakfast in the morning, lunch at noon, and dinner, the most important meal of the day, in the evening (Mebis, 1995; Mertens, 1997). On Sundays, however, another sequence of meals applies, with the main meal of the day, Sunday dinner, taken at noon (Scholliers, 1993). We will go into the importance of Sunday dinner in more detail in section 1.2.2.2, when we deal with the genesis of the three-meal pattern.

#### **1.2.1.4 Duration: time (exclusively) reserved for eating**

The meal’s duration is also part of its culturally regulated temporal structure. A certain amount of time needs to be reserved for eating, if eating is to reveal a temporal structure. According to Lévi-Strauss, it is impossible to discern a structural pattern or logic within the eating habits when eating is hindered too much by practical imperatives like a lack of food or a lack of time. A set meal pattern can only be established when sufficient food and time to eat are available (Lévi-Strauss, 1969: 8-11 in Carroll, 1982). Brillat-Savarin already mentioned the availability of adequate time as a prerequisite for a good meal<sup>1</sup> (Ferguson, 2003: 12). The meal’s ritual and collective character guarantee that a minimum of time is spent on the meal. Spending adequate time with the family is an essential element in the ritual of the family meal (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 114). Herpin discovered that eating was highly valued when one was able to take the time to eat. This idea seems to be widespread and seemed to go for all ages, both sexes, and all social classes. In France, slowness is synonymous for having a good time (*bon temps*), it is a piece of quality time in the daily rush (Herpin, 1980), it is time out of time as Gillis (1996: 15) has called it. The

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<sup>1</sup> In his Méditation XIV Brillat-Savarin writes: “...*quelque recherchée que soit la bonne chère, quelque somptueux que soient les accessoires, il n’y a pas de plaisir de table, si le vin est mauvais, les convives ramassés sans choix, les physionomies tristes, et le repas consommé avec précipitation*” [however refined a good meal is, however sumptuous its accessories, there is no pleasure at the table, when the wine is bad, the meal partners gathered indiscriminately, sad expressions on the face and the meal eaten **in a hurry**] (Ferguson, 2003: 12).

ritualised duration of the meal is especially apparent for the main meal of the day, more than for any other meal. The ritualised duration of dinner will be tackled more deeply in section 1.2.2.

If eating is to assume a separate status as a meal in daily time use, this not only presumes that a certain amount of time is reserved for eating, but also that eating as such is the central activity during the time spans reserved for it, i.e. mealtimes. This entails that other activities are excluded from those time spans. In her famous article *Deciphering a meal*, Douglas has demonstrated the regulating character of the meal in directing individual behaviour: 'Meals require a table, a seating order, restriction on movement and on alternative occupations. There is no question of knitting during a meal. Even at Sunday breakfast, reaching for the newspapers is a signal that the meal is over. The meal puts its frame on the gathering' (Douglas, 1997: 41). Fischler equally points to the protective function of the social frame of the meal: '*L'effet de l'encadrement social des conduites alimentaires, il faut le rappeler, n'est pas seulement de contrôler les comportements mais aussi de les protéger: le rite culinaire et commensal isole un temps spécifique du manger, écarte donc nécessairement les autres activités et les renvoie à leur temps propre*' [The social frame of eating habits is not only aimed at controlling behaviour, but also at its protection: the culinary and commensal rite isolates time destined to eat, and necessarily excludes other activities at the same time] (Fischler, 2001: 215). To put it sharply, a structured meal pattern assumes that parallel activities are excluded from the meal. When other activities are performed simultaneously, eating loses its autonomy (Lemorel, 1992: 363).

The temporal characteristics of the meal pattern reveal the importance attached to eating in a given society. We agree with Rotenberg (1981: 25) that 'Duration, sequence and timing of activities, taken together, describe that aspect of the social system through which priorities are set, resources, especially labour resources are deployed and routine goals are met'. The temporal structure of eating assigns a separate status to eating as a culturally valued activity. By allocating a specific rate, timing, sequence and duration to eating by means of a proper meal pattern, eating is recognised as a separate activity and assumes an autonomous status in society. Conversely, activities like blowing one's nose, going to the loo or drinking water are not considered as activities with a separate status or priority. Although these activities

are just as well biological necessities, they are not given a separate autonomous status in daily time use, through the allocation of a specific rate, timing, sequence or duration. Aymard, Grignon and Sabban (1996) compare the temporal structure of the meal pattern to linguistic grammar rules. One can eat new foodstuffs just like one can use new words. This has no impact on the meal pattern or on a language's grammar. There is less potential for individual discretion with regard to the meal's temporal dimension as this would be hazardous to the meal's meaning and comprehensibility (Aymard, Grignon and Sabban, 1996). Not respecting the temporal structure of eating practices assumes that eating is stripped of its status as a culturally valued activity and loses its meal status. Although the ideas regarding the meal's temporal boundaries are hardly ever made explicit, they are important guiding principles in directing behaviour (Zerubavel, 1981: 7 & 22). According to Aymard, Grignon and Sabban, the temporal dimension of our eating habits is as essential as its content dimension. The old German saying that *Der Mensch ist was er Isst* [You are what you eat] should be changed into 'Tell me what you eat and when you eat it, and I'll tell you who you are' (Aymard, Grignon and Sabban, 1996: 170).

In the following sections, we discuss how the temporal structure of the three-meal-pattern with breakfast in the morning, lunch at noon, and dinner in the evening was institutionalized. The three-meal-pattern has not always been considered as the ideal meal pattern. This holds for Belgium as well as for Western Europe. When we look at it from a historical perspective, the three-meal pattern is a fairly recent model. We will try to grasp whether (and when and how) the three-meal pattern came into being, using historical research. Unfortunately, little research on that topic is available for Belgium. In fact, in general very little is known on how eating fitted into the daily schedule in the past, compared to the knowledge about what people ate in the past (Palmer, 1984: 2; Flandrin, 1996). Nevertheless, we consider it justified to search for the genesis of that meal pattern in other geographical areas but Flanders and Belgium. Clearly, there must be differences between the daily meal patterns of Western European countries and regions. The status of the English breakfast or the Oslo breakfast (as a social-democrat breakfast model launched in the 1930s) can hardly be equated with the Italian habit of breakfasting by means of coffee alone. Analogously, the institutionalization of a three-meal pattern in Austria cannot be fully equated with the institutionalization of the three-meal pattern in France. Self-evidently differing

socio-economic and cultural contexts result in a different timing of the institutionalization process, as well as in particular characteristics within each meal pattern. Still, historical evidence shows some clear similarities between Western European countries in the meal pattern that was institutionalized over the last centuries as well as in the social forces that promoted the institutionalization of such a meal pattern (Kisban, 1986). Particularly since World War II, socio-economic and cultural developments indicate converging habits and aspirations within Western Europe, in terms of purchasing power, working time, and women's participation in paid labour.

### 1.2.2 The genesis of the three-meal pattern

Before the nineteenth century, there was little proof of a general unique temporal frame of meals throughout the day, let alone of the three-meal pattern. The unique standard of three daily meals spread gradually throughout Western Europe as the nineteenth century progressed. Most historians agree on the fact that the sequence of meals was the most uniform aspect in European eating habits in the late middle ages, that is between 1300 and 1500. A two-meal system is believed to have existed at that time, with little essential variation according to region (Kisban, 1986: 2; Flandrin, 1996). This does not mean that all people only ate twice a day. Rather, two daily meals were considered as the proper meal pattern, as the number of meals that should be eaten. In a text from the fourteenth century, Baudet discovered the following quote corroborating that vision: *'Mengier une fois est vie d'ange et mengier deux fois le jour est vie humaine, et trois fois ou quatre ou plusieurs est vie de beste et pas de creature humaine'* [Eating once is an angel's life, twice per day is human, and three or four times or more is bestial and not of a human creature] (Baudet, 1904: 3 in Jobse-Van Putten, 1995a: 143). The idea of two daily meals was also supported by the Church. The two-meal pattern was based on two meals, dinner and supper (*dîner* and *souper* in French). Dinner was taken between 9:00 and 11:00 and supper between 16:00 and 17:00 (Edwards, 2000; Flandrin, 1996; Kisban, 1986:2).

From the sixteenth century onwards, gradual changes in the proper meal pattern emerged. Supper was postponed until a later moment. Between 1550 and 1714, the French elite moved supper from 5 in the afternoon to 10 or 11 in the evening

(Flandrin, 1996). Simultaneously, dinner also moved further down the clock. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, dinner around noon was considered as the main meal of the day (Jobse-Van Putten, 1995a, Kisban, 1986: 5). In the middle of the seventeenth century, a new three-meal system came into being. It was firmly established by 1800, when breakfast had become a set mealtime in the morning before starting work. As such, a three-meal-pattern came into being with breakfast in the morning, the main meal (dinner) at noon and the less important meal (supper) in the evening (Kisban, 1986, 6).

Gradually, the main meal, dinner, was shifted from noon to the evening. From his study of English tales, Palmer concluded that in 1780 the gentlefolk in England dined between three and five in the afternoon, and it was dinner that was the genuine hinge of the day, as it was by dinner ‘...’, and not by the sun, [that] the day was divided. [...] It was “morning until one dined” (Palmer, 1984: 12). By the second half of the nineteenth century, the bourgeois dinner had replaced the aristocratic supper (*souper* in French) and by the turn of the twentieth century, dinner had obtained a fixed location in the course of the day. On an average evening, dinner was to start between 19:30 and 19:45 (Palmer, 1984: 134). As industrialisation moved on, dinner obtained a new meaning for the Victorian bourgeoisie. From an exclusive manner to show one’s social status, dinner evolved to be a family occasion. Therefore, dinner was taken when father came home from work and marked the transition between working time and leisure time. By the second half of the nineteenth century, family time had become special time and had settled itself at the end of father’s working day.

### **1.2.2.1 Dinner, the main meal of the day**

The idea that the most important meal of the day is taken in the evening, is corroborated in various sociological studies, both in the UK and elsewhere in Europe (Bugge and Doving, 2000). Dinner is considered as the family meal *par excellence*, when all family members gather at the end of the day. As mentioned by Douglas, the importance of the meal is linked to its timing. The most important meal, which is meal A, is taken in the evening at 6 o’clock during the working week and at noon on Sundays (Douglas, 1982; Murcott, 1983c). The meal in the evening is the cooked meal and is also the most important meal of the day, as there is only one cooked meal

per day. The meal's repetition at regular intervals though time is essential to its family-constructing function, i.e. when a "traditional" household is involved (consisting of both parents and at least one child). Family meals work by instilling security through repetition (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 108). A study by Charles and Kerr shows that the cooked meal has to be served regularly, ideally on a daily basis (Charles and Kerr, 1986a). Murcott (1982b: 679) finds that although typically a cooked dinner is taken once daily, the norm is that it is served three or four times a week: twice or three times during the working week and once on Sundays. On Saturdays, the variation of reported activities is very variable from one household to another. As a result, eating is formalized least of all on Saturdays and the proper meal does not occur (Murcott, 1982b: 680).

During the working week, over seven in ten families in Charles and Kerr's study have their main meal in the evening, only over one in twenty have the main meal at noon (Charles and Kerr, 1988). Again, these studies detect that, resembling the origin of the family dinner in the bourgeoisie, the cooked meal in the evening during the working week is to mark father's return from work. In Western society, the meal was developed as an important demarcator within family life. As a family ritual, the meal was considered as a powerful organizer of family life (Bossard and Boll, 1966). Just like the little story before bedtime separated time awake and time asleep for young children, the family dinner in the evening was the demarcator of the end of the working day for father and the beginning of leisure time. The anticipation of father's return home from work had a great impact on women's and children's experience of the day. One could state that women's ordering of time was set up to enable men's ordering of time: women's anticipation and preparation at home enabled men's enjoyment of family time and his quality time with children. Therefore, dinner was to be taken punctually. The meal's punctuality was closely linked to father's homecoming and was thus taken seriously (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 106). The cooked meal is '...what must be ready for husbands as they come home from work, or for children after school' (Murcott, 1982a: 9). On weekdays, dinners usually coincided with father's homecoming from work, usually between 17:30 and 18:30. Mother prepares dinner and sets the table before father's homecoming. The baby is fed before father comes home, so the family could sit down for dinner immediately after father's homecoming (Dryer and Dryer, 1973; Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988:

87). Having a proper meal ready for the husband's return home from work or children's return home from school, is deemed essential to the health and happiness of the family (Murcott, 1982a). Analogously, when fathers are not joining the family for dinner, the meal was often taken at another moment than usually, since there was no reason for the meal's strict timing that day (Charles and Kerr, 1988).

#### **1.2.2.2 Sunday dinner, the main meal of the week**

Dinner, the main meal of the day, was not only characterised by a strict timing (punctuality), but also had a ritualised duration (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 106). The end of father's working day was emphasized by dinner as a relaxed, leisurely occasion, contrary to the hurried nature of the working day. The importance of the duration and timing of the main meal of the day are even more clearly shown on Sundays. In various sociological studies, Sunday dinner recurred as the proper meal *par excellence* (Charles and Kerr, 1986a). The importance of the main meal on Sundays in marking family time was sustained by its timing and duration. While the most important meal on weekdays was taken in the evening, the most important meal on Sundays was taken at noon (Murcott, 1983c). The idea of Sunday dinner as the most important meal of the week is again a fairly recent development within Western eating habits. Once more we refer to the rise of the industrial regime with its strict separation between work and leisure and the private and the public atmosphere. This regime promoted Sunday as the day for spending time with the family. The Sunday dinner, in the middle of the day, was to emphasize Sunday's homely and family character. More than on other days, the presence of all family members was expected on Sunday dinner (Murcott, 1983a), in order to reflect and reproduce the family. This also entailed more time was dedicated to that meal. Sundays could be seen as the day on which eating practices approached eating ideals in the best way possible (Morrison, 1996). Sunday dinner was the archetype of the proper meal (Charles and Kerr, 1986a).

*'Sunday was the only day the family had to itself, but it was not just the absence of work and school that made it special. Sundays provided not only more time for family but a different kind of time: slow time, unclocked time, time that, to fidgety children, seemed endless but that to adults, and particularly to men, was a time out of time. By*

*ritually positioning the big family meal at the center of the day, Sunday time flowed backward and forward in a manner different from weekdays, when everything led up to the evening meal. [...] But above all it was the ritualized predictability of Sunday that gave it a special quality. On this one day, families could feel themselves in the presence of their pasts and futures. Not only did the clocks seem to tick less relentlessly, but history itself was suspended'* (Gillis, 1997: 97).

Sunday dinner first spread under the bourgeoisie, which started in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was around that time that Sunday changed from a public day into a family day (Gillis, 1996: 8; Gillis, 1997: 98). Workers only started to pay attention to Sunday dinner somewhat later. They often lacked the time and the means to mark their Sundays by a special meal (Mitchell, 1999). It was only from 1900 on and, especially from the 1920s on, that the nutritional situation in Belgium and Flanders improved and that the practice of the Sunday meal was spread (den Hartog, 1987). In most European countries, Sunday became a free day in the beginning of the twentieth century (Rotenberg, 1981), although this day has had a special status (church attendance, less or no paid work) since earlier times. In Belgium, Sunday's rest was legally established through the law of 17 July 1905 (Maes and Van Rie, 1985).

### **1.2.2.3 Lunch, the meal of lesser importance**

Within the contemporary three-meal pattern, lunch is considered as a meal of lesser importance than dinner. Douglas termed the meal at noon, at 12:30 to be exact, on weekdays as meal B, since she considered that meal of lesser importance than meal A at the end of the working day (Nicod, 1980: 59; Douglas, 1982: 92). The same idea is corroborated in Charles and Kerr's study. Besides the main meal in the evening and breakfast in the morning, a third non-main meal was taken at noon (Charles and Kerr, 1988). The formal institutionalization of lunch had much to do with the change of timing in other meals. Due to the fact that dinner was postponed to a later moment in the day from the sixteenth century on, there was a need for introducing new meals earlier in the day. Lunch (*déjeuner* in French) replaced dinner as the meal in the middle of the day. Lunch was a less important meal compared to dinner and this was reflected in its less complex and less substantial nature. The working members of the

bourgeoisie often took a *déjeuner à la fourchette*, to distinguish themselves from the workers, who had a substantial hot meal at noon. Other members of the bourgeoisie responded to the problematic nature of lunch or *déjeuner* by multiplying the number of small eating occasions in between the real meals (Grignon, 1996: 210).

Until the end of the nineteenth century, the lower social classes continued to name the meal at noon “dinner”. Their eating habits were still to be summed up as *déjeuner* in the morning, *dîner* in the middle of the day and *souper* in the evening, rather than *petit déjeuner* in the morning, *déjeuner* at noon and *dîner* in the evening, as was the case for the bourgeoisie (Jobse-Van Putten, 1995a). Despite the fact that their eating habits had not evolved in the same way as the elite’s, the elite managed to force its sequence and terminology of meals on these groups (see also Douglas, 1997: 40), due to its social and political domination (Flandrin, 1996). According to Grignon, the bourgeois model becomes the national symbol in France because of the intellectual and political triumph of the ideals of the Enlightenment and the Revolution (Grignon, 1992). By the end of the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie obtained increasing influence all over Europe and tried to enforce its way of life on the entire society. First, the new three-meal schedule got spread within the social classes that had regular contacts with the bourgeoisie and the leading social forces (Grignon, 1992: 645; Flandrin, 1996; Grignon, 1996). It still took a while before the bourgeois pattern was widely spread in all social classes and to the farthest corners of the country. Rural areas were the last to accept the meal in the evening as the main meal of the day. A small-scale study based on memories showed that people in Flemish Turnhout between World War I and II commonly ate porridge rather than their main meal in the evening (Mebis, 1995). After World War II, the economic imperatives of industrial society pushed the lower social classes to take their main meal in the evening rather than in the middle of the day (Jobse-Van Putten, 1995a: 223; Rotenberg, 1981). Still, there are considerable differences between European countries as regards the status of the meal at noon. In the Southern part of Europe, the main meal at noon was maintained longer (Mennell, Murcott and van Otterloo, 1992: 70). In Finland, the hot meal at noon, a habit institutionalized in Finnish schools at the end of the 1940s, is the most important meal of the day. In Sweden, both lunch and dinner can be hot and the most important meal of the day, while in Norway and Denmark, the meal at noon is a cold event with the Oslo breakfast as a standard (Prättälä, 2000). In Belgium and the

Netherlands, the main meal in the evening became more widely spread from the 1960s (den Hartog, 1992: 17).

#### **1.2.2.4 Breakfast, the least important meal of the day**

The least important meal within the daily meal pattern is breakfast. Breakfast does not even enter into the meal system as described by Douglas. If asked, Douglas' subjects said they never had breakfast, just a cup of tea, just a piece of toast, and the like (Douglas and Nicod, 1974: 745). Breakfast is not often considered as a structured event: there are little or no set rules with regard to content, company,... (Douglas and Gross, 1981). Despite the fact that breakfast was the meal that was most often skipped, and with the least social character, breakfast is still part of the three-meal pattern that is considered as the ideal or the norm (Charles and Kerr, 1988; Grignon, 1996). In Flanders and Belgium, breakfast is also considered as an essential part of the daily meal pattern, being the first and least important meal of the three meals in the daily meal pattern (Mertens, 1997).

The institutionalization of "breakfast" is a fairly recent development in human eating practices. Around 1500, there was no sign of breakfast. The first meal of the day was taken between 9:00 and 11:00 in the morning, depending on the season, although this meal was not called breakfast but dinner (Flandrin, 1996; Edwards, 2000). According to some food historians, it is highly unlikely that nothing was eaten before that time, since most people started working much earlier than 9:00 in the morning. An eating occasion before dinner must have been common, especially for workers. Nevertheless, breakfast was not part of the prevailing two-meal pattern (Kisban, 1986). It was long considered as something that was not done, and was therefore often a secret eating occasion (Flandrin, 1996). It was only from the end of the seventeenth century when the daily work schedule was extended and dinner, the first meal of the day, was postponed till a later moment, that breakfast became to be accepted as a real meal (Edwards, 2000; Mertens, 1997). By the middle of the nineteenth century, breakfast gradually achieved a formal status (Palmer, 1984: 54). New drinks like chocolate, tea or coffee gave the elite the opportunity to turn breakfast from a new into a distinctive eating occasion. Breakfast assumed a formal status as the first meal of the day, that literally breaks the overnight fast (Pliner and Rozin, 2000: 37).

Gradually, the habit to eat before starting work was institutionalized by means of breakfast. By the end of the nineteenth century, the middle and upper middle classes in the UK took breakfast between eight and half past eight in the morning (Palmer, 1984: 73-74 & 129-130). Originally for the higher classes, breakfast was a long-lasting, leisurely, meal, taken late in the morning (Palmer, 1984: 11, 26). Later, by the middle of the nineteenth century, it evolved to be an earlier, more urgent event (Palmer, 1984: 72). As time moved on, breakfast became an urgent matter and therefore also a light cold meal, with its own distinctive foods. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the meal had turned into a very fast and early event (Mertens, 1997). The demands of paid work, together with the wider availability of coffee and bread, turned breakfast into a small meal with a standard format, namely coffee (or tea) with bread. The genesis of a single meal before noon, based on bread and coffee, was only spread in the rural areas after World War II. Due to the economic imperatives of the labour market, breakfast achieved an urgent nature. As such, it is no surprise that breakfast is the smallest and shortest part of our three-meal pattern.

In the first section of this chapter, we tackled the essential structure of our eating habits, namely its temporal structure. The temporal character of the meal pattern involves that eating occurs at set times, three times a day. Each meal has its own status, with the main meal of the day taken in the evening on weekdays and at noon on Sundays. The temporal organization of eating is closely connected to the meal's social structure. Sharing meals largely depends on the meal's timing. If people want to gather to share a meal, collectively set mealtimes are necessary. This means that the meal pattern as a temporally structured pattern also assumes a social structure. The social structure of the daily meal pattern is tackled in the next section.

### **1.3 The social structure of the meal pattern**

“*Sine amico visceratio leonis et lupi vita est*” [Without a friend, feeding is like a lion’s and a wolf’s life]

Epicurus

#### **1.3.1 Commensality: the meal as a social occasion**

One of the main characteristics of eating is its social character. Many scientists have pointed to the essentially social character of food in human relationships. According to De Garine, ‘It is in the nature of food to be shared; not to share it with other people is to “kill its essence and destroy it for oneself as well as for others”’ (De Garine, 1972: 154). Indeed, in contrast to animals, humans use food in social relationships. Meals bring people together to share food and drink. Sharing food and drink affirms friendship, ends hostility, celebrates and commemorates. The sharing of food turns the meal into a basic civilizing act, an act characteristic of humans, but not of animals. Humans have to tame their animal instincts that drive them to fight for the largest share of meat for themselves (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 73). Not to share one’s food is considered as animal behaviour. According to Simmel, it is the social character of the meal that elevates a physiologically basic event up to an event with supra-personal meaning. In Western tradition, the meal has been assigned a social function for a very long time. According to Mäkelä (1991: 90), the cultural idea of a meal includes the sociability of eating. Durkheim already drew attention to the importance of alimentary communion in (re)building a community, drawing upon ‘the Latin etymology of the word “companion”: com= together, panis= bread, or literally, ‘one who takes bread with someone’ (Falk, 1991: 56). In *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Durkheim argues that in various societies, shared meals allow for creating an artificial kinship by eating the same foods. As such, the meal rebuilt the meal companions’ organisms, that were now made up of the same flesh and blood, like blood relatives (Poulain, 2003b).

Eating together is considered as an important way to create new bonds as well as to confirm existing bonds (Chaline, 1992). Commensality, the shared consumption of food and drink, is held to signify togetherness, equivalence among a group that

defines and reaffirms insiders as socially familiar (Grignon, 2001; Mennell, Murcott and van Otterloo, 1992: 115). Commensality entails sociability. '*Accoudés à la même table (mensa), les commensaux se doivent d'être non seulement des co-mangeurs ou des co-buveurs mais véritablement des convives*' [Seated around the same table, the commensal partners are not only meal partners or drinking partners but real companions] (Thelamon, 1992: 10). Especially in political and religious contexts, sharing food is an important ritual. Attending the christian mass on Sundays is gathering to share wine and bread, to commemorate Jesus, and to affirm one's identity as a Christian. In Christian tradition, commensality is a sign of friendship, good will and reconciliation. Not surprisingly, it has an important part in the bible (Ryan, 1992). Initiatives like the "Great barbecue" on the Leien in Antwerp in August 2002, bear witness to the attempt to fuel the community spirit by sharing a meal (Het Laatste Nieuws, 08/08/2002). A shared meal with colleagues is invariably meant for teambuilding at work. Special meals like Christmas dinner emphasize the meal's social function. Yet, the same function is to be discerned from the daily, routine eating habits (Mennell, Murcott and van Otterloo, 1992: 115).

Within a meal pattern various commensal relationships can be discerned. Sobal distinguishes between commensal circles and commensal units. Commensal units are groups of people who assemble to consume meals, snacks or beverages. In contrast, commensal circles are networks of people that eat together on a regular basis (Sobal, Bove and Rauschenbach, 2002: 378-379). Analogously, Douglas discerns between family and friends on the one hand, and acquaintances on the other hand. Meals are not shared with acquaintances, but only with family and friends, while drinks can be shared both with acquaintances, friends and family. The meal is a reflection of intimacy. As long as the distinction between intimate friends and distant acquaintances matters to us on the level of social structure, the distinction between food and drinks matters to us on the level of meal structure (Douglas, 1997: 41). The meal asks for company, but not of whoever is available. The meal asks for a specific commensal circle. In this respect, the family is considered to be the commensal circle *par excellence*.

### 1.3.2 The family as the commensal circle *par excellence*

One of the most important commensal circles in contemporary Western society is the nuclear family. The family meal is considered as the archetype of commensality (Sobal, Bove and Rauschenbach, 2002). Kjaernes even identifies a family dimension as a *conditio sine qua non* of the meal. A meal has to be eaten by the family and a *proper* family meal justifies the existence of a *proper* family (Kjaernes, 2001a: 268). A meal becomes a family meal once the family is present for sharing the meal. However, not all meals are assumed to be family meals. This expectation especially holds for the main meal of the day, dinner. It is only recently that the meal, and more particularly the main meal of the day, has taken on a social character within the family. According to Gillis, it was only in the 1850s and 1860s that the family meal as an institution started to exist: 'Earlier, no one had thought of setting aside a special time for the family to eat together on a daily basis' (Gillis, 1997: 88). 'In the early nineteenth century, bourgeois households everywhere still ate on the run and only rarely in family groups. There was neither a time nor a place for the family dinner: the dining room as we know it had not yet been invented, and the big meal was still located closer to noon' (Gillis, 1996: 8). This does not mean that families had not been sharing meals before. But when this happened, it was for reasons of convenience, rather than for reasons of expressing and maintaining a sense of family solidarity (Marenco, 1992: 113 in Kaufmann, 2005: 86). Before the second half of the nineteenth century, the family meal did not assume the same regularity and the same meaning. Domestic eating was formalized and ritualized gradually. This happened not only within the upper classes, but also in middle-class households. Especially dinner in the early evening was highly ritualized and assumed its modern association with the family (Gillis, 1997: 91).

In Western society as a whole, the social structure of the meal pattern and the importance of the nuclear family as a commensal circle are essentially part of the bourgeois family ideology. This family ideology developed in a situation of proceeding industrialisation, a process that took place in all Western European countries, be it in somewhat different socio-cultural circumstances and with a different timing. Industrialisation fostered an ideology that associated men with the public realm of paid labour and women with the private realm of the home. The

private, caring family was there to protect family members against the heartless, competitive world. In this ideology, the role of women was reduced to creating a haven from the harsh realities of the commercial world. Women became highly dependent on their economically independent husbands. Women's dependency was considered as the norm: it was a sign of virtue and the only natural, decent state possible for a woman (Gordon and Nair, 2002). As the economic rationality of the labour market came to bear down heavily on men, the safe haven of the home was given growing importance. The inside world of the family and the home became more attractive as the outside economic world lost its attractiveness. Moreover, the culture of domesticity was fostered by a variety of societal forces. Feminists, educational reformists, criminologists, physicians and bureaucrats all saw many benefits in the home and the family, and they tried to convince men and women to withdraw into family life for happiness and comfort. Family life was promoted for its regularity, sobriety, and caring function towards children. The family as an institution could take care of a variety of functions and was very useful to society. However, the emphasis on the glorification of family life has always assumed a counterweight in the ideology of labour. From its very start the ideology of leisure and the family has always been in a battle with the ideology of labour (Lash, 1981).

The family meal became an important ritual within the glorified family life. In the second half of the nineteenth century, dinner became a genuine family meal, an institution aimed at creating a sense of family togetherness. As it became harder for families to spend time together at the end of the nineteenth century, with the husband working outside the realm of the private home and the children attending school, family time assumed more meaning and ritualizing (De Vault, 1994: 14-15; Gillis, 1997: XV). To guarantee its reproduction in terms of ideology, the family had to gather regularly, which included sharing meals regularly. 'Like all repetitive behaviour, dinner rituals have their communicative and didactic functions, lending to family an identity that time has threatened to take from it' (Gillis, 1997: 92). Women had an important duty to perform in guaranteeing the glorified family life (Scholliers, 1993: 123). Codes of behaviour and educational texts from the nineteenth century emphasized women's responsibility in creating a pleasant atmosphere. Preparing a meal was one way of creating a pleasant home, a place to rest free from work (Mc Intosh, 1999).

Originally, the family meal was seized for its disciplining role. Within the bourgeois family ideology, the family meal was especially aimed at transmitting the family culture (Feiring and Lewis, 1987). In contrast to the aristocracy, the middle class' status in society was a matter of achievement, rather than ascription. Education was judged essential as a means of acquiring status. In the same respect, the family was also considered as an important mechanism in passing on the various types of capital to the younger generation. Family meals have a key role to play in this transmission process (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 31). The cultural reproduction strategies of the middle class aim at defining the middle class as superior. The bourgeoisie often justifies itself by setting the standard for appropriate behaviour (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 42). Originally, the bourgeois family ideology was very hierarchical. This hierarchy was characteristic for society as a whole. The bourgeois status was affirmed especially by means of its hierarchically conscious behaviour. Like the servants, children were considered to be imperfect and even lower-level creatures. Not surprisingly, children's education was especially aimed at following the parents' example. Parents' behaviour was considered as the model. Especially the father, who was considered to be at the top of the hierarchical pyramid, demanded respect and obedience from all those hierarchically beneath him. Strict rules with regard to punctuality<sup>2</sup>, seating order, table manners and so on were followed and individual defect for whatever reason was inadmissible. Great emphasis was put on passing the family culture to the younger generation. This type of cultural reproduction not only assumed teaching children table manners. It also assumed that children learned the social structures and relationships and that they were taught how to function in society. Children gradually became aware of "their place in society" and their differences towards others (Corbeau, 1992: 118). As such, within the bourgeois family ideology, the family meal assumed a key role in modelling children's behaviour. Dinner time came to be like school with the Victorians (Gillis, 1997: 92).

However, entering the twentieth century, the bourgeois put less emphasis on hierarchy, and the family became to be considered as an anchor for the individual member rather than the other way around. The strict rules surrounding the meal

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<sup>2</sup> As was apparent for the whole time schedule in the Victorian era, punctuality was of uttermost importance (Palmer, 1984: 73-74 & 129-130).

became more casual. The family meal was no longer the moment *par excellence* for the hierarchical family ideology which subjected all its participants to a common discipline. Instead, the family meal became the chosen moment for family members to meet. It was only when the meal and its rules were no longer considered compulsory, that the meal assumed a real sociable, commensal significance (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988:179-185). The family meal was less and less solely aimed at introducing children in the hierarchical conscience and bourgeois ideology. During the first half of the twentieth century, order and hierarchy devaluated and became less important to the benefit of individual expression, the search for pleasure, and sociability (Kaufmann, 2005: 89). After World War II, the family meal was gradually modelled in a different way, given the general changes in family and educational ideology. From then on, children were increasingly considered to be equal partners. The centrality of children in general and, more particularly, during the family meal, implied the decline of the disciplinary model, which only took a few decades (Kaufmann, 2005: 111). Blind dutifulness and father's ineluctable authority were substituted by negotiation and equality between parents and children (Fallding, 1957: 11 in Coveney, 1999: 264).

As a result, there has been a declining emphasis on the meal as a learning environment. Gradually, family meals were seen as pleasant events for all family members, and this equally entailed greater emphasis on children's demands. Although this was often hard to realize, in general, the meal grew out to be more than just a harmonious experience for the husband. Although these ideas are presented as class-neutral, they are part of the modern values of the middle class (Deven, 1996: 66-67). These ideas originated from the situation and concerns of the dominant social classes: promoting the family meal as a pleasant event for the whole family aims at affirming the professional part of the ruling order (De Vault, 1994). Dryer and Dryer discovered that in the 40 middle-class families in their study, the meal ritual clearly displayed the values that society imposes on man. Children's valued status was shown by the fact that children were allowed at the same table with their parents to share a meal and through the fact that they were served by the parents and before them. Women are also seated at the same table as men (Dryer and Dryer, 1973). From his qualitative study with parents over children's eating habits, Coveney concluded that 'The need to keep children happy and to provide an enjoyable meal for them is often a priority

for many of these families. Mealtimes together were expected to be occasions in which the family came together to share not only food but also pleasant experiences. Respondents often justified the choice and freedom they gave to children by referring to a need to avoid unpleasant experiences' (Coveney, 1999: 268). However, despite the fact that the family meal is ideally considered as a pleasant occasion, this is not always the case. Murcott points at the reality of unpleasant family meals. Moreover, family meals are not always observed for reasons of family sociability, but sometimes also for other reasons such as economising (Murcott, 1997).

After World War II, the meal, and more particularly dinnertime, became to be considered as an encounter. Ochs, Smith and Taylor (1989: 238 in Blum-Kulka, 1997: 11) denoted dinner as an opportunity space: 'Dinnertime is a time when adults and children often come together after being apart throughout the day, a somewhat unique time period for many families wherein there is some assurance of a relatively captive audience for sounding things out. Dinnertime is thus an opportunity space- a temporal, spatial and social moment which provides for the possibility of joint activity among family members' (Blum-Kulka, 1997: 11). In their focus groups research with Flemish boys and girls aged 13 to 17, De Bourdeaudhuij and Van Oost concluded that eating a hot meal together at set times was considered as a real family affair, assuming talking and a pleasant get-together (De Bourdeaudhuij and van Oost, 1997). In Sjögren-de Beauchaine's study on the eating habits of the Parisian bourgeoisie, the idea of *le repas est un échange* turned up regularly. The family meal was the occasion to gather and to talk (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 142). The family should sit together round the table to share a meal, talk to each other and enjoy the food and each other's company.

Talking is an ideal way for the family to catch up with the experiences and stories of other family members. As the meal became emphasized as an encounter, rather than a learning environment, more emphasis was put on talking during the meal. Blum-Kulka found that the meal was especially praised for its opportunity to build relationships rather than achieving instrumental goals (Blum-Kulka, 1997: 36). Gradually the meal gained importance as providing a scene for conviviality and talking, rather than a means of discipline (Fischler, 1996c). In most families, talking is considered as an essential part of the meal (Serville and Trémolières, 1967).

Especially since World War II the meal assumed the role of a real speech event, that is a select moment for talking aimed at entertaining a pleasurable moment (Blum-Kulka, 1994: 6). Most table talk was aimed at information-seeking, asking what other family members had done during the day (Lewis and Fering, 1982). Blum-Kulka came to similar conclusions. Situational concerns with an imposed relevance only took one fifth of the family table talk. Immediate family concerns took a much more important place in the conversation (Blum-Kulka, 1994: 33-39). Information-seeking was of crucial importance in maintaining the family as a viable entity. Bossard already drew attention to the importance of the family meal as family council time (Bossard, 1943: 296).

During the last three decades, the idea that the proper meal should ideally be eaten ‘...by the family as a family...’ (Charles and Kerr, 1988: 17-18; De Vault, 2003: 1297) appeared in various studies in Western society. ‘In the typical conception, however, a cooked dinner is taken by family/household members together’ (Murcott, 1982b: 681). Nevertheless, Murcott found that mealtimes were often serial, i.e. with various household members eating at different times rather than together. Murcott argues that, although the serial organization of eating ‘may offend middle-class mores in which gathering the family for a meal is explicitly reckoned important’, ‘simultaneity is not the only way a meal may be shared’. The proper meal is shared just as well by the serial taking of a identical version of the cooked meal (Murcott, 1982b: 693).

The participation in the repetitive, structured sequence of meals is one of the central ways of expressing and experiencing one’s membership of a particular family. Meals reproduce the family, the nuclear family as well as the larger family (Charles and Kerr, 1988). The family is only aware of its boundaries to the extent that the boundary between insiders and outsiders is experienced. Sjögren-de Beauchaine’s study clearly pointed at the importance of the family meal as a means to continue the family (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 166-167).

Not surprisingly, the family meal only gains importance once a family is established. Sociological studies found that people’s eating habits tended to change considerably once they set up a family, through marriage or cohabiting. A study by Bove, Sobal

and Rauschenbach (2003) with newly married couples concluded that eating together was considered an important ideal that was searched for by all couples in the study. The meal had to be a shared experience in terms of the moment for sharing the food. A study by Kemmer, Anderson and Marshall (1998b: 200) in Scotland also found that once two singles had started living together the presence of the partner was deemed important. The opportunity to share a meal was highly appreciated by the couple and the increased opportunity to do that due to cohabitation, was seized: while only a quarter of the meals was shared with the partner before cohabitation, this changed into seven in ten meals once partners had started living together (Marshall and Anderson, 2002). Sobal, Bove and Rauschenbach (2002) discovered that it was the factual state of sharing a household that had an influence on sharing the same table, rather than the officially authorized state of marriage. By and large, creating a family gave rise to healthier, more regular, more elaborate, and more structured eating habits, in short to more proper meals and a stable meal pattern.

The studies on the normative significance of the meal revealed that the importance attached to the presence of the household members was not equal for all meals. This depended to a large extent on the importance of the meals. The more important a particular meal was, the more the presence of the household members was deemed essential. The presence of household members was the norm during the main meal of the day and especially on Sunday dinner (Kemmer, Anderson and Marshall, 1998a). As industrialisation moved on, dinner increasingly assumed the meaning of a family meal for the Victorian bourgeoisie. From an exclusive manner to show one's social status, dinner evolved to be a family occasion. By the second half of the nineteenth century, family time had become special time and had settled itself at the end of father's working day. The idea that dinner was the family meal par excellence, when all family members gather at the end of the day, was corroborated in various sociological studies. More than any other meal of the week Sunday dinner demanded the presence of all family members (Murcott, 1983a). However, eating together as a family did not always entail that *all* family members were present. In their studies of study of child socialization during family dinner, Dryer and Dryer (1973) required that all family members were present during the family meal. Analogously, in their study of the structure of mealtime habits, procedures, rules and roles, Feiring and Lewis (1987) equally focussed on mealtimes with all household members present.

Nevertheless, the majority of the households included in their study revealed that family dinner did not always involve all household members. Family dinner with all household members usually occurred only twice per week.

Contrary to what is found for dinner, the presence of the partner and other family members was esteemed less important during less important meals. The acceptability of eating alone varies according to the meal's level of structure and thus according to the meal's importance. Absence during lunch or breakfast is considered as more acceptable than absence during dinner (Sobal, 2000). Douglas' study showed that there are little or no set rules with regard to the company present during breakfast (Douglas and Gross, 1981). Other studies also showed that breakfast was the meal that was most often skipped and had the least social character (Charles and Kerr, 1988; Grignon, 1996: 226). In his investigation of English novels, Palmer saw the sociable character of breakfast evolve through time. Originally for the higher classes, breakfast was a highly conversational meal, often with guests invited (Palmer, 1984: 11, 26). Later, by the middle of the nineteenth century, it evolved to be a less social event. Guests were less often invited to breakfast and breakfast became to be a family matter, although it had 'little of the family likeness shared by dinner and lunch' (Palmer, 1984: 72). Breakfast is often defined as an exceptional meal, intended for children (De Bourdeaudhuij and van Oost, 1997). In contrast to Palmer's study of the late nineteenth century, Bugge and Doving conclude that nowadays lunch was not aimed either at marking family time. The meal at noon was more often taken with another commensal circle than the family. Colleagues or fellow students were more frequent lunch partners (Bugge and Doving, 2000).

The meal's social character not only assumes that the meal is synchronized, i.e. collectively located in time, but also that eating is located in space. For the meal to be a socially shared event, meal partners have to be at the same place at the same time. In the following section, we go into the spatial structure of the meal pattern.

#### **1.4 The spatial structure of the meal pattern**

Various sociological studies have pointed to the fact that eating is quintessentially a domestic activity. The domestic character of the meal is linked to its production as

well as to its consumption. The location of eating at home especially relates to the main meal of the day. For the respondents in Murcott's study, a proper meal was the same as a home meal: 'home is where proper eating is ensured' (Murcott, 1983c:80). The home preparation of the meal is an essential element of the proper meal (Mäkelä, Kjaernes, Ekström et al., 1999: 75). This idea was corroborated time and time again in studies on the significance of the meal. It marked father's homecoming from work and the relationship between the public and the private realm.

Various studies have shown that the proper meal was equally connected to a specific location in the home, which is the dinner table. The family meal is symbolically tied to the domestic kitchen and the dinner table (Warde and Martens, 1999: 117). According to Douglas, the meal's location at the dinner table has a constraining effect. The dinner table provided the necessary frame for the family meal and therefore excluded other activities (Douglas, 1997: 41). Murcott found that no specific location was reserved for the home meal. Nevertheless, Sunday meals were usually taken at the dinner table, while the husband was very likely to have his weekday dinner 'in an "easy" chair in front of the evening's TV' (Murcott, 1982b: 692).

Eating at the dinner table in the dining room is again a fairly recent phenomenon that suited with bourgeois ideology. The rise of the bourgeoisie not only influenced what was eaten, but also how it was eaten in terms of manners, ordering and the context of meals. As the bourgeoisie increasingly put its mark on society, the ritual of the meal became increasingly important and the dining room assumed a central role in bourgeois life. The bourgeoisie attached great importance to privacy in the seclusion of the home, as well as to the house interior (separate rooms for separate functions). This was connected to the growing interest for family life and the upbringing of children. As time progressed, family life became increasingly structured. The increasing specialisation of functions in different rooms and the wish to emphasize the social distance towards the domestic staff were reflected in the architecture of the home. The kitchen, in which primal needs were fulfilled, became clearly separated from the dining room, in which the highly controlled meal ritual took place. When the dining room assumed a central role in family life and the ritualising of the meal, its original masculine character was abandoned. For the first time in history, the dining room became the family room *par excellence* (Gillis, 1997). The bourgeois meal ritual

of the nineteenth century showed a high level of self-control and regulation. A strict time schedule was taken into account and the meal was tied to one specific place, which is the dining room (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 121-123). 'The dining-room is the symbol of nature transformed into culture' (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 123). Although the family meal was gradually considered as a central family ritual in Victorian families, children were not considered to be seated at the table with their parents until they could live up to the codes of conduct with regard to eating and talking (Bossard and Boll, 1966: 136; Margolis, 1984 & Matthews, 1987 in McIntosh, 1999).

As the twentieth century proceeded, the bourgeoisie was less committed to affirming its hierarchical status. The more egalitarian vision affected family relationships and the relationship towards the domestic staff. Self-control and the transmission of traditional values also became less important. Instead, family unity, development of the personality, efficiency, and pleasure were highly valued. As already stressed, this made the meal ritual into an event adjusted to the needs and preferences of its participants, rather than an event autonomously disciplining its participants as before (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 124). The more relaxed nature of the meal ritual connected to the disappearance of the domestic staff also affected the location of the meal. The kitchen came to assume a more central role in family life and family meals, while the dining room assumed more formality. The kitchen came to be considered as the most efficient location for a relaxed family meal. The kitchen fits in better with the demands of modern life. As the kitchen assumed a more central role in family life, serious efforts were made to give it a more pleasurable character (Southerton, 2001).

In Charles and Kerr's study, the majority of respondents ate dinner at the dinner table, which was considered as the ideal location. Almost 75 percent ate at the table during the week and even over 80 percent was at the dinner table for the proper meal on Sundays. The location of the meal at the dinner table was thus especially essential for the main meal of the day, and more particularly for dinner on Sundays. The location of dinner at the dinner table was especially emphasized by young families with children. The main reason for that was the fact that control over the children could more easily be exercised within the structured framework of the dinner table than in any other location. Family meals with all family members gathered round the dinner

table tended to pass smoothly. In families that did not eat at the table, order and discipline were often lacking. The dinner table was a controlling frame, excluding certain types of behaviour and prescribing specific behaviour as long as one was at the table.

Since the rise of the bourgeoisie, another location but the home place has assumed an important role as an eating location, namely the restaurant. Eating out has been practised for a very long time. Originally, meals at inns were only taken by men who were away from their families. Like the proper meal at home, the restaurant meal was highly promoted as desirable behaviour (by the bourgeoisie) from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. Since that time, eating out has become within reach of an increasing part of the population and this process is likely to result in eating out assuming new meanings. Eating out no longer asks for immediate display as before with the bourgeoisie. Warde, Martens and Olsen (1999) argue that this practice does not contain the same symbolic messages for the various social classes. For that reason, eating out becomes less effective as a means of affirming one's status towards other social classes. The higher social classes use the restaurant meal as a means to exchange cultural capital with other members of the same social class and as such to increase their social or economic power (Warde, Martens and Olsen, 1999; Lupton, 2000a). Restaurant meals are often used to eat with friends and acquaintances. Restaurants also assume an important role as the location for business lunches. The restaurant is considered as the ideal location for such meals: it tends to neutralise all relationships and obligations of family life (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 172). In contrast to the homemade meal, the restaurant meal was considered as a commercial affair, a commodity service that was bought in exchange for money. However, nowadays, restaurants also aim at families (Mc Intosh, 1996) and eating out in restaurants assumes a more sociable character (Caplan, 1997; Warde and Martens, 1999: 121). In their qualitative study on the experience of eating out, Warde and Martens discovered that for a large majority of respondents (82 percent), eating out was a pleasurable event, due to the absence of domestic duties and the responsibility to cook.

Despite the fact that restaurant meals have become within the reach of an increasing part of the population and despite the important meanings they have assumed in the

twentieth century, we will not focus on restaurant meals in this study. The reason for this is the exceptional nature of restaurant meals. In contrast to home meals, meals in restaurants are considered as exceptional. Through in-depth interviews that probed the meaning of eating, Warde and Martens came to the conclusion that most respondents did not want to increase the frequency of eating out in restaurants in order to maintain the special character of this type of meals. The singularity of the restaurant meal contrasted with the routine character of the home meal (Martens and Warde, 1997; Warde and Martens, 1999). In this study we focus on the organization of daily eating practices. In our view, eating out is generally not essential to day-to-day eating practices.

### **1.5 Conclusion: the “proper” meal pattern as a historic anomaly but an important social institution**

In this chapter, we have discussed the emergence of the present-day proper meal pattern. The reading of various sociological studies that aimed at grasping the normative significance of the meal has resulted in a clear insight into what a proper meal pattern should look like. From these studies we gathered a frame of reference, a collective ideology that governs our eating habits. This frame of reference reveals a clear structure in our eating habits on a temporal, social and spatial level. Nowadays, in Western Europe, a proper meal pattern consists of three daily meals, namely breakfast, lunch and dinner. Dinner is the most important meal of the day, which is revealed by stricter rules concerning time use, social contact, and location. The main meal of the day, dinner, should be located in the evening on weekdays, take a considerable amount of time, be shared with family members, and take place at the dinner table at home. For breakfast and lunch, these rules apply to a lesser extent.

The studies reviewed in this first chapter are not aimed at drawing generalisable conclusions on eating practices. Here, they were not read as such either. The respondents in the various studies claimed not to be able to put these ideals embodied by the proper meal pattern or the proper meal in practice on a daily basis. De Vault's (1994) study showed that although the details (timing, place, conversation and informal and formal rules applying to the meal) of the daily meals varied between families, most people's ideas seemed to reflect the idealised versions of family life.

The ideas regarding a proper meal often remain ideas, but they still remain very influential. They were considered as important guidelines for modelling eating practices.

This study is aimed at getting a view on the change in eating practices in Flanders and Belgium over the recent decades and at assessing to what extent this change reveals destructureation. In order to get a view on the change in *practices*, we need another type of information than the information provided by the studies discussed in this chapter. In this study, we study *practices* rather than *ideals and norms*. Nevertheless, the frame of reference gathered from these qualitative studies will not only prove very useful, but also necessary in assessing the evolution in eating practices. The proper meal pattern as described in this chapter is often wrongfully considered as the traditional meal pattern. Indeed, by traditional we understand 'a long-established behaviour of the vast majority of the population' (Warde, 1997: 62). Historical studies on the genesis of the three-meal pattern, as discussed in this chapter, have clearly shown that this meal pattern is not such an ancient, and therefore not a *traditional*, practice. The three-meal pattern with the main meal taken at set times together with the family is a model, an ideology, rather than a practice. These essentially bourgeois ideals were especially put into practice by the bourgeoisie and generally not by the common man. Historical evidence negates the widespread and ancient practice of the three-meal pattern. Despite the fact that the three-meal pattern and family dinner at the dinner table are awarded a traditional character in the public mind, this manner of eating is more of a historic anomaly (Murcott, 1997). It is *traditional* only in the sense of a taken for granted, unconscious way of eating, but not as a mechanically repeated way of eating for a large share of the population.

In her study of the Parisian bourgeoisie, Sjögren-de Beauchaine has shown that although the meal ritual is a frame of reference that is passed on from one generation to the next, this transmission is not a passive process. Tradition is updated according to the situation and the individuals involved (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988). The family meal as we know it today only came into being once the nuclear family itself assumed a central role in Western society (Gillis, 1997: 88). The importance of the nuclear family as an institution of socialization was strongly connected to the rise of the bourgeoisie and its distinguishing lifestyle and ideology. The development of this

type of society was itself the result of economic and political processes. As the political power in society changed and the bourgeoisie no longer felt the need to emphasize values like discipline and punctuality, this also had its impact on the family meal: from a purely disciplining learning ground it changed into a valued encounter between family members. In the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie managed to make the meal system more uniform and more ceremonial. Conforming to this model became symbolic of the bourgeoisie, and through behaving as such, one was recognised as a bourgeois. Therefore, the three-meal pattern with the main meal taken at set times together with the family is a symbol of the bourgeois society (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1986: 54). The dominance of the bourgeoisie and its emphasis on values like regularity and discipline were of utmost importance in the spread of the three-meal pattern, based on breakfast in the morning, lunch in the middle of the day and the most important meal in the evening (Flandrin, 1993). Before the three-meal pattern was widely spread, Western European eating habits were characterised by a high level of diversity, according to social class, area, sector of employment, season, and so on. The bourgeois emphasis on hygiene, regularity, and discipline promoted the three-meal pattern as the ideal meal pattern, showing national unity (Poulain, 2001). The idea of the family meal spread only gradually from the bourgeoisie to the lower social classes, and this did not automatically entail that working-class families pursued the same practices. Working class women were not really keen on domestic science classes when they first appeared in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and material circumstances often prevented the bourgeois ideology to be put into practice. For a long time, the family meal could not be put into practice by the majority of the population. Instead, food scarcity and malnutrition were everyday fare. The lack of time, food, and cooking skills prevented many women from serving a proper meal.

Despite the middle-class character of the proper meal and the proper meal pattern, historians seem to agree on the fact that this practice was put into practice by a large majority of the population during a relatively short time span. Generally the 1950s, and sometimes also the 1960s, are considered as the high days of the family meal. This period is believed to show a unique national, widespread three-meal pattern based on the idea of the family meal. A number of historians agree on the fact that never in the history of human eating habits had there been a sign of such homogeneity

(Bugge and Doving, 2000; Flandrin and Montanari, 1996; Jobse-Van Putten, 1995b, den Hartog, 1987). In the 1950s, the bourgeois acculturation process, i.e. the spread of the ideology of the bourgeois three-meal pattern and family meal throughout all social groups, is believed to have reached its apogee. The traditional family also passed through its high days in the same period. However, the proper meal pattern, as it is believed to exist in the 1950s and as it was found in people's ideology in various sociological studies on the significance of the meal, is believed to be under serious pressure nowadays. The 1960s are often considered as a turning point: a rather homogeneous eating pattern had to clear the way for an unknown diversity of eating habits (Jobse-Van Putten, 1995b). Social scientists seem to agree on the fact that the proper meal had barely institutionalized itself and it was already contested. '*A peine valorisée, étiquetée, ritualisée, "intimisée" et socialisée à la fois, la table est vite contestée au XXe siècle*' [Barely valorised, labelled, ritualised, familiarised and socialised at the time, the meal is soon under fire in the twentieth century] (Lemorel, 1992: 363).

However, social scientists do not agree on the level of change in eating practices. This will be tackled more deeply in chapter 2, more particularly section 2.2. In this study our central aim is to assess to what extent the change in eating practices over the last decades can in fact be considered as a process of destructureation. In this study, the ideal of the three-meal pattern with the main meal taken at set times together with the family is used as a frame of reference, that will allow for generating operational hypotheses on the destructureation of our eating practices. In her study, Sjögren-de Beauchaine (1986: 55) found that for many bourgeois, this model remained the standard, '*le critère suivant lequel on mesure la situation actuelle*' [the criterion by which the contemporary situation is judged]. The existence of such widespread conventions clearly demarcates the important aspects in Western eating habits. Therefore, the temporal, social and spatial structure in Western and Belgian eating habits, as deduced from the studies on the normative significance of the meal, is used as an analytical construct. Like Mäkelä, 'our aim is to analyse actual modern eating practices by using the construct of proper meals embedded in earlier theoretical discussions and empirical findings' (Mäkelä, 2001: 135). Given the resemblances between studies from various countries and taking into account the various contexts in which these eating habits developed, it seems correct to use the various studies in

constructing a typology, a point of reference for a study assessing the level of destructure in eating practices.



## **Chapter 2 The deconstruction of the meal pattern assessed by means of time-use data**

In the previous chapter, we have sketched the collective frame of reference governing Western eating habits. This collective structure was to a large extent inferred from qualitative studies that are aimed at grasping such an ideology. However, this ideology is not necessarily turned into practice. There are a number of other factors besides ideology that affect practices. This study is focussed on practices and changes in practices. More particularly, it is our aim to see to what extent the recent evolution of eating practices reflects a loss of structure, more particularly, to what extent the temporal, spatial and social structure of the meal are taken into account less than before. Such an evolution is characterised as a deconstruction of eating habits. When the evolution of eating practices is to be considered as moving away from the ideal structure governing Western eating habits, then this change is considered as a proof of the deconstruction of Western eating habits. In this chapter, we tackle the operational definitions of the deconstruction of the Belgian meal pattern. To assess the process of deconstruction within the Flemish and the Belgian population, we need generalisable data. Therefore, we prefer a quantitative approach, based on time-use data. In a first section, we go into the opportunities and shortcomings of time-use data for grasping the deconstruction of Belgian eating practices. We also describe the various time-use datasets used in this study. In a second section, we specifically tackle the hypotheses on the deconstruction of the Belgian meal pattern.

### **2.1 Meal deconstruction questioned through time-use data**

Time-use surveys are a fairly recent type of social surveys, compared to questionnaire surveys. In Belgium, the first nationally representative time-use survey was conducted in 1966. This study was part of the Multinational Comparative Time-Budget Research project, considering time use in 12 different countries (see also: Szalai, 1974). The fieldwork of this study was co-ordinated by Pierre Feldheim and Claude Javeau at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (see also: Javeau, 1970). The next nationally representative study in Belgium was only conducted 33 years later. In 1999, the National Institute for Statistics conducted a large-scale study on time use among the

Belgian population. The fieldwork was co-ordinated by the National Institute for Statistics. The research group TOR, more particularly Ignace Glorieux and Jessie Vandeweyer, accepted the preparation of the dataset and the processing of the data (see also: Glorieux and Vandeweyer, 2002). The TOR research group specializes among other things in the study of time and time-budget studies, hence its name *Tempus Omnia Revelat* (TOR). Since its formation in 1982, this research group had already conducted two small-scale time-use surveys (one in 1984 and one in 1988) with specific samples of the population. However, a large-scale time-use survey was for a long time impossible. The financial burden of this type of study was too large to be carried by the funds for scientific research, while policy makers did not show much interest in this type of data. It was only in 1997 that sufficient financial means were made available by the Flemish government to organize the first large-scale time-budget survey in Flanders in 1999. The first large-scale time-use study in Flanders was conducted as a part of the research project “The time use of the Flemings: a time-use study among a representative sample of Flemings” (“*De tijdsbesteding van de Vlamingen: een tijdsbestedingsonderzoek bij een representatieve steekproef van Vlamingen*”) and was financed by the Policy Oriented Research Program of the Flemish Government (*Programma Beleidsgericht onderzoek van het Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap* (PBO97/3/109)). The co-ordination of the fieldwork and the preparation of the study and the data were executed by the TOR research group, more particularly by Ignace Glorieux, Suzana Koelet and Maarten Moens. More information on this study can be found in the technical research report of the study (Glorieux, Koelet and Moens, 2000). Somewhat later, in 2004, a sequel study of the 1999 time-use survey was conducted as part of the same research project (“*De tijdsbesteding van de Vlamingen: een tijdsbestedingsonderzoek bij een representatieve steekproef van Vlamingen*”), which was financed by the Policy Oriented Research Program of the Flemish Government (*Programma Beleidsgericht onderzoek van het Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap* (PBO99B/4/25)). The co-ordination of the fieldwork and the preparation of the study and the data were again accepted by research group TOR, more particularly by Ignace Glorieux, Joeri Minnen and Jessie Vandeweyer. More information on this study can be found in the technical research report of the study (Glorieux, Minnen and Vandeweyer, 2005). The research group would like to continue time-use research in Flanders on a five-year basis as is

the case in the Netherlands, although currently there is no financial security on the continuation of this type of research in Flanders.

So far, time-use data have been scarcely used to study eating habits. Eating habits, both practices and attitudes, have mainly been studied by means of qualitative research methods like in-depth interviews or quantitative methods like questionnaires. Although time-use data have been collected in many Western countries since a few decades, eating was seldom focused on by means of that type of data. If this type of data was used to say something on eating practices, this occurred almost exclusively in terms of the time spent on food-related matters like eating and cooking (Scholliers, 1996; Javeau, 1970). Here we focus on the distinctive features of time-budget data for studying practices, in particular eating practices. Eating has long been treated as a trivial activity by many (time use) scholars. Only recently, time use scholars started paying more extensive attention to trivial activities like sleeping (Robinson and Godbey, 1997; Dinges, Fomberstein, William et al., 2005; Michelson and Frederick, 2005; Zuzanek, 2005) and eating (Hamermesh, 2005). In 2004, a Food and Eating Module was even included in the American Time-use survey (Hamrick, Andrews and Guthrie, 2005). Food historians and sociologists have concentrated on what we eat for quite some time. However, the organizational and temporal aspects of eating have long been neglected. Except for scholars like Herpin (1980; 1988) and Grignon (1992), little attention was paid to that aspect of the meal. At the end of the 1980s, growing attention was paid to the temporal aspects of eating. Aymard, Grignon, and Sabban started to reflect on the structuring role eating has on social time, but also on the increasing importance of the time that is allocated to eating. They decided to organize a round table on this subject in October 1989. This eventually led to the publication of a standard book on the temporal aspects of eating (Aymard, Grignon and Sabban, 1993). Despite this new focus of attention, the extensive use of time-budget data in mapping eating behaviour is still rather exceptional. In a Workshop on Diffusion of Cultures of Consumption, organized by CRIC, the Centre for Research on Innovation and Competition, co-director Warde and his colleagues were surprised by the fact that time-use data had not been used more often to understand the practice of eating. Since 2004, they themselves have made ample use of time-use surveys (Cheng, Olsen, Southerton and Warde, 2005, 2007). Scholars like de Saint Pol (2003; 2005a; 2005b) have also shown that time-use data offer ample possibilities to study

eating habits, like investigating the timing of meals or the sequence of activities during meal periods.

In this section, we will try to show the potential of time-use data in grasping the question of the deconstruction of our eating habits. Therefore, we first discuss various parameters of temporal ordering. We consider how these parameters of temporal ordering can be assessed by time-use data and what they mean for the study of meal deconstruction. Secondly, we discuss the various datasets used in this study and their importance and shortcomings in assessing the deconstruction of the Belgian meal pattern.

### 2.1.1 The parameters of time-use data

Time-use studies are aimed at grasping respondents' daily time use. Respondents are asked to register every activity they have performed in a time-use diary. Generally, the diary period for time-use studies is restricted to one or more days or one week. Time-budget diaries are believed to be a valid method to register people's time use on a large scale level (Converse, 1968; Kalfs, 1993; Robinson and Godbey, 1997; Gershuny and Sullivan, 1998). We assume that time-use data provide a good basis to tackle the question of meal deconstruction. Eating is a rather private activity, which is rather difficult to grasp. Nevertheless, we believe that the time diary method provides a good source to get a view on eating practices, which essentially relate to the way eating is organized in a person's time use.

The time-diary method assumes immediate reporting of all activities. This method decreases the likelihood that the data are distorted in a number of areas. Immediate registration makes it less likely that errors occur due to a failing memory, as is often the case when using a recall-method. Moreover, immediate registration of all activities makes errors due to social desirability somewhat less likely. The respondents, who fill in the time-use diary, are not exclusively focussed on their eating practices, since they have to register all their activities. Compared to food-diary studies, that only register eating occasions, or specific questionnaire questions where attention is exclusively drawn to eating behaviour, socially desirable answers are less likely in time-use diaries.

Time-use diaries are especially aimed at grasping the temporal aspects of people's behaviour by assessing the beginning time and ending time of a primary activity. The primary activity is the main activity a respondent engages in during a given time span. However, time-use diaries also grasp important information on the context of an activity, like the company present during an activity or the company involved in a conversation during an activity, the location of an activity and possibly also the secondary activity occurring simultaneously. The location of an activity is essential in grasping the spatial dimension of the meal, whereas the interaction partner(s) present is essential in outlining the social dimension of the meal. Other large-scale datasets like household budget data or food diaries often lack the possibility of contextualizing the eating occasion; eating practices are mostly assessed in terms of caloric and financial expenses. The availability of contextual information on eating is of fundamental importance for a study that aims at investigating the social and the spatial structure of eating practices.

Nevertheless, time-use data reveal some shortcomings with regard to the contextual information. This information is not always very precise due to the fact that answering possibilities only allow for a certain extent of precision. The time-budget surveys used in this study distinguish between various types of company, without allowing to specify the number of persons present. For example, people can register whether their children were present during the meal, but it is not known from that information whether all, some or just one child were present. Analogously, in most time-budget surveys, it is impossible to know, when parents were present, whether both or only one parent were present. The same holds for the location of an activity. In the time-budget surveys used in this study, respondents are asked to choose between a limited number of generally suitable locations: the home, the workplace, other people's houses, a public eating place or another location. The spatial context of an activity is thus not registered in great detail. Therefore, one needs to fall back on questionnaire data for more specific information on the location or social contact of activities. To assess the specific location of eating, we will take into account the information gathered by the questionnaire included in the Flemish time-use survey of 2004.

Thus, we believe that time-use data essentially provide a good basis to assess eating practices and more particularly their temporal, social and spatial structure. Nevertheless, time-use data are not suited to assess every aspect of meal deconstruction in a thorough manner. In the next sections, we investigate what type of information can be deduced from the time-use surveys, and how this adds to solving the question of meal deconstruction. As time-use studies are primarily aimed at grasping respondents' daily time use, they are best suited to reveal the temporal order in a person's behaviour. In general, four parameters of temporal ordering are discerned, namely tempo or rate, duration, sequence and timing (Glorieux, 1985:3; Moore, 1963; Zerubavel, 1981). These parameters are discussed below, assessing their importance and their limitations for questioning meal deconstruction.

#### **2.1.1.1 Rate or tempo**

The tempo of an activity is the frequency of that activity during a particular period of time (Moore, 1963: 8). The more an activity occurs within a certain time span, the higher the tempo or the rate of this activity. The tempo of events is closely connected to the cycle of events. In the first chapter of this study, we have argued that the ideal meal pattern consists of a cycle of three daily meals. This daily rate of eating is not a biological necessity but a cultural convention. Time-use data are well suited to grasp the rate of activities that occur on a daily or a weekly basis, depending on the length of the diary period.

*Time-use data are less suitable to learn about activities with a low tempo*

In general, time-use data present a reliable picture of activities that occur on a regular basis, but they are less suitable to grasp activities that occur less frequently. Practices that do not occur on a regular basis, like going to the movies or eating out, cannot be grasped well by means of time-use surveys. Although activities like eating out, going to the movies or visiting a museum are registered as such in the time-use diary, the registration period of a week at most is too short to get a reliable picture of activities with a low tempo. The respondents who engage in such an "exceptional" practice within the registration period are not necessarily the ones who engage in such a practice on a regular (i.e. daily or weekly) basis. The impossibility to grasp particular types of activities by means of diary registration, due to their exceptional character in

time, is a problem well-known in time-use research and more particularly for studying culture participation (van den Broek, Knulst and Breedveld, 1999: 29; van den Broek, Breedveld and Huysmans, 2001: 46). For that purpose, a question on the frequency of cultural practice is often included in the accompanying questionnaire of the time-use survey.

*A random day or week is not always a representative day or week*

Given the limited diary period, it is self-evident that time-use surveys are less suitable to grasp activities with a low frequency. However, time-use data are not always able to grasp activities with a high frequency in a satisfying manner either. By this we mean that the activity pattern during the diary registration period is not necessarily representative for a person's general activity pattern. Or, to put it differently, the inquired day or week is not necessarily a representative day or week. Time-use diaries assess a person's behaviour on a specific moment in time. This is very concrete and thus possibly variable behaviour. Questionnaires, on the other hand, tend to inquire about people's usual or general behaviour: e.g. when do you usually have a hot meal on weekdays? It is very unlikely that a respondent would fill in the questionnaire on his or her usual behaviour differently on different days.

The behaviour registered in a time-use diary on the diary day can be completely different from the behaviour of the following weekday. The behaviour registered on a particular day or week is not necessarily representative for a person's general daily or weekly behaviour pattern. Diary data are thus much less stable than questionnaire data. It is no surprise then that such concrete behaviour is difficult to explain and more difficult to explain than the average behaviour as estimated in a questionnaire. Trying to predict a person's exact behaviour on a specific week or on a specific day, is a very difficult exercise. This consideration should be kept in mind when interpreting the explained variance of the models based on behaviour as registered in the time-use diaries.

### *A high frequency of missing data*

Since eating is a recurrent activity that normally happens on a daily basis, we believe that the rate of eating will be captured well by means of time-use data. Nevertheless, the recurrent nature of an activity is not a sufficient precondition to grasp recurrent activities. One of the principal weaknesses of time-use data is the high frequency of missing data. Compared to filling in a questionnaire, time-use diaries entail a very high respondent burden. Time-use registration is a very strict procedure: respondents are asked to register their time use in a very precise manner and at very regular intervals over a particular period of time. This results in lower response rates on two levels. Firstly, time-use studies are known to have low response rates, which may put at stake their representativeness (Kalfs, 1993). When describing the various time-use surveys used for this study, we discuss their response rates and the implications for their representativeness. Secondly, the severity of the registration procedure also brings about multiple gaps in the data, so-called “missing time”. Missing time is time that is left unappointed by respondents. It results from the fact that the ending time of the previous activity is not in line with the starting time of the following activity. The higher the missing time in a person’s time use, the less reliable the information. In order to guarantee a qualitative view on a person’s time use, respondents with too much missing time are eliminated from the data. For each dataset we use in this study, the problem of missing data will be discussed.

The high respondent burden characteristic of time-use surveys entails that some time-use periods are left blank (no registration: missing time) or that the time-use registration happens in a scarcely detailed manner. In general, short activities are more likely not to be included in the time-use diary. It seems reasonable to expect that every respondent registers at least one eating occasion per day. This is not always the case. When describing the various time-use surveys used for this study, we also discuss the underregistration of eating in the various times-use studies and its implications for studying meal destructure. The underregistration of eating in the time-use studies concerns the more general problem of the underregistration of short activities. The underregistration of short occasions is in itself revealing, though. It is an indication of the low importance attached to that activity, an activity not even worth the registration in the time-use diary. The underregistration of short activities is

generally due to a strategy of relieving the heavy burden of time-use registration by registering only the activities that are deemed relevant.

Sometimes, the underregistration of short activities may even be enhanced by methodological instructions that are aimed exactly at relieving the respondent burden. When time use is registered in fixed 10-minute time slots, rather than in a continuous registration procedure, short activities are likely to be omitted from the time-use registration. Even when a continuous registration procedure is used, considerable measurement error may occur regarding the registration of short activities. Sometimes instructions of time-use surveys even dictate that an activity with duration of 5 minutes or less shall not be included in the diary. The methodology and the high respondent burden may thus entail measurement error regarding the rate of short occasions. When short activities are systematically not included in the time diary, this is likely to result in a serious underestimation of the tempo of certain activities. The underregistration of short activities has serious implications for the assessment of the rate of a particular activity: an activity is found to occur much less than it occurs in reality.

The main conclusion to be drawn from the underregistration of short eating occasions for the study of meal deconstruction is that the short eating occasions are not grasped well by this method and that only the longer eating occasions are registered. When short eating activities are not registered or underregistered in the time diary, this results in an underestimation of the tempo of eating in general, but not in the underestimation of longer eating occasions. To conclude, we believe that time-use data allow well for grasping the rate of *meals*, but not to assess the rate of eating in general.

#### **2.1.1.2 Duration**

Duration concerns the amount of time allotted to a particular activity. In general, time-use data are assumed to give a reliable picture of the daily or weekly duration of activities just as they are believed to give a reliable picture of the daily or weekly tempo of activities. Given the recurrent character of eating we believe that time-use data provide a reliable picture of the time allotted to eating within particular time

spans, like the week, the day or even periods within the day. Nevertheless, both the duration of primary activities, as well as the duration of activities in particular contexts may be subject to measurement errors.

#### *Measurement errors in the duration of primary activities*

The duration of primary activities may not be measured in a very exact manner by means of the time-use diary. This may be due to various factors. First of all, the methodology used in the time-use survey may result in measurement errors regarding the duration of activities. When time use is registered in fixed 10-minute time slots, rather than in a continuous registration procedure, the exact duration of an activity cannot be grasped. This method entails that part of the short activities are simply omitted from the diary, while in other cases the short activities are inflated to occupy a 10-minute slot, while in reality they may only have lasted 5 minutes or less. We accept it is justified to assume that the chance of omitting or inflating short activities is equal. This results in a more or less reliable picture of the duration of eating on an aggregate level, but may entail measurement error on an individual level. Even when a continuous registration procedure is used, considerable measurement error may occur regarding the duration of activities. As mentioned above, short activities are often omitted from the diary. We accept that the implications of omitting short occasions from the data are more far-ranging for the tempo of activities than they are for the duration of activities. As these activities have a short duration, their absence or underregistration is less likely to seriously affect the total duration of a particular activity. However, the average duration of an eating occasion is very likely to be biased. Due to the underregistration of short eating occasions, the average duration of eating occasions is very likely to be overestimated. However, in this study, we only use total durations per day or per week. We do not use the average duration of eating occasions.

#### *Measurement errors in assessing the duration of contextual variables*

So far, we have discussed the implications of the time-use method for the reliability of the duration of primary activities. Next to primary activities, other contextual information is included in the diaries. Although the duration of a primary activity is

generally believed to be a good reflection of the actual time allotted to that activity (despite the shortcomings just mentioned), this is not necessarily the case for the contextual variables registered in the time-use data. Respondents are instructed to register a new activity as soon as one of the variables registered for the current activity changes. This means that a new activity shall be registered when the main activity or one of the contextual variables, like the secondary activity, the company present or the location, changes. In practice respondents for the most part only start a new activity when the main activity changes. Respondents are less likely to start a new activity when the context of the activity, namely the parallel activity, the conversation partners present or the location, changes. This means that the contextual information, characteristic for a particular activity, does not necessarily apply to the whole episode of that activity.

#### A. The duration of parallel activities

Parallel or secondary activities do not occur with all activities and some time-use surveys do not even ask respondents to register a secondary activity. In the Flemish time-use surveys, which will be discussed more thoroughly in section 2.1.2.4, the respondents were asked to register a secondary activity, if necessary. It is up to the respondent to decide whether or not a secondary activity is registered, and which activity is registered as a secondary rather than as a primary activity. All activities in the activity list can be registered either as a primary activity, either as a secondary activity. The primary activity is considered to be the main activity, while the secondary activity is considered as the parallel activity of lesser importance (Gershuny, 2000: 258).

Respondents are not very likely to start a new activity when a parallel activity is finished. When a respondent has watched TV for two hours, but during the first 20 minutes he was having lunch, this is most likely to be registered as one activity in the diary, namely two hours of primary watching television with eating as a secondary activity. The finishing of the parallel activity is often not deemed essential to the definition of an activity in the time-use diary. However, the duration of a secondary activity may overlap completely with the duration of the primary activity or may only take up a share of the time spent on the primary activity. Equating the full duration of

the primary activity with eating as a secondary activity might therefore seriously distort durations. For that reason, we prefer to work with the rate or the frequency of secondary activities rather than its duration.

#### B. The duration of an activity in specific social context

Respondents are also asked whether anyone else was present during the primary activity. Either they are asked who that person was, or they are asked whom exactly they had talked to during that activity. When the company is measured by means of a conversation to specific persons, the duration of the primary activity does not necessarily reflect the duration of the conversation with those persons. For example, when eating at work with colleagues is registered for half an hour, this does not necessarily mean that the respondent has talked to his colleagues all that time. It is more likely that the respondent has talked to them for part of that time, while he may have been in the opportunity to talk to them during the rest of the time. We do not consider this as a serious shortcoming for assessing the social context of activities, more particularly eating occasions. Whether or not the persons present were actually involved in a conversation is not essential here. What matters, is the fact that eating occurred in a specific social context and that it was a social occasion with specific commensal partners.

The social context of activities is subject to another, more important measurement error, due to the underregistration of short eating occasions. It is highly likely that this results in an underestimation of eating alone. Indeed, short eating occasions are more likely to be solitary, rather than commensal, occasions. If mainly long eating occasions are registered in the time-use diary, this results in an overestimation of the commensal nature of eating.

#### C. The duration of an activity in a specific location

In general, the registration of the location of activities is believed to be a fairly unproblematic event. In most time-use surveys as well as in the time-use surveys used here, the choice between locations is fairly limited. For each activity the respondent registers whether the activity took place at home, at the workplace, at someone else's

house or at another place. This limited and exclusive manner of inquiring the location of an activity makes it unlikely that a person's time use does not take into account this information in an adequate manner. However, errors are more likely to occur for a specific type of location, namely travelling. Research into Belgian travelling behaviour, as registered in time-use diaries, has shown that the registration of a means of transport often referred to the travelling performed just before that activity rather than during that activity (Koelet and Glorieux, 2006: 38). As such, short travelling episodes are often wrongly inserted in the next activity. This information should be kept in mind when assessing the location of eating activities.

#### **2.1.1.3 Sequence**

The sequence of an activity relates to the order in which activities occur (Glorieux, 1985: 3; Moore, 1963: 8; Zerubavel, 1981). Very often this order is again a matter of cultural convention: it is a prescribed order rather than a natural order. Time-use data allow well for grasping the order of activities: every activity is registered according to its occurrence in time. However, the sequence of activities is just as well subject to measurement errors, due to the registration errors mentioned earlier. The inclusion of a means of transport during an activity following a short travelling episode, results in considerable measurement errors as to the sequence of activities: a succession of two events is registered as only one event. Analogously, the omission of short activities equally affects the sequence of activities. The omission of short eating occasions also affects the sequence of eating occasions. The underregistration of short meals like breakfast entails that the first eating occasion of the day is not necessarily breakfast (Mestdag, 2005). However, in this study, we do not define meals by means of their sequence but by means of their timing. As such we can be sure that the meal occurring at noon on weekdays is lunch, irrespective of the fact whether this is the second eating occasion registered in the time-use diary.

#### **2.1.1.4 Timing**

The timing of activities relates to their location in time (Glorieux, 1985: 3; Zerubavel, 1981). The timing of activities is heavily regulated. Most activities have a specific location in time: it is time to eat when it is dinnertime, it is time to sleep when it is

night, it is time to get up when it is morning, and so on. As mentioned earlier, this parameter of temporal ordering is closely connected to the social nature of activities. For individuals to share an activity, their agenda's need to be synchronized at a particular time (Moore, 1963: 8). Time-use data allow well to assess the timing of activities. The collective timing of activities can be visualised by means of tempograms. These figures show which percentage of a given population is engaged in a particular activity at a particular moment in time. However, due to the underregistration of short activities, the timing of activities may be partly distorted. It is very likely that the underregistration of short eating activities, which are more likely to occur beyond proper mealtimes, results in an underestimation of eating occurring beyond proper mealtimes.

In this section, we have assessed the four parameters of temporal ordering and their implications for assessing the question of meal deconstruction by means of the time-use data. In the following section, we go into the various datasets used in this study. For each dataset, the particular shortcomings for assessing the question of meal deconstruction are highlighted.

### 2.1.2 Datasets

In the beginning of section 2.1 we have discussed the history of time-use research in Flanders and Belgium. Since 1966, four time-use studies have been conducted in Flanders and Belgium. For this study, three of these time-use studies will be used extensively, namely the Belgian time-use survey of 1966, the Belgian time-use survey of 1999 and the Flemish time-use survey of 2004. In contrast to the Belgian time-use studies of 1966 and 1999, the Flemish time-use survey of 2004 has been conducted by the research group TOR. This means that the research group took on the preparation of the questionnaire, the support during the fieldwork period and the preparation of the dataset and preliminary data analyses. I myself am part of this research group since 2001. As such, I was actively involved in the 2004 survey. However, it should be emphasized that my personal influence on the TOR'04-questionnaire was very limited. There was only little room to add new questions to the questionnaire of the TOR'04 time-use study. The comparability with the earlier TOR'99 time-use study

and the restriction of the length of the questionnaire to reduce the respondent burden resulted in the fact that only two food-related questions could be added to the questionnaire, one tackling the specific location of particular meals and another tackling the attitude towards the organization of eating practices. The latter set of questions will be discussed in the fourth chapter which considers the factors that affect the organization of eating practices. In section 2.1.2.4, the Flemish time-use survey of 2004 is discussed thoroughly.

The fact that the Flemish time-use surveys of 1999 and 2004 were conducted by the research group I am part of myself, allows me to be more confident on the quality and representativeness of these data. The response rate and weighting coefficients of the TOR time-use surveys were calculated in a transparent manner. The fieldwork is equally sufficiently documented. This does not hold for the Belgian time-use surveys of 1966 and 1999, which were conducted by other institutions. For these studies, we have only little information on the quality of the fieldwork and the preparatory research work performed to make these dataset ready for use. This leaves us much more in the dark on the quality of the Belgian time-use data, than on the quality of the Flemish time-use surveys conducted by TOR. In the next sections, we tackle the shortcomings and possibilities of the various datasets used for this study. Given my close involvement in the 2004 Flemish time-use survey, it is self-evident that we can evaluate the shortcomings and possibilities of the Flemish time-use survey in a more detailed manner than is the case for the data that were made available by other institutions.

#### **2.1.2.1 The Belgian time-use survey of 1966 (Szalai'66)**

The Belgian time-use survey of 1966 was the first national time-budget study conducted in Belgium. It was part of the Multinational Comparative Time-Budget Research project, considering time use in 12 different countries. The study was launched by the European Coordination Centre for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences in Vienna, and was under the direction of Alexander Szalai. Henceforth this dataset will be called "Szalai'66". In Belgium, the project was carried out by the University of Brussels, under the direction of Pierre Feldheim and Claude Javeau. A basic questionnaire to be applied in all countries was developed. In

Belgium, a wide range of additional questions was attached to the basic questionnaire. In all countries the same time-use registration procedure, following multinational guidelines, was carried out. All respondents kept a diary on a randomly designated diary day during 24 hours. The survey contains time-budget data from 2,077 Belgians (Javeau, 1970). Primary and secondary activities, location and interaction partners were registered by the respondents in a continuous self-completion procedure. Afterwards, a coding list was developed to allow for an international comparison of activities, locations and social context. The final coding list contained 96 different activity codes and ten different codes with regard to location. Ten different codes with regard to interaction partners were available, and respondents could indicate two different types of interaction partners if deemed necessary.

### *Missing data*

The Belgian time-use survey of 1966 does not entail problems concerning missing data. In fact, the time-use diaries do not contain missing time. This means that there were no time spans left blank for the registration of primary activities. Most probably missing time was filled up by the poll-taker in consultation with the respondent when the time-use diary was collected. The registration of the context of the activities also occurred in a satisfying manner. The location of the activity was registered very well. Only 0.4 percent of all activities in the activity dataset had no valid answer on location. When taking into account only eating activities, the response rate was even higher, namely 99.8 percent. The information about the interaction partners that were present during the activity was less reliable. This had already been pointed out by Professor Javeau<sup>3</sup>. The company present during the activity was only registered in 79.6 percent of all the activities. Fortunately, with a response rate of 99.6 percent, the registration for eating activities was excellent. We may conclude that the Belgian time-use survey of 1966 does not pose particular problems as far as missing data are concerned.

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<sup>3</sup> In January 2003 I visited Professor Javeau in view of accessing the 1966 time-use dataset. The 1966 time-use dataset was no longer available in the ULB archives, but the conversation with Professor Javeau was very informative on the quality the data.

### *Representativeness*

The representativeness of the Belgian time-use survey for the Belgian population poses larger problems. A first problem relates to the fieldwork period. The fieldwork was carried out between January and April 1966 (Javeau, 1970). This may entail that the data are not representative of the whole year. Due to the lack of time-use registration during the other months of the year this shortcoming could not be resolved by a corrective weighting procedure for registration month.

The representativeness of the Belgian survey from 1966 is also put at stake by the intentional omission of certain groups within the population. The multinational character of the study had its consequences for the demographic specifications of the survey population. The aim of the research project was to study the industrially employed population, which principally lived in urban areas. Only individuals between 19 and 65 years old who lived in a household with an employed household head were included in the study. This implies that we have no information on households with an unemployed household head. Households with a household head employed in agriculture, were equally left aside. As a result, this study contains no data on non-active and agriculturalist households. This is a serious shortcoming that cannot be adjusted. The Belgian time-use survey is thus only aimed to be representative for the industrially employed population. Although Belgium had the lowest response rate of all participating countries in the multinational study, namely only 60 percent (Szalai, 1972: 67), this response rate is high, compared to the response rates of current time-budget studies.

In order to guarantee the representativeness of the data for the Belgian population as much as possible, the data were weighted. The original dataset in 1966 contained weighting coefficients based on the number of respondents in the household. To bring the sample in line with the national population, we calculated new weighting coefficients based on the respondents' sex, age and educational class<sup>4</sup>. The weighting coefficients ranged from 0.27, for men aged 40 to 65 with a degree of higher

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<sup>4</sup> The census data from 1961 were used as a base for constructing the weighting coefficients.

education, to 2.33, for men aged 19 to 39 with a degree of lower education at most. These weighting coefficients are acceptable.

In 1972, the data from the Multinational Comparative Time-Budget Research have led to the stout publication under the direction of Szalai (1972). The Belgian data in particular have also been analysed by Javeau (1970). Results in the present study may deviate from the results published earlier by Szalai and Javeau due to a different weighting procedure. Since these publications these data were not used anymore and became difficult to find. Fortunately, all the communal information gathered in all participating countries from the Multinational Time-budget Study was collected by Philip J. Stone. These data were made available through the archive of the Henry A. Murray Research Center of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Against all expectations, we had the original activity database at our disposal. The database had some restrictions, though. Since only the communal items of the questionnaire were preserved in the Philip J. Stone dataset, a very limited number of background characteristics was available. Moreover, all items in the questionnaire were on a categorical rather than on a ratio level. This limited the opportunities for multivariate analyses to a considerable extent.

#### **2.1.2.2 The Belgian time-use survey of 1999 (NIS'99)**

The second national time-use survey in Belgium was conducted in 1999 by the National Institute for Statistics (NIS), and will henceforth be called NIS'99. The Belgian time-budget study was conducted according to Eurostat-guidelines (Eurostat, 2000). The fieldwork period was spread between December 1998 and January 2000. The survey contains data from 8,382 Belgians, from 4,275 households, aged between 12 and 95. All respondents kept a diary during one randomly designated weekday (Monday through Friday) and one randomly designated weekend day (Saturday or Sunday). A self-completion diary with fixed 10-minute time slots was used. Respondents were asked to register primary and secondary activities. The registration of secondary activities was so low that this information was not included in the final time-use dataset. Afterwards, the activities mentioned in the diaries were recoded to 272 different activities according to Eurostat-guidelines. For every activity, respondents also registered whether or not they were alone, with a child of the

household, with an adult member of the household or with another person. A combination of three different company types could be made. Respondents equally registered where the activity was carried out. Six different location types were available.

### *Missing data*

The Belgian time-use survey of 1999 does not contain any missing time. Missing time was filled up by the poll-taker in consultation with the respondent when the time-use diary was collected. The registration of contextual variables is also satisfactory. The response rate for location was much higher than for company present: 99.8 percent versus 82.8 percent. Fortunately, when taking into account only eating activities, the response rate for the company reached a level of 95.3 percent.

### *Representativeness*

The response rate of the Belgian time-budget study of 1999 was very low, namely 6.28 percent. This figure is however not comparable to the generally registered response rates characterising specific surveys. The calculation method is completely different, due to a double selection procedure. The response rate of 6.28 percent does not mean that only 6.28 percent of those who were included in the random sample for the time-use study, have participated in the study. No separate random sample was drawn for participation for the Belgian time-use survey of 1999. Instead, the Belgian time-budget study of 1999 was linked to the household-budget study. Only respondents that completed the latter were invited to participate in the time-budget study. Respondents that returned the invitation (postcard) to participate in the time-use study were included. This brought about considerable selectivity in the time-use dataset and explains the low response rate.

In order to make the dataset representative for the entire Belgian population, the data were weighted on an individual level, taking into account region, sex, age, educational level, season and day of the week. Weighting coefficients ranged from 0.08 (women from the Brussels region aged 70 to 74 with a degree of higher education (non-university) who registered their time use in December) to 7.38 (women from the

Flemish region older than 75 with a degree of lower education who registered their time use in July) (for more information see also: Vandeweyer, Glorieux and Vanderhoeft, 2001; Glorieux and Vandeweyer, 2002: 4). The calibration technique takes into account the representativeness on a variety of levels, which explains for the high weighting coefficients.

Despite the high selectivity of the dataset and its low response rate, there is no reason to assume that this dataset is not valid for the Belgian population. So far this dataset has been used extensively to assess the time use in various areas and it has never proved to be deviant. The Flemish data in the Belgian time-use survey of 1999 have been compared to the Flemish time-use survey effected by the TOR-research group in 1999 (TOR'99) on a variety of topics. The TOR'99 dataset has a much higher response rate, namely 26.8 percent. The weight coefficients applied to the TOR'99 dataset ranged from 0.36 (men aged older than 55 with a degree of general lower secondary education) to 3.04 (women aged older than 55 with a degree of lower education at most). Moreover, the time-use studies conducted by the TOR research group observe high quality standards. The methodology and procedure observed during the time-use surveys were carefully registered. Therefore, we are convinced of the representativeness and the validity of the time-use studies conducted by TOR. The Flemish data in the Belgian time-use survey of 1999 have been compared to the TOR'99 dataset and proved to be highly comparable as far as average duration and timing of general activity categories, the timing of work, travelling behaviour and so on is concerned (Koelet and Glorieux, 2006). Given the careful application of the calibration procedure and the earlier comparisons with another time-use dataset with a higher response rate, we believe it is justified to consider the Belgian database from 1999 as representative of the Belgian population.

### **2.1.2.3 The merged Belgian dataset (BEL'66-'99)**

The descriptions of both Belgian time-use surveys have made it clear that there were considerable differences between Szalai'66 and NIS'99. In order to check for significant changes between both research years, the data of the two studies had to be standardized to a common format and had to be merged. The standardization to a common format applied to the activity dataset as well as to the questionnaire. With

regard to the activity dataset, a common format was constructed containing information on the primary activity, the location and the company during the activity. The coding lists of both studies were used to construct a reduced list, containing 52 activities. Due to the absence of secondary activities in NIS'99, no secondary activities were included in the merged Belgian dataset. Five types of location were included and all travelling episodes were assigned the location 'while travelling'. Eight types of company were discerned. It was not always possible to make all variables completely compatible, though. For Szalai'66 there was no activity code for drinking. For NIS'99, drinking was retained as a separate activity. There was also an extra category for company in the NIS'99 dataset, since the respondents had the opportunity to select three different types of company per activity. In the Szalai'66 dataset, a maximum of two different types of company could be registered per activity. As a result, the company type 'with adults and children of the household and other persons' only appeared in 1999. It was impossible to reduce the company type to a simpler category as all three categories (children of the household, adults of the household & other people) were equally suited. We also experienced some problems with the questionnaire. The construction of a merged data file implied a serious loss of information in the 1999 questionnaire. The reason for this was the fact that the measurement scale of all the variables, of which many had an interval or ratio scale in the original NIS'99 dataset, had to be set at a categorical level. To equalize certain variables, serious recoding was necessary. A final obstruction that could not be overcome, was the definition of children. In the two time-budget studies, different age limits were applied to define children. In 1966 and 1999, children were defined as children living in the household, younger than 19 and younger than 16, respectively. As there was no further indication of children's age, we were unable to overcome this problem.

For reasons of comparison, we only retained respondents between 19 and 65 years old. This implied a reduction from 8,382 to 6,331 respondents for NIS'99. This age selection affected the average weight coefficient, which was no longer 1, but 0.92. This means that we marginally outweigh those already overrepresented in NIS'99. As a result, the weighted number of respondents amounted to 5,840. In order to optimize comparability with the Szalai'66 database, one respondent per household was selected from NIS'99. The Szalai'66 database contained only one respondent per household.

Given our aim to assess commensality patterns, it was essential that datasets were comparable in their capacity to measure commensality. Including more than one respondent per household in the dataset could affect the results. The selection of one respondent per household from the NIS'99 dataset entailed that respondents had an unequal chance of being included in the selection, depending on the number of respondents questioned in a particular household. While respondents in single-person households had a 100 percent chance of being included in the selection, this was only 25 percent for a person in a household where four household members were included in the study. Therefore, the original distinction according to household types as found in the NIS'99 dataset was restored by attributing a corrective weighting coefficient to the respondents in the various household types.

**Table 2:1 Corrective weighting procedure applied to the selection of one respondent per household from the NIS'99 dataset for household type**

	NIS'99 19-65 (weighted by weight)		NIS'99 selection one respondent per household (weighted by weight)		Corrective weighting coefficient per household type	NIS'99 selection one respondent per household (weighted by totweight)
Living with parents	581	10.0%	213	7.2%	1.39	296 (10.0%)
Living alone	971	16.6%	927	31.4%	0.53	491 (16.7%)
Single parents	170	2.9%	114	3.9%	0.74	84 (2.9%)
Couple without children	1919	32.9%	835	28.3%	1.16	969 (32.9%)
Couple with children	2045	35.0%	792	26.9%	1.30	1030 (34.9%)
Missing	153	2.6%	68	2.3%	1.13	77 (2.6%)
TOTAL	5840	100%	2949	100%		2947 (100%)

This corrective weight was combined with the original weighting coefficient (weight), as discussed earlier. The application of this combined weighting coefficient (totweight) restored the original division by household type in the 1999 dataset. For Szalai'66, the average weighting factor is one, as we work with the full dataset. The weighted and unweighted number of respondents in the 1966 and 1999 on all separate weekdays are presented in table 2:6. Henceforth, this merged dataset will be called "BEL'66-'99".

*Potential and shortcomings of the merged Belgian dataset in assessing meal deconstruction*

One of the central questions to be answered in this thesis is to what extent we are witnessing a change in our eating habits. A concept like deconstruction assumes a process of change, a modified situation, compared to the past. For that reason, we need historical research that takes into account eating practices from the past and compares it to present eating practices. To assess whether Belgian eating habits have really changed, we need large-scale data from different periods in time. The BEL '66-'99 dataset are essentially used to outline the historical evolution of the various dimensions of meal deconstruction. The data of 1966 and 1999 were merged in view of performing significance tests to check for the statistical significance of the observed changes between 1966 and 1999. The BEL '66-'99 dataset appears to grasp eating activities in a satisfying manner. The percentage of respondents registering zero eating activities on a particular day appears to be very modest (Table 2:2). In 1966, the percentage of respondents without a daily eating occasion amounts to 0.5 percent at most, with all respondents registering at least one eating occasion on Tuesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Although the percentage without a daily eating occasion is somewhat higher in 1999, this percentage remains very modest amounting to 1.5 percent at most.

**Table 2:2 Percentage of respondents taking zero daily eating occasions on all days of the week in 1966 and 1999 (BEL '66-'99)**

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednes-day	Thursday	Friday	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>1966</b>	0.5% (n=281)	0% (n=329)	0.5% (n=338)	0.3% (n=337)	0% (n=311)	0.3% (n=1596)	0% (n=254)	0% (n=226)
<b>1999</b>	1% (n=605)	0.9% (n=603)	1.5% (n=577)	0.4% (n=593)	0.2% (n=570)	0.8% (n=2947)	0.7% (n=1424)	0.8% (n=1523)

Moreover, the merged Belgian dataset contains information on short eating occasions. In 1966, 5.4 percent of eating occasions last at most ten minutes, and 30.6 percent last at most 20 minutes. In 1999, 17.9 percent of the eating occasions have a duration of 10 minutes, 43.0 percent have a maximum duration of 20 minutes. Obviously, the underregistration of short eating occasions is not such a serious problem in the NIS'99 dataset. The use of 10-minute time slots in the diary obviously increases the odds of registering short eating occasions: Although this merged dataset essentially provides a

solid basis to draw conclusions on the historical evolution of eating habits in Belgium, it also reveals some shortcomings in answering the question of meal deconstruction.

A first shortcoming concerns the fact that the BEL'66-'99 dataset does not allow to assess all symptoms of meal deconstruction in a historical manner. This is due to the fact that the BEL'66-'99 does not contain much detailed contextual information on time use. The BEL'66-'99 dataset does not contain information on parallel activities. As such, we cannot assess to what extent eating as a separate activity is put at stake by the increasing importance of simultaneous activities. Moreover, the contextual information available is rather limited, especially when it comes to the registration of company. Respondents can only distinguish between adults of the household, children of the household and non-household members. This method of registration does not allow for distinguishing between the partner, parents, brothers and sisters or other co-resident adults. Moreover, it does not allow for distinguishing between various types of non co-resident commensal partners.

A second shortcoming concerns the fact that only one day per week was registered in 1966 and only one weekday and one weekend day in 1999. The small number of respondents filling in a Saturday or a Sunday in 1966 (Table 2:6 on p. 80) makes comparison between 1966 and 1999 impossible for certain groups within the population. Therefore, it was decided to use the BEL'66-'99 dataset only for purposes of comparison on a population level.

A third shortcoming concerns the fact that we cannot grasp a genuine trend, as our conclusions on change in eating habits are based on the comparison of only two datasets. This means that there is only one reference point. Only change in the one or the other direction, rather than a genuine trend, can be discerned. Still, the change involves a period of 33 years and the reference point is 1966. In the first chapter, we saw how the pattern of the regular meals came into being and how a uniform series of habits was spread throughout society. The 1950s and 1960s are generally considered as the Golden Era of the family meal and the apex of the uniformising of the meal pattern (Bugge and Doving, 2000; van Otterloo and de la Bruheze, 2002). Given the nature of the reference point and the long period between the two recording episodes, we accept that this is a valid method for assessing the deconstruction of eating

practices in the last third of the twentieth century. The merged database from 1966 and 1999 can give us an interesting insight into change in the organization of eating occasions and it will surely offer us the capacity of mapping eating behaviour in two periods segregated by 33 years.

A final shortcoming of the BEL'66-'99 dataset concerns the lack of a wide range of background variables and the lack of information on other household members in families with a non-working household head. This dataset does not include any information on attitudes either, let alone on attitudes regarding the organization of meals. The restrictions of this dataset especially affect the possibilities for finding the reasons behind change. Therefore, we decided not to use this dataset to assess which factors affect and affected the temporal, social and spatial organization of eating practices.

#### **2.1.2.4 The Flemish time-use survey of 2004 by research group TOR (TOR'04)**

The 2004 Flemish time-use survey is the second large-scale time-use survey that has been conducted in Flanders. It was conceived as a sequel study to the first Flemish large-scale time-use survey conducted in 1999. As mentioned earlier, the research group TOR at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel directed both studies. Henceforth, the abbreviations TOR'99 and TOR'04 will be used for the Flemish time-use surveys of 1999 and 2004, respectively. Both studies have been financed by the Flemish government. The fieldwork of the TOR'04 time-use study was carried out between 15 April 2004 and 30 October 2004, but was interrupted between 15 July and 1 September to avoid distortion due to the holiday period. A random sample of Flemings was asked to fill out two questionnaires that were read out loud to them by especially trained poll-takers. Respondents also kept a diary for an entire week. A page from the time use diary used for the TOR'04-study can be found in appendix E. In the diary, primary and secondary activities were registered following a continuous registration procedure. For this purpose, a list of 163 activities was available. Next to primary and secondary activities, respondents also registered where the activity had taken place, what means of transport had been used (in case of travelling), whether anyone was present, whom one had talked to, and what the primary motivation was

for doing the activity. All this extra information was also registered following fixed formats.

*Missing data*

The TOR'04-study is satisfactory, as far as missing data are concerned. The precondition to be included in the TOR'04 dataset was that the respondents did not exceed a maximum amount of missing time. For a time-use diary to be valid for scientific study, only a minimum of missing information is allowed within a certain time span. The Flemish time-use survey of 2004 asked respondents to keep a diary during a full week. Separate files were constructed for the working week, Saturday, Sunday and the full week. To be included in one of these files, a maximum amount of missing time on the working week, Saturday, Sunday and the full week respectively was not permitted to be exceeded. As such, respondents could be included in each of the four datasets, according to their level of missing time during each of involved time spans. To be included in the working week data file, respondents were allowed 10 hours of missing time (8.3 percent of total time) during the working week. To be included in the Saturday or Sunday data file a maximum of 2 hours of missing time (8.3 percent of total time) was allowed on a Saturday and a Sunday respectively. To be included in the full week data file, a maximum of 14 hours of missing time (8.3 percent of total time) was allowed during the full week. As a result, different samples of respondents were included in the various time use files (Table 2:3) (Glorieux, Minnen and Vandeweyer, 2005: 46). We decided to include only those respondents that filled in every period of the week according to the highest quality measures. We retained 1,719 respondents.

**Table 2:3 Total unweighted number of respondents included in TOR'04 by period of the week**

<b>Period of the week</b>	<b>Total number of respondents included (unweighted)</b>
Working week	1,751
Saturdays	1,752
Sundays	1,763
Full week	1,768

The TOR'04 time-use survey contains rather elaborate contextual information on the activities registered in the time diary. Next to primary activities, a secondary activity could be registered. All activities in the activity list of the TOR'04 time-use survey

could be registered both as a primary and a secondary activity. The activity list did not impose a previously determined hierarchy between primary and secondary activities. It was the respondent himself or herself who decided which activity to consider as the main or the primary activity and whether any activity (and which activity) would be registered as a secondary activity. 35.1 percent of all activities in the activity dataset include a secondary activity. It is impossible to assess the quality of the registration of secondary activities as not all primary activities occur with a parallel activity. A lower level of secondary activities than in other studies may point at a lower quality of registration, but may just as well indicate that multi-tasking was less prevalent.

For all other contextual variables besides the secondary activity, we can confirm satisfactory registration. Non-response rates remained very low, with 0.6 percent for means of transport, 3.3 percent for company present and 3.2 percent for persons talked to, and 5.1 percent for location. When considering only eating activities, the non-response rates for contextual variables were even lower, amounting to 1.5 percent at most (Glorieux, Minnen and Vandeweyer, 2005).

### *Representativeness*

The TOR'04 study is also satisfactory as far as representativeness for the Flemish population in 2004 is concerned. The response rate of the TOR'04 study amounts to 36.5 percent. This is a very high response rate for time-use surveys. When we take into account the respondents that could not take part in the study due to a language barrier or because the person had deceased, or moved or was untraceable, handicapped or on holiday, the response rate would even reach 42.2 percent (Glorieux, Minnen and Vandeweyer, 2005: 28). In order to be representative for the whole Flemish population, the sample was weighted using respondents' educational level, age and sex. Weighting coefficients ranged from 0.38 (men older than 55 with a degree of higher secondary general education) to 3.40 (men between 35 and 54 with a degree of lower education at most). These weighting coefficients are believed to be acceptable.

*Potential and shortcomings of Flemish time-use survey of 2004 in assessing meal destructure*

An elaborate picture of our contemporary eating habits is drawn through the use of TOR'04. This dataset contains a bulk of detailed information on Flemish eating habits. The temporal, social and spatial structure of our eating habits can be grasped well by means of this dataset. In contrast to the BEL'66-99 dataset, the TOR'04 dataset also includes information on secondary activities. This information is important in assessing the question of meal destructure. We also have information on the specific nature of the meal. The activity list of the TOR'04 time-use survey (see appendix C) distinguishes between hot meals, cold meals, hot meals at work, cold meals at work and restaurant meals. In some instances, these various types of eating will be discussed separately. For the most part, however, eating in general is considered. This is the sum of hot meals, cold meals, hot meals at work, cold meals at work and restaurant meals. Drinking (drinking in general or drinking tea or coffee) and having a coffee circle or a party, are not considered as eating activities. Although something could be eaten during these activities, this is not necessarily the case. Moreover, the TOR'04 dataset includes time-use information from a full week, which is a considerable advantage compared to the single day registered in the BEL'66-'99 dataset. Finally, the TOR'04 dataset is a valuable source for assessing the destructure of eating habits, due to the comprehensive questionnaire included in the study. This questionnaire not only contains essential background information on the respondents, like socio-demographic characteristics, household-related characteristics and work-related characteristics. As mentioned earlier, I prepared two food-related questions that were included in the TOR'04-questionnaire, one tackling the particular location (at the table, in the sofa, ...) of specific meals (weekday lunch, Saturday dinner, ...) and another tackling the normative conceptions of the meal. The question tackling the particular location of specific meals allowed me to investigate the location of meals in greater detail. A set of attitudes on the meal provided me with some information on people's normative expectations regarding eating habits. Unfortunately, this set of attitudes had to be limited and therefore only contains 13 items. Moreover, given the timing of the TOR'04 fieldwork, the items measuring the normative conceptions of the meal were devised in a very early phase of this study. As a result, the measurement of the normative conceptions of the meal may be rather

shallow. We shall go into the measurement of the normative conceptions of the meal in greater detail in section 4.1.2.

Despite the detailed registration of time use and the rich information included in the accompanying questionnaire, the TOR'04 dataset reveals some important shortcomings for assessing the question of meal destructure. These mainly relate to the underregistration of eating in the time-use diary. In the TOR'04 dataset, the number of respondents who do not report any eating occasion on certain days, is considerable as shown by table 2:4.

**Table 2:4 Percentage of respondents taking zero daily eating occasions for all days of the week (TOR'04 - n=1710)**

Monday	Tuesday	Wednes-day	Thursday	Friday	Weekday <sup>5</sup>	Saturday	Sunday
4.3%	4.9%	5.6%	5.7%	6.0%	5.3%	6.7%	6.8%

On an average weekday 5.3 percent of the respondents register no eating occasion as a primary activity in their time-use diary. Percentages are similar on the various weekdays and are even higher on weekend days. Respondents not registering eating as a primary activity might have eaten as a secondary activity. However, only about 40 percent of respondents without a primary eating activity registers at least one secondary eating activity. It is unlikely that all the respondents without primary and secondary eating occasions did not eat on that particular day, because they were for example ill or had a stomach-ache. Respondents registering no eating occasions may very well have snacked one or several times on that particular day, without any trace in the time-use diary. In the TOR'04 activity dataset, the percentage of eating occasions of 10 minutes at most amounts to 2.8 percent. The percentage of eating occasions with a duration of maximum 20 minutes amounts to 22.2 percent. This is considerably smaller than the percentage of eating occasions lasting at most 20 minutes in the NIS'99 dataset (43.0 percent of eating occasions) and in the BEL'66 dataset (30.6 percent of eating occasions). Obviously, the TOR'04 dataset reveals a clear problem of missing data: there is a serious underregistration of short eating occasions. Respondents participating in the TOR'04 survey were not asked to register activities with a duration of less than 5 minutes. Clearly, this instruction decreases the odds of short (eating) occasions being registered. The underregistration of (short)

eating occasions is in itself revealing on the declining importance of eating, but it affects the potential of the TOR'04 dataset to draw conclusions on meal destructure. It seriously jeopardizes the comparability of the findings from 2004 with those of 1999 and 1966 on some levels. We believe that the underregistration of short eating occasions in the TOR'04 dataset distorts the following parameters:

- a serious underestimation of the rate of eating (rate of eating will be lower in TOR'04 than in NIS'99)
- a small underestimation of the duration of eating per period (as only the short eating occasions are not included in the daily or weekly duration, the daily or weekly duration of eating will be somewhat lower in TOR'04 than in NIS'99)
- a small underestimation of the percentage of eating performed beyond proper mealtimes (as only the short eating occasions are not visible in the daily timing of eating the share of eating performed beyond proper mealtimes will be somewhat lower in TOR'04 than in NIS'99)
- a small underestimation of solitary eating (the underregistration of the short, solitary eating occasions entails a lower level of solitary eating and a higher level of commensality in TOR'04 than in NIS'99)

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<sup>5</sup> This calculation is the average percentage of respondents eating zero to six meals on the five weekdays. Results for the average working day did not lead to interpretable results, as the number of meals was in most cases a fractional number, rather than an integer.

**Table 2:5 Main characteristics of the time-use datasets used**

	Szalai'66	NIS'99	BEL'66-'99	TOR'04
<b>Age</b>	19-65	12-95	19-65	18-75
<b>n (unweighted)</b>	2,077 Belgians, one respondent per household	8,382 Belgians, from 4,275 households	5,356 Belgians, one respondent per household	1,780 Flemings, one respondent per household High quality full week selection: 1719 Flemings
<b>Fieldwork period</b>	01/1966-04/1966	12/1998 – 01/2000	/	15/04-15/07/2004 & 1/09-30/10/2004
<b>Diary period</b>	1 day	1 weekday and 1 weekend day	/	1 full week
<b>Diary registration method</b>	continuous	10-minute time slots	/	continuous
<b>Diary information</b>	Primary activity Secondary activity Location Company present	Primary activity Location Means of transport Company present	Primary activity Location Company present	Primary activity Secondary activity Location Means of transport Company present Talked to whom Motivation
<b>Questionnaire information</b>	Restricted number of background variables All variables at categorical level of measurement	Restricted number of background variables	Restricted number of background variables All variables at categorical level of measurement	Elaborate questionnaire Specific questions on eating habits

**Table 2:6 Unweighted and weighted number of respondents in the time-use surveys of Szalai'66, NIS'99 and TOR'04 for all days of the week**

	Szalai'66		NIS'99		TOR'04	
	Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted
<b>Monday</b>	288	281	658	605	1,719	1,710
<b>Tuesday</b>	334	329	673	603	1,719	1,710
<b>Wednesday</b>	340	338	642	577	1,719	1,710
<b>Thursday</b>	333	337	658	593	1,719	1,710
<b>Friday</b>	313	311	648	570	1,719	1,710
<b>Weekdays</b>	<b>1,608</b>	<b>1,596</b>	<b>3,279</b>	<b>2,947</b>	<b>1,719</b>	<b>1,710</b>
<b>Saturday</b>	252	254	1,641	1,424	1,719	1,710
<b>Sunday</b>	217	226	1,638	1,523	1,719	1,710
<b>Weekend days</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>3,279</b>	<b>2,947</b>	<b>1,719</b>	<b>1,710</b>
<b>Full week</b>	<b>2,077</b>	<b>2,076</b>	<b>3,279</b>	<b>2,947</b>	<b>1,719</b>	<b>1,710</b>

## **2.2 Hypotheses: operational definitions of meal deconstruction**

This study aims to picture the temporal, social and spatial dimensions of meal deconstruction as elaborately as possible. These dimensions of deconstruction are discussed separately, and within each dimension a number of various indicators are studied. In this section, we tackle the hypotheses that are central to the first research question in this thesis, namely the veracity of the deconstruction of our eating habits during the last decades. Here we move from a conceptual definition of deconstruction to an operational one. We define how meal deconstruction can be discerned from the time-use data, given the conceptual definition of the temporal, social and spatial structure of the meal pattern we have tackled in the first chapter. The main issue is defining how temporal, social and spatial deconstruction of the meal pattern should reveal itself in the time-budget data.

Answering the question of deconstruction assumes that we evaluate an evolution over time. The historical evolution of the various dimensions of meal deconstruction is outlined by means of the BEL'66-'99 dataset. Significance tests are performed to check for the significance of the observed changes between 1966 and 1999. Sometimes, it is not possible to draw a historical picture of the situation. This is due to the fact that the BEL'66-'99 dataset does not contain much detailed context information on time use. The results for Flanders in 2004 are presented next to the historical evolution in Belgium between 1966 and 1999. When it is deemed necessary, remarkable differences between the results for 1999 and 2004 are highlighted. However, no analyses are performed simultaneously on the Belgian (NIS'99) and the Flemish (TOR'04) dataset. We did not want to discard the wealthy source of material available in the Flemish time-use dataset through homogenization with the Belgian data. Due to different registration procedures and different regions (Belgium versus Flanders), the comparability of the data from 1999 with those from 2004 is not always self-evident.. In this section, we successively go into the hypotheses about temporal deconstruction, social deconstruction and spatial deconstruction.

### 2.2.1 Temporal destructureation: hypotheses

According some social scientists (Aymard, Grignon and Sabban, 1996; Fischler, 2001; Herpin, 1988), the meal pattern has lost much of its stable temporal character. The meal is no longer considered as a hinge of the day, a *Zeitgeber*, giving meaning to the course of the day. The relationship between meals and time is presumed to be reversed. It would no longer be meals that structure time, instead time would structure meals. In the early 1990s, Grignon, Sabban and Aymard were wondering whether food was not increasingly a matter of the time reserved for it, rather than a *Zeitgeber*. As mentioned in the first chapter, the location of meals in the day, their sequence and duration is closely tied to the meal's importance (Aymard, Grignon and Sabban, 1996). As such, the temporal destructureation of eating practices reveals itself in various manners.

With regard to the tempo of eating, some social scientists consider the lack of fixed times for eating as typical of modern eating habits. This temporal disinsertion (*désimplantation horaire*) as defined by Herpin (1988) corresponds with the decline of the three-meal pattern and the increase in snacks in between meals. The loss of fixed times is closely linked to a multiplication of food contacts throughout the day, or to put it differently, to a deconcentration of food contacts (Herpin, 1988). In this respect, the term "grazing" is used, indicating that food is eaten in an incidental way with regard to timing, but also with regard to place and contents (Kjaernes, 2001a: 9). The intake of food would no longer be dictated by social impulses or temporal norms, but rather by the physiobiology of hunger or another individual imperative. Fischler (2001) considers destructureation among other symptoms as an increased flexibility with respect to the meal's regularity. As meals dissolve and get skipped more often, other types of eating occasions fill the vacuum. The end of meals would herald the era of snacks. When food intake is possible in between meals, i.e. in extra-prandial format, the meal loses its function as a regulating mechanism (Poulain, 2002a: 48). If eating loses its regulating and meaning-providing character in daily time use, then there is no strict relationship anymore between eating and its timing and rate: meals can occur at any time, irrespective of the times reserved for eating and irrespective of the socially regulated daily frequency of eating.

*If a structured meal pattern assumes that eating is restricted to a set number of eating occasions, namely three daily meals, then the skipping of one or more of these three meals as well as including extra-prandial intakes beyond these three meals, is to be considered as a sign of the temporal deconstruction of Belgian eating habits.* Earlier in this chapter, it was argued that time-use data do not allow for grasping very short eating occasions and mainly register longer eating occasions, which are most likely to be meals rather than snacks. This means that the data available here do not allow to grasp (the evolution of) these extra-prandial intakes and as such do not allow for assessing the grazing hypothesis. As we only note the meals in a person's eating practice, the temporal deconstruction of our eating habits can only be assessed by means of the evolution of the number of meals, more particularly the skipping of meals. *This means that a decline in the percentage of the population with a three-meal pattern and an increase in the proportion skipping one or more meals between 1966 and 1999 can be read as a sign of the deconstruction of Belgian eating habits, as far as the tempo of eating is considered.*

The temporal deconstruction of eating habits also relates to the timing of meals. The meal is anticipated exactly by the prohibition to eat at other times than mealtimes. The meal's anticipation and its temporal delineation point to the meal's importance. *If a structured meal pattern assumes that eating occurs at the times reserved for it, namely during "breakfast time", "lunch time" and "dinner time", then eating beyond the proper times reserved for eating, is considered as a symptom of the temporal deconstruction. If eating occurs more beyond the proper mealtimes in 1999 than in 1966, then this is a sign of the temporal deconstruction of Belgian eating habits, as far as the timing of eating is concerned.*

The temporal structure of the meal pattern not only assumes that eating is restricted to the three daily meals at the times reserved for it. It also assumes that time is exclusively attached to eating during the times reserved for eating. A deconstructed meal pattern assumes that eating loses its separate status and autonomy in daily time use (Lemorel, 1992) and that there no longer is a strict relationship between time and eating. Grignon discerns the lack of such a relationship in the contemporary snacky ways of eating: *'Le repas sur le pouce ne transforme donc pas la prise alimentaire en pause; il ne constitue pas un moment particulier capable d'organiser la journée, de*

*structurer l'emploi du temps quotidien*' [A snack does not turn the eating occasion into a break; it does not stand for a particular moment that organizes the day, structures daily time use] (Grignon, 2001b: 19-20). According to Csergo (2001: 13-14), contemporary alimentary nomadism is characterised by a non-controlled attitude towards food: food intake no longer asks for a break, for the interruption of other activities to award eating a separate status. Nahoum-Grappe equally argues that contemporary snacking assumes another relationship towards time: '*Le grignotage est marqué par son rapport au temps: aucun rapport, il n'a ni début ni fin, il s'évase comme un souvenir pas encore défini*' [Snacking is characterised by its relationship towards time: there is no relationship, it has no beginning and no end, it slips away like an undefined memory] (Nahoum-Grappe, 2001: 47). The temporal deconstruction of the meal pattern thus assumes that eating as a primary activity is increasingly pushed aside in daily time use. The decline of the separate status of eating in daily time use is revealed by a shorter time span devoted to eating or by eating while devoting time to another simultaneous activity. The time spent on eating depends on how prevalent this activity is within a person's time use: it is a reflection of how much time is thought to be needed for other things. The more other activities are given priority to eating, the more eating is assumed to be of lesser importance, which is revealed by a shorter time spent on eating (Mintz, 2002: 31). ***A decline in the time allotted to eating also reveals the temporal deconstruction of the meal pattern. The less time is consecrated to eating and the more other activities are given precedence over eating in a person's time use, the more deconstructed the meal pattern. If less time is spent on eating in 1999 compared to 1966, then this evolution is to be read as a deconstruction of the Belgian meal pattern, as far as duration is concerned.***

The status of eating as an activity with a separate social status not only depends on the total time spent on eating per day, but also on the time spent on the various meals. The more important the meal, the more time should be allotted to eating. The meal with the highest status is dinner. As the main meal of the day, dinner should take most time and should be skipped least of all meals. Especially dinner on Sundays cannot be skipped. Meals of lesser importance can take less time and can more easily be skipped. Although breakfast is ideally part of the three-meal pattern, this meal can more easily be skipped than dinner (Charles and Kerr, 1988; Grignon, 1996).

Moreover, the hurried nature of breakfast may allow for less time allotted to this meal compared to dinner. *The skipping of meals, that is when eating takes no time during the times reserved for it, is another symptom of the temporal deconstruction of eating patterns. If the percentage of meal skippers increases between 1966 and 1999, then this change reveals a temporal deconstruction of Belgian eating habits. Analogously, the general decline of time spent on each meal, and more particularly dinner, is to be considered as a temporal deconstruction of Belgian eating habits, as far as duration is considered.*

The separate status of the meal is also put at stake when eating occurs with other simultaneous activities. In the first chapter, it was argued that ideally the meal puts its frame on the gathering, i.e. eating excludes other, simultaneous activities. The only activities that are supposed to occur during the meal are eating and talking. Especially simultaneous attention-demanding activities put the autonomy of eating at stake. Eating loses its status as a valued separate activity in daily time use, when it is combined with another simultaneous attention-demanding activity. *Therefore, the more eating occurs with parallel attention-demanding activities, the more eating loses its autonomy, the more deconstructed the eating practices.* Unfortunately, this type of deconstruction cannot be assessed in a historical manner. The BEL'66-'99 dataset, which is used for historical comparison, does not contain information on parallel activities. Therefore, we have to assess the contemporary situation of eating occurring with other activities by comparing it to eating occurring as a primary activity without disturbing simultaneous activities. This helps putting into perspective the frequency of disturbed eating occasions.

The temporal deconstruction of eating habits reveals itself in four ways:

- a change in tempo: a decline of the three daily meals
- a change in timing: a decline of eating during the collectively reserved times for eating
- a change in duration:
  - a decline of the time allotted to eating as a primary activity on a daily level, a decline in the time spent eating per meal, more particularly dinner and an increase in the number of meal skippers, more particularly dinner skippers

- an high number of eating occasions occurring with simultaneous attention-demanding activities compared to the number of primary, non-disrupted eating occasions

### 2.2.2 Social destructureation: hypotheses

If the meal loses its temporal structure, it is also stripped of its social importance. If the daily rhythm of eating is no longer respected, the result is unpredictability and a higher chance that eating becomes a solitary affair (Elchardus and Glorieux, 1989: 118). Social interactions during the meal are less likely to occur, as the time schedules of individuals are no longer synchronised by the meal as a *Zeitgeber* (Breedveld, Cloïn and van den Broek, 2002: 16). Herpin defines the meal's de-synchronisation as the loss of the meal's sociable character, due to less temporal co-ordination (Herpin, 1988).

In the first chapter of this study, we argued that the meal has to be a social occasion. Nowadays, some scholars fear that the long-lasting, close link between food and sociability is broken up (Fernandez-Armesto, 2002: 19, Gauthier, 1992). The meal's development from a social to a solitary event is considered as a proof of the decay of our eating habits. The uncivil nature of solitary eating appears in one of the first sociological treatises on the meal, Simmel forcefully denounces eating alone: *'Das individuelle Aussehen einer Speise würde sich mit ihrem Zwecke verzehrt zu werden nicht vertragen: das wäre wie Menschenfresserei'* [The individual consumption of food would not allow to be consumed with its aim: it would be like cannibalism] (Berliner Tageblat, 10/10/1910). Indeed, eating alone is often seen as inhuman, animal behaviour. According to Flandrin and Montanari (1996: 717), men distinguish themselves from animals because of the social function attached to food. The animal character of eating alone is also mentioned by Fischler. He restores on the work of Bilz (1971) on Anorexia Nervosa. Bilz discriminates between two categories of eating behaviour of primates: commensalism and vagabond feeding. Fischler recognizes a growing trend towards vagabond feeding in modern Western civilisations. Vagabond feeding is phylogenetically speaking more archaic than commensalism. It is the behaviour of a solitary berry-seeking, vegetarian gatherer, which preceded the commensal practices of the carnivorous hunter. For Fischler the development of

urban-industrialised eating habits comes down to a phylogenetic regression and a U-turn in centuries of civilization (Fischler, 1979: 204). Enjoying gastronomic pleasures has always assumed a social base. From the nineteenth century onwards, the pleasures of the table got stripped of their sinful nature because of commensality. For Brillat-Savarin, *le plaisir de la table* should be an eminently social situation. In his Méditation XIV he writes: “...quelque recherchée que soit la bonne chère, quelque somptueux que soient les accessoires, il n'y a pas de plaisir de table, si le vin est mauvais, les convives ramassés sans choix, les physionomies tristes, et le repas consommé avec précipitation” [...however refined a good meal is, however sumptuous its accessories, there is no pleasure at the table, when the wine is bad, the meal partners gathered indiscriminately, sad expressions on their faces and the meal eaten in a hurry] (Ferguson, 2003: 12). Brillat-Savarin attached great importance to the enjoyment of gustatory pleasure and the organizational factors surrounding the *gourmandise*. The social deconstruction of eating reveals itself in a changing structure of the social contacts during the meal. ***The more eating occurs as a solitary activity, the more eating is deconstructed socially. If eating is found to occur alone more often in 1999 compared to 1966, then eating is more deconstructed on a social level than before.***

The meal is not only supposed to be a social affair, but more particularly a family occasion. Meals should especially confirm primary relationships. The persons with whom the household is shared are assumed to be the ideal meal partners. This holds especially for the main meal of the day. Household members are thus assumed to take a considerable part of the social contact during the daily meal pattern. ***The less social contact occurs with household members during eating occasions, and more particularly during dinner, the more socially deconstructed the meal pattern is.***

The social deconstruction of eating habits reveals itself in two ways:

- an increase in solitary meals.
- a decrease in primary commensality (i.e. eating with the household members) in general and more particularly during dinner

### 2.2.3 Spatial deconstruction: hypotheses

In the first chapter, it was argued that the home and more particularly the dinner table, are considered as the ideal locations for a proper meal. As the main meal of the day, dinner, marked the beginning of family time by father's homecoming, this meal was especially tied to the home. Nowadays, eating is assumed to be tied less to this specific location. Herpin refers to the general change in the spatial character of the meal as a *de-localisation*. This assumes that food is less territorially demarcated (Herpin, 1988). Sjögren-de Beauchaine found that her respondents, members of the Parisian bourgeoisie, considered the changes in the spatial character of the meal as a genuine revolution. The growing flexibility and variety in locations of the meal were seen as an indication of the decay of the meal's ritual character. Instead of the exclusive location of the meal in the dining room, many other locations were possible nowadays like in the kitchen or in front of TV, despite the high level of criticism on that practice (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 118). The location of eating at the dinner table holds especially for dinner.

Similarly, the delocalisation of the meal also reveals itself beyond the homeplace. Although there may be some doubts on the fact that massive eating on the streets is a recent phenomenon, there is considerable unanimity on the fact that this practice has been denounced for a long time, at least since the bourgeois meal ideology came into being. Mayhew studied the London street folk in the middle of the nineteenth century and estimated that there were 41,000 street-traders in London in 1850 - that is one for every 63 inhabitants. This fast-food was especially consumed by the less well-off, children and young people, and open-air and casual workers (Mayhew, 1861: 158 in Burnett, 2002:28). Despite its normality in terms of occurrence, eating on the streets never achieved an acceptable image in moral terms: 'Cheap 'fast' food, eaten publicly from a newspaper packet with the fingers, offended propriety: it was too suggestive of hunger and the inability of a housewife to provide a 'proper' meal' (Burnett, 2002: 29). Fierro (2001: 134) comes to similar results for Paris: '*Dans ce désordre et cette agitation, dans des conditions aussi précaires, même si le nez du Parisien est accoutumé aux odeurs putrides d'une voie publique regorgeant d'ordures et généralement dépourvue d'égouts, il n'est guère aisé de s'alimenter dans la rue, et ce malgré la présence de nombreux vendeurs ambulants qui proposent des denrées à*

*consommer sur place* [In this chaos and confusion, in these critical conditions, even if the nose of the Parisian was accustomed to the putrefying smells of streets full of rubbish and without any drains, and despite the food vendors present in large numbers, he is not in the habit of eating on the streets].

*The spatial destructure of the meal pattern is revealed by the decreasing importance of the homeplace and the dinner table as the location for eating and more particularly for the main meal of the day. If eating and more particularly dinner, occurs more at other places than the home place in 1999 than in 1966, then this will be considered as a sign of the spatial destructure of eating practices.* Unfortunately, we only have information on the specific location of meals (at the dinner table or other locations) from 2004, which means that the evolution of eating at the dinner table cannot be assessed. The spatial destructure of eating on that level will be assessed by comparing the frequency of eating at the dinner table with its frequency at other locations.

The spatial destructure of eating habits reveals itself in two ways:

- a large proportion of eating occurring at other locations compared to the dinner table
- a decrease in eating time spent at home, and more particularly a decrease in the share of dinner time spent at home.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

In this thesis, the destructure of eating practices is tackled by means of time-use data. These data are especially designed to assess the temporal ordering in people's behaviour. This chapter assessed the potential of time-use data for answering the question of meal destructure. In the next chapter, the Belgian time-use surveys from 1966 and 1999 are compared in order to draw conclusions on the change in Belgian eating practices, and more particularly the veracity of the destructure thesis. In the last section of this chapter, we defined the symptoms of temporal, social and spatial destructure of the Belgian meal pattern. In the next chapter, it is tested whether these symptoms are discerned in practice.

## **Chapter 3 The destructure thesis tested**

This chapter aims at answering the first of the two research questions central to this thesis, namely do Belgian eating habits reveal a process of destructure? In the second chapter, it was defined which evolutions are read as symptoms of meal destructure and why this is so. Successively, we tackle the temporal, social and spatial destructure of Belgian eating habits. As argued earlier, the temporal order in our eating habits is considered as the most essential one: the various meals within the daily meal pattern are first and foremost temporally demarcated within the day. Before we can assess the social and spatial destructure of particular meals, these meals need to be defined temporally.

To test the destructure thesis, we principally rely on the merged Belgian dataset with time-use information from 1966 and 1999. Each section starts by commenting the historical evolution in Belgian eating practices between 1966 and 1999. The Flemish situation in 2004 is also discussed. The Flemish situation in 2004 should largely confirm the trends we have discerned in the Belgian dataset, which means that the Flemish data from 2004 should largely correspond with the Belgian data from 1999. If considerable differences exist between the conclusions from 1999 and 2004, this is discussed more deeply.

### **3.1 Temporal destructure of the meal pattern**

In the first section of this empirical chapter, our focus is on the various symptoms of temporal meal destructure. We consecutively tackle the daily rate of eating, the timing of eating, the duration of eating and the combination of eating with other simultaneous activities. There is a particular reason for maintaining this order. By investigating the rate and the timing of eating activities, we assess to what extent the three-meal pattern persists. Then we move on to the duration of eating. We assess the duration of the three meals and the extent to which these meals are skipped. The duration of eating reveals the importance attached to eating as an autonomous activity. This is also revealed by the extent to which eating occurs without simultaneous secondary activities, the last symptom of temporal destructure of our eating habits.

### 3.1.1 The rate of eating: the decline of the three-meal pattern

As argued in the second chapter, the time-use data used here do not grasp short eating occasions in a satisfying manner. This entails that these data do not allow for tackling the grazing hypothesis. The grazing hypothesis assumes that the number of snacks or short eating occasions has increased. As short eating occasions are not, or at least insufficiently, registered in the time-use diary, this hypothesis cannot be tested. This does not mean that the temporal deconstruction of eating, as far as rate is concerned, cannot be tested at all by means of the available data. The time-use data only register the longer eating occasions, which are most likely to be meals rather than snacks. A normal daily meal pattern includes three square meals. In this section, it is our aim to assess to what extent three meals are still taken on a daily basis.

**Table 3:1 Average number of eating occasions on all days of the week in 1966 and 1999 (BEL'66-'99)**

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Week-day	Sat	Sun
<b>1966</b>	3.15 (2.98) (n=281)	3.25 (3.06) (n=329)	3.15 (2.97) (n=338)	3.15 (2.97) (n=337)	3.18 (3.00) (n=311)	3.18 (3.00) (n=1596)	3.08 (2.94) (n=254)	3.07 (2.93) (n=226)
<b>Sig Δ 66-99</b>	*** (ns)	*** (***)	*** (ns)	*** (*)	*** (***)	*** (***)	*** (*)	*** (ns)
<b>1999</b>	2.88 (n=605)	2.82 (n=603)	2.85 (n=577)	2.84 (n=593)	2.75 (n=570)	2.83 (n=2947)	2.79 (n=1424)	2.84 (n=1523)

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, ns: p≥0.05 (*the average number of eating occasions excluding the four o'clock break* – significance level comparing the average number of eating occasions excluding the four o'clock break in 1966 with the average number of eating occasions in 1999)

A comparison of the average number of daily eating occasions between 1966 and 1999, as displayed in table 3:1, shows that there has been a significant decline in the number of daily eating occasions on all days of the week between 1966 and 1999. In 1966 the average daily rate of eating amounted to more than three. As will be shown in section 3.1.2.1, next to the three daily meals some people also took a four o'clock snack. On an average weekday about 17.8 percent of the Belgian population had something to eat around four o'clock. Women and those who not active on the labour market (retired, housewives, unemployed) were significantly more likely to have four o'clock break. The four o'clock snack was a rather collective meal occasion as far as timing is concerned. However, it is not considered an *essential* part of the three-meal pattern, which consists of breakfast, lunch and dinner. Therefore, we have also calculated the average number of eating occasions in 1966, excluding the four o'clock

break. In 1966, the average number of eating occasions on an average weekday, excluding the four o'clock snack, amounts to three. In 1999, the average number of eating occasions is less than three. The evolution of the daily rate of eating occasions is a sign of the temporal destructure of the Belgian meal pattern. The rate of meals is lower than three. Meals are more often skipped in 1999 than in 1966. The decline in the daily rate of meals is corroborated by the findings for Flanders in 2004 (Table 3:2). The average number of primary eating occasions is slightly more than two per day. The average number of eating occasions is somewhat higher on weekdays (2.26) than on weekend days (2.14 and 2.06 on Saturdays and Sundays respectively). In 1966, we also found that the average number of meals was higher on weekdays than on weekend days. This is in line with earlier findings from the Nordic countries and Denmark (Gronow and Jääskeläinen, 2001: 97-98). In 1999, on the contrary, there is no difference between weekend days and weekdays as far as the rate of meals is concerned.

**Table 3:2 Average number of eating occasions of each type for all days of the week (TOR'04 - n=1710)**

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Week-day	Sat	Sun
<b>Hot meals<sup>6</sup></b>	0.83	0.85	0.82	0.78	0.77	0.81	0.70	0.69
<b>Cold meals<sup>7</sup></b>	1.38	1.39	1.39	1.38	1.35	1.38	1.28	1.21
<b>Restaurant meals</b>	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.10	0.07	0.15	0.17
<b>All meals</b>	2.28	2.29	2.28	2.24	2.22	2.26	2.14	2.06

There is a marked contrast in the average number of eating occasions between 1999 and 2004. The large difference between NIS'99 and TOR'04 can be put down to three different reasons. Firstly, it is probably due to change over time, with the average number of daily eating occasions declining as time goes on. Secondly, the difference between NIS'99 and TOR'04 is partly due to a difference between Flanders and the Walloon region. While Belgians report an average of 2.83 eating occasions in 1999, Flemings register an average number of 2.77 eating occasions per day, which is significantly less than the 2.94 found with the Walloon population. The same conclusion holds for Saturdays, but not for Sundays. However, the difference between 1999 and 2004 is also due to the difference in the registration procedure between the Flemish and the Belgian time-use studies. In section 2.1.2.4, we argued that the

<sup>6</sup> Hot meals include hot meals in general and hot meals at work.

<sup>7</sup> Cold meals include cold meals in general and cold meals at work.

stronger underregistration of short eating occasions in the TOR'04 dataset would entail a lower rate of eating occasions in TOR'04 than in NIS'99. In the Flemish time-use survey with continuous registration conducted in 1999 (TOR'99), the average number of eating occasions on a weekday was 2.36, which is considerably less than the 2.77 eating occasions per day as registered by the Flemish selection in the Belgian 1999 dataset (NIS'99) in a 10-minute interval registration procedure.

**Table 3:3 Percentage of respondents taking zero to six daily eating occasions for all days of the week in 1966 and 1999 (BEL'66-'99)**

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednes- day	Thursday	Friday	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>1966 (all eating occasions)</b>								
<b>Number of daily meals</b>	<b>n=281</b>	<b>n=329</b>	<b>n=338</b>	<b>n=337</b>	<b>n=311</b>	<b>n=1596</b>	<b>n=254</b>	<b>n=226</b>
<b>0</b>	0.5%	0.0%	0.5%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>1</b>	0.5%	2.0%	1.8%	2.1%	1.6%	1.6%	1.7%	3.8%
<b>2</b>	14.0%	10.4%	14.5%	12.7%	15.0%	13.3%	17.8%	17.4%
<b>3</b>	58.0%	54.9%	54.3%	57.5%	53.4%	55.6%	56.8%	51.6%
<b>4</b>	22.0%	27.2%	23.8%	22.5%	25.0%	24.2%	18.8%	22.6%
<b>5</b>	4.9%	4.4%	4.9%	4.6%	3.8%	4.5%	4.7%	4.1%
<b>6+</b>	0%	1.0%	0.3%	0.4%	1.1%	0.6%	0.3%	0.4%
<b>1966 (excluding four o'clock snack)</b>								
<b>Number of daily meals</b>	<b>n=281</b>	<b>n=329</b>	<b>n=338</b>	<b>n=337</b>	<b>n=311</b>	<b>n=1596</b>	<b>n=254</b>	<b>n=226</b>
<b>0</b>	0.5%	0.0%	0.6%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>1</b>	1.7%	2.7%	1.7%	2.3%	3.1%	2.3%	2.2%	3.8%
<b>2</b>	15.1%	13.6%	19.9%	17.3%	16.6%	16.6%	21.9%	22.2%
<b>3</b>	65.6%	62.9%	58.2%	62.8%	60.6%	61.9%	59.5%	53.6%
<b>4</b>	16.0%	18.0%	17.3%	14.8%	17.6%	16.7%	13.0%	17.3%
<b>5</b>	1.1%	1.8%	2.4%	2.4%	1.1%	1.8%	3.2%	3.0%
<b>6+</b>	0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.1%	1.1%	0.5%	0.2%	0.0%
<b>1999 (all eating occasions)</b>								
<b>Number of daily meals</b>	<b>n=605</b>	<b>n=603</b>	<b>n=577</b>	<b>n=593</b>	<b>n=570</b>	<b>n=2947</b>	<b>n=1424</b>	<b>n=1523</b>
<b>0</b>	1%	0.9%	1.5%	0.4%	0.2%	0.8%	0.7%	0.8%
<b>1</b>	6.0%	7.0%	6.5%	7.5%	7.5%	6.9%	6.1%	5.2%
<b>2</b>	22.7%	24.9%	20.1%	24.4%	26.9%	23.8%	26.2%	24.8%
<b>3</b>	49.9%	48.3%	52.8%	48.5%	51.5%	50.2%	50.7%	51.6%
<b>4</b>	16.0%	15.5%	15.7%	15.0%	11.1%	14.7%	13.2%	14.4%
<b>5</b>	3.9%	2.5%	3.3%	3.7%	2.5%	3.2%	2.6%	2.6%
<b>6+</b>	0.4%	0.8%	0.1%	0.6%	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%	0.6%

The declining importance of the three-meal pattern can also be investigated by assessing the share of the population that still engages in three daily meals. As shown in table 3:3, about a quarter of the population in 1966 has four eating occasions on an average weekday. We have already pointed to the fact that 17.8 percent of the population take a four o'clock snack. Therefore we have also calculated the frequency of the various meal patterns in 1966, excluding the four o'clock snack. The percentage of the population with three daily meals on a weekday (excluding four o'clock snack) has decreased from 61.9 percent in 1966 to 50.2 percent in 1999. The percentage of the population taking less than three daily meals has grown considerably from about

19.2 percent in 1966 to over 30 percent in 1999. The rise is most pronounced for the two-meal pattern. Nevertheless, three daily meals remain the most common pattern, characteristic of the majority of the population in 1966 as well as in 1999 (Table 3:3). The decline of the percentage taking three daily meals is corroborated by the Flemish situation in 2004 (Table 3:4). In 2004, 45.5 percent of the Flemings take three daily meals. There are some slight fluctuations between weekdays, with Tuesdays characterised by the highest frequency (47.9 percent) and Fridays by the lowest frequency (43.7 percent) of three daily meals. On Sundays, the two-meal pattern is more popular (37.6 percent) than on weekdays. This finding may point at the practice of combining the morning meal and the midday meal in only one meal, namely brunch late in the morning on weekends. This assumption is also sustained by the timing of eating on Sundays which will be discussed in section 3.1.2.1. Meal patterns with four or more eating occasions are highly exceptional in 2004, varying around 2.7 percent on weekdays and even less on Saturdays (2.4 percent) and Sundays (1.4 percent). Almost all these respondents register four eating occasions, while five or more are highly exceptional.

**Table 3:4 Percentage of respondents taking zero to six (or more) daily eating occasions for all days of the week (TOR'04 - n=1710)**

Number of daily meals	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Weekday <sup>8</sup>	Saturday	Sunday
0	4.3%	4.9%	5.6%	5.7%	6.0%	5.3%	6.7%	6.8%
1	14.1%	14.4%	13.8%	14.6%	14.7%	14.3%	16.6%	18.8%
2	33.8%	30.2%	31.4%	32.7%	33.2%	32.3%	34.7%	37.6%
3	45.0%	47.9%	46.1%	44.7%	43.7%	45.5%	39.6%	35.1%
4	2.8%	2.5%	2.9%	2.1%	2.1%	2.5%	2.3%	1.5%
5	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
6+	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

The above leads us to conclude that there has been a temporal deconstruction of the Belgian meal pattern as far as the daily rate of meals is concerned. The ideal of three daily meals occurs less in practice in 1999 than in 1966: the percentage with three daily meals has decreased, while the percentage with less than three daily meals has increased. Nevertheless, we assume that the deconcentration of food contacts is still in an early stage in Flanders and Belgium. Although the evolution of the number of short eating occasions could not be assessed, three daily meals remain the most common pattern. The main meals are still there, which presumes that they face little

<sup>8</sup> This calculation is the average percentage of respondents eating zero to six meals on the five weekdays. Results for the average working day did not lead to interpretable results, as the number of meals was in most cases a fractional number, rather than an integer.

competition from eventual snacks in between. These snacks may occur, but as a complement, rather than a threat (i.e. substitute), to the existing meals.

In this section, we questioned the daily rate of meals without assessing which meals in particular are skipped or maintained. This will be tackled in the third section on the duration of eating. Before we can go into the skipping of particular meals, these meals have to be temporally delimited, which is the topic of the second section, namely the timing of eating.

### 3.1.2 The timing of eating: the collective rhythm of eating and eating beyond proper mealtimes

In this section, the timing of eating and the frequency of eating beyond proper mealtimes is tackled. First, the temporally collective nature of eating is examined. Shared meals like breakfast, lunch and dinner operate as *Zeitgebers* in the individual use of time. One of the central concerns over modern eating habits is the skipping of these three meals. The loss of fixed mealtimes implies a deconcentration of eating occasions. Eating is no longer concentrated on the periods reserved for it, but (also) beyond those periods. This *désimplantation horaire* as defined by Herpin (1988) is closely linked to the concept of grazing, which assumes that food is taken in an incidental way among other things with regard to timing (Kjaernes, 2001a). As such, the intake of food would no longer be dictated by social impulses or temporal norms, but rather by the physiobiology of hunger or other individual imperatives.

In a first sub-section, we assess what the proper mealtimes are in Flanders and Belgium. The timing of meals, that is the period of the day reserved for eating, is a collective affair. By means of tempograms, which visualise the collective timing of eating throughout the day, we demarcate proper mealtimes. We consider to what extent these proper mealtimes overlap in the various research years and whether there is any difference in the timing of eating between 1966, 1999 and 2004. We also investigate whether eating is temporally a less collective activity, and therefore operates less as a *Zeitgeber*. The central aim of the first sub-section is to define the three daily proper mealtimes by means of the collective timing of eating (tempograms) in the three research years. In a second sub-section, we investigate to

what extent Flemings and Belgians still adhere to these proper mealtimes. It is studied to what extent eating is concentrated on the proper mealtimes and whether this concentration has decreased over time.

### **3.1.2.1 Assessing and demarcating proper mealtimes by means of tempograms**

In order to assess whether individuals have a normal eating behaviour that mirrors the collective, temporal norms regarding eating, individual eating behaviour is compared to the collective eating behaviour in the population. For weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays separately, the appropriate time spans for breakfast, lunch and dinner are delimited, based on the occurrence of eating at any given moment of the day. This is reflected by tempograms. It seems reasonable to delimit mealtimes, by looking at the proportion of the population that is engaged in eating at a given moment in the day. Indeed, when a large share of the population is eating, that moment may be considered as an appropriate time for eating. Conversely, when only a small share of the population is eating, that time should not be considered as a proper mealtime.

However, it is not self-evident what share of the population should be eating to consider a moment as a proper mealtime. Van Gelooven defined appropriate drinking situations as those moments when at least 5 percent of the population is drinking. Conversely, moments with less than 5 percent of the population drinking, were considered as improper drinking situations (van Gelooven, 1990). *To define proper mealtimes, we assume that at least 5 percent of the population is eating.* To allow for a more well-founded demarcation of eating moments, the timing of two other activities besides eating is also taken into account. Alongside meals, sleeping and working also operate as important *Zeitgebers*, that temporally structure activities. Temporal norms on the appropriate timing and duration of work, sleep and meals give bearing to one's behaviour and give meaning to time. 12 o'clock at noon is not the same as 12 o'clock at night. The latter is deemed appropriate for sleeping, while the former is deemed appropriate for eating. The collective rhythm divides the day into different periods: time to get up, breakfast time, working time, lunch time, dinner time, time to relax and sleeping time. *On weekdays and Saturdays, the timing of work is taken into account as an important Zeitgeber in defining proper mealtimes.* In a study on the effect of unemployment on the rhythm of daily life, Elchardus and

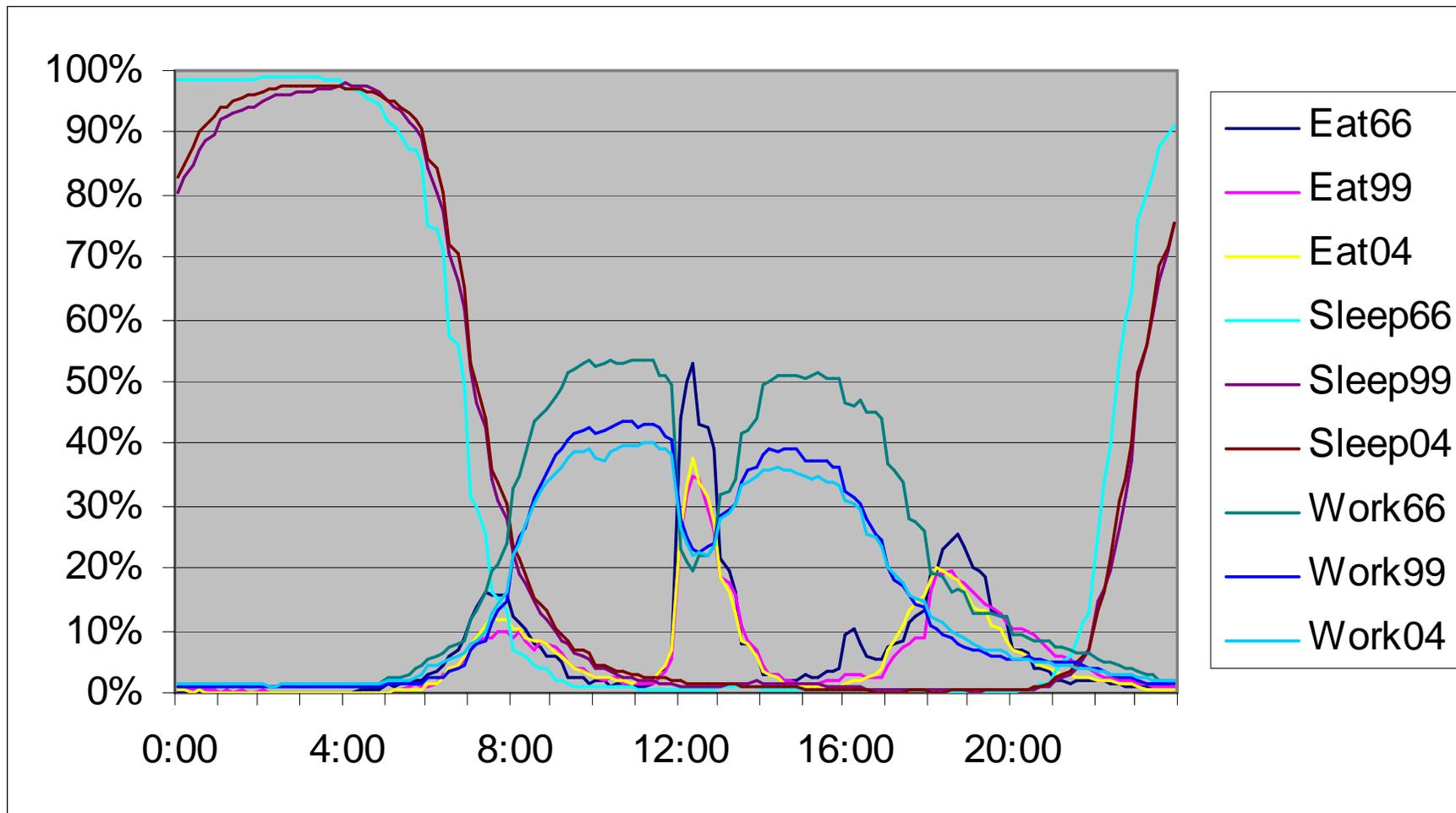
Glorieux found that the daily rhythm of life was highly synchronised throughout society. Both the employed and the unemployed kept in pace with the collective rhythm of work on the level of time order (Elchardus and Glorieux, 1989: 118, 135). As such, the appropriateness of eating is assumed to depend on the timing of work, not only for the employed, but also for those who are not in the labour market. *Sleep was taken into account as a Zeitgeber on weekdays and weekend days.* The course of sleeping is considered as an important determinant in delimiting breakfast: one has to wake up before having breakfast. The proper time for breakfast thus also depends on the proper time for sleeping and waking up. Most sleep occurs at night, while breakfast literally is the first break after the long fast of the night. Where exactly to put the border between the night and the day, is not self-evident. The percentage of people awake is a good guide in judging the appropriateness of breakfast.

In the following sections, the collective timing of eating and the temporal boundaries of breakfast, lunch and dinner on weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays are tackled consecutively. The distinctive features of the collective timing of eating are discussed exhaustively for the three research years. When the timing of meals has not evolved considerably in the last four decades, we try to reach an univocal delineation of proper mealtimes for all three research years (the temporal boundaries for proper mealtimes coincide). This univocal delineation of proper mealtimes facilitates the historical comparison, without jeopardizing the proper timing of eating in a specific research year. When there has been a serious evolution in the proper timing of eating, and the location of eating within the day considerably differs between research years, then separate temporal boundaries are applied to the various research years. More information on significant differences in the prevalence of eating on each hour of the day between 1966 and 1999 can be found in appendix D.

The demarcation of proper mealtimes entails the demarcation of improper times for eating. The periods in between meals are termed as the morning (the period between breakfast and lunch), the afternoon (the period between lunch and dinner), the evening (the period between dinner and bedtime) and the night (the period between bedtime and breakfast). For reasons of clarity, we decided to let the night begin at 23:00, on weekdays as well as weekend days, and for all three research years. For a study that tries to discern proper mealtimes from atypical times for eating, there is little use in

establishing a border between night and evening in a very precise manner, as both night and evening are considered as atypical times for eating. 23:00 is acceptable as mean bedtime, for weekdays as well as weekend days and for all three research years. By 23:00 on a weekday, 50 percent has gone to bed in 1999 and 2004, while 76 percent had gone to bed at that time in 1966. On Saturdays, 31 percent has gone to sleep by that time in 1999 and 2004, while 54 percent was already asleep at 23:00 in 1966. On Sundays, 52 percent has gone to bed by 23:00 in 1999 and 2004, while 68 percent was already in bed in 1966.

Figure 3:1 The daily rhythm of eating, working and sleeping on weekdays in 1966 and 1999 (BEL'66-'99) and in 2004 (TOR'04)



*Proper mealtimes on weekdays*

**Table 3:5 Definition of the temporal boundaries of the breakfast, lunch and dinner period on weekdays in 1966 and 1999 (BEL'66-'99) and in 2004 (TOR'04)**

Breakfast		Lunch (midday meal)		Dinner (evening meal)	
Starting time	Finishing time	Starting time	Finishing time	Starting time	Finishing time
6:30	9:10	11:50	13:50	17:00	20:30

Between 6:00 and 7:00 in the morning people start waking up massively (Figure 3:1). At 6:30, 57 percent of the population was already awake in 1966 and more than 5 percent was eating at that time. In 1999 and 2004, people wake up later than in 1966. At 6:30, 7 in 10 are still in bed and less than 5 percent are having breakfast. However, due to the fact that the percentage eating and the percentage waking up increases rapidly from 6:30 on, the starting time for weekday breakfast is set at 6:30 (see table 3:5). In 1966, the breakfast peak is reached at 7:50 with 15.8 percent engaged in eating. In 1999, the peak is reached between 7:40 and 8:10, with only 9.7 percent engaged in eating. Indeed, the percentage engaged in eating between 7:00 and 8:00 in the morning is significantly lower in 1999 (8.79 percent on average) than in 1966 (14.73 percent on average) (Appendix D). The height of the breakfast peak, as illustrated in figure 3:1, corroborates this finding: breakfast is a less temporally collective meal in 2004 and 1999 than in 1966. This is no surprise, as in 1999 and 2004, 35 percent is still asleep at 7:30. People not only wake up later now than in the past, but they also start work somewhat later than in 1966. This has repercussions on the timing of breakfast. After all, breakfast is considered to be the first meal of the day, breaking the long overnight fast and taken before starting to work. By 8:00, one in three people was already at work in 1966. In 1999 and 2004, that is true for barely 22 percent. The maximum percentage of people engaged in paid employment is reached at 10:50 in 1966 and 1999. In 2004, the maximum percentage of people engaged in paid employment is reached at 11:20. However, the percentage engaged in paid work at that time is only slightly higher than at 9:10. Bearing in mind the importance of the temporal rhythm of paid work for the employed and unemployed population, it is assumed that by the time almost the entire active population is engaged in work, that is at 9:10, the time is no longer appropriate for breakfast (Table 3:5).

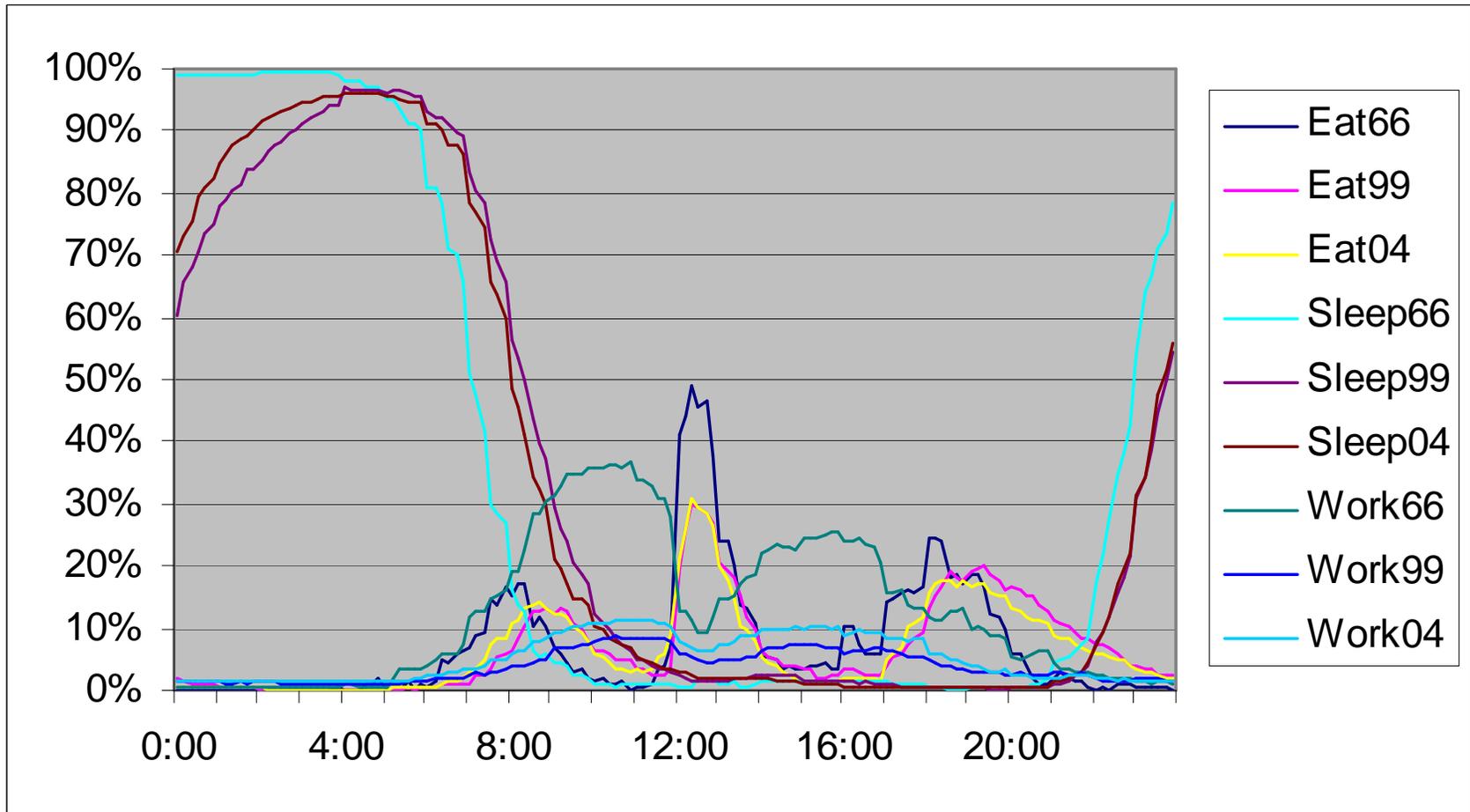
In contrast to breakfast, weekday lunch still operates as an important *Zeitgeber*. The steep peaks for lunch in all research years attest to that. More than any other meal of the week, the weekday meal at noon incites people to collectively give up on all other activities to have lunch. Especially in 1966 lunch still operated as a very important *Zeitgeber*: the percentage engaged in work was more than halved between 11:50 and 12:00. In 1999 and 2004, work does not collapse to the same extent at noon, but we also register an important decrease in the proportion working between 11:50 and 12:00. Moreover, it is striking that lunch still occurs at the same time now as before, since people generally live somewhat later now than in 1966 (get up later and go to sleep later). Therefore, the starting time for the weekday lunch is set at 11:50 for all three research years (Table 3:5). In 1966 the absolute low in percentage at work over noon was reached at 12:20, exactly when eating was at its maximum. In 1999, the lunch peak is reached at the same moment (Figure 3:1). In 2004, the peak is reached at 12:30. The temporal boundaries and the peak location of lunch overlap completely in 1966 and 1999. Nevertheless, the height of the lunch peak is considerably lower in 1999 and 2004, with about one in three respondents engaged in eating at the peak moment, compared to almost 53 percent in 1966. Between 12:00 and 13:00, the average percentage engaged in eating in 1966 amounted to 45 percent, in 1999 this is only 30 percent (Appendix D). Weekday lunch is clearly a less collective mealtime than before. Although the peak shows a more gradual character in 1999 and 2004, and although the collective nature of eating has decreased over time, lunch remains the most temporally co-ordinated meal of the day.

Immediately after the lunch peak, the percentage engaged in working starts going up again. In 1966, the growing trend of people engaged in work is characterised by two breaking points, namely between 12:50 and 13:00, and between 13:20 and 13:30. Both breaking points have their parallels in the rhythm of eating. The weaker connection between work minima and lunch peaks in 1999 and 2004 is due to less people being engaged in paid work before and after lunch, compared to 1966. By 14:00, a very large share of the population is at work again in all research years. Between 13:50 and 14:00 the percentage engaged in working shows a breaking point, delimiting lunch temporally in 1966 and 1999. Therefore the ending time of the weekday lunch is set at 13:50 in all three research years (Table 3:5).

In contrast to lunch, dinner is spread much more throughout the evening. At 17:00, already 7 percent is eating in 1966 as well as in 2004. However, at the same time 37 percent was still at work in 1966, while only 20 percent is still at work in 1999 and 2004. The percentage engaged in paid work is not a real good indicator to delimit dinner. Even though a larger share of the population is engaged in working late in 1966, a larger share is engaged in eating late in 1999. Therefore weekday dinner starting time is set at 17:00 (Table 3:5). Due to the fact that dinner is spread over a longer time span than lunch, dinner peaks are also lower than lunch peaks. The dinner peak in 1966 was centrally located at 18:40 with over 25 percent of the population engaged in eating (Figure 3:1). In 1999, the dinner peak is reached at 18:30, with over 19.7 percent eating, but there is a very long tail stretching out late in the evening. In 2004, the peak is reached at 18:10, with just over 20 percent eating. Again dinner is clearly a less collective moment than it was in 1966. Between 18:00 and 19:00, the percentage of diners amounted to 22.5 percent in 1966, but reached only 18.3 percent in 1999. Moreover, the average hourly percentage engaged in eating is also lower between 17:00 and 18:00, and between 19:00 and 20:00. Only between 20:00 and 21:00, the percentage engaged in eating is higher in 1999 than in 1966 (Appendix D). Dinner time runs out in a much longer and much slower manner in 1999 than in 1966 and 2004. In 1966 and 2004, less than 5 percent engage in eating after 20:30, while in 1999, this is an hour later. This difference is due to the Walloons eating later in the evening than Flemings, at least in 1999 (Appendix F). In contrast to Southern countries like France, Spain or Italy, Belgium and especially Flanders do not have a tradition of eating late. Therefore, the ending time for weekday dinner is set at 20:30 (Table 3:5).

In 1966, the collective rhythm of eating shows a fourth meal, namely the four o'clock break taken by more than 5 percent of the population between 16:00 and 16:40. In 1966, the percentage eating went up between 16:00 and 16:10 and then went down until 16:40. From 16:50 the percentage of people engaged in eating went up again. The proper times for the four o'clock break and dinner were thus contiguous in 1966, with only an artificial scission at 16:50. In 1999 and 2004, there is no sign of a four o'clock break. Therefore, this eating occasion is not included in the demarcation of proper mealtimes.

Figure 3:2 The daily rhythm of eating, sleeping and working on Saturdays in 1966 and 1999 (BEL'66-'99) and in 2004 (TOR'04)



*Proper mealtimes on Saturdays*

**Table 3:6 Definition of the temporal boundaries of the breakfast, lunch and dinner periods on Saturdays in 1966 and 1999 (BEL'66-'99) and in 2004 (TOR'04)**

	Breakfast		Lunch (midday meal)		Dinner (evening meal)	
	Starting time	Finishing time	Starting time	Finishing time	Starting time	Finishing time
<b>1966</b>	6:30	9:10	11:50	13:50	17:00	20:30
<b>1999/ 2004</b>	7:30	10:10	11:50	14:20	17:00	22:00

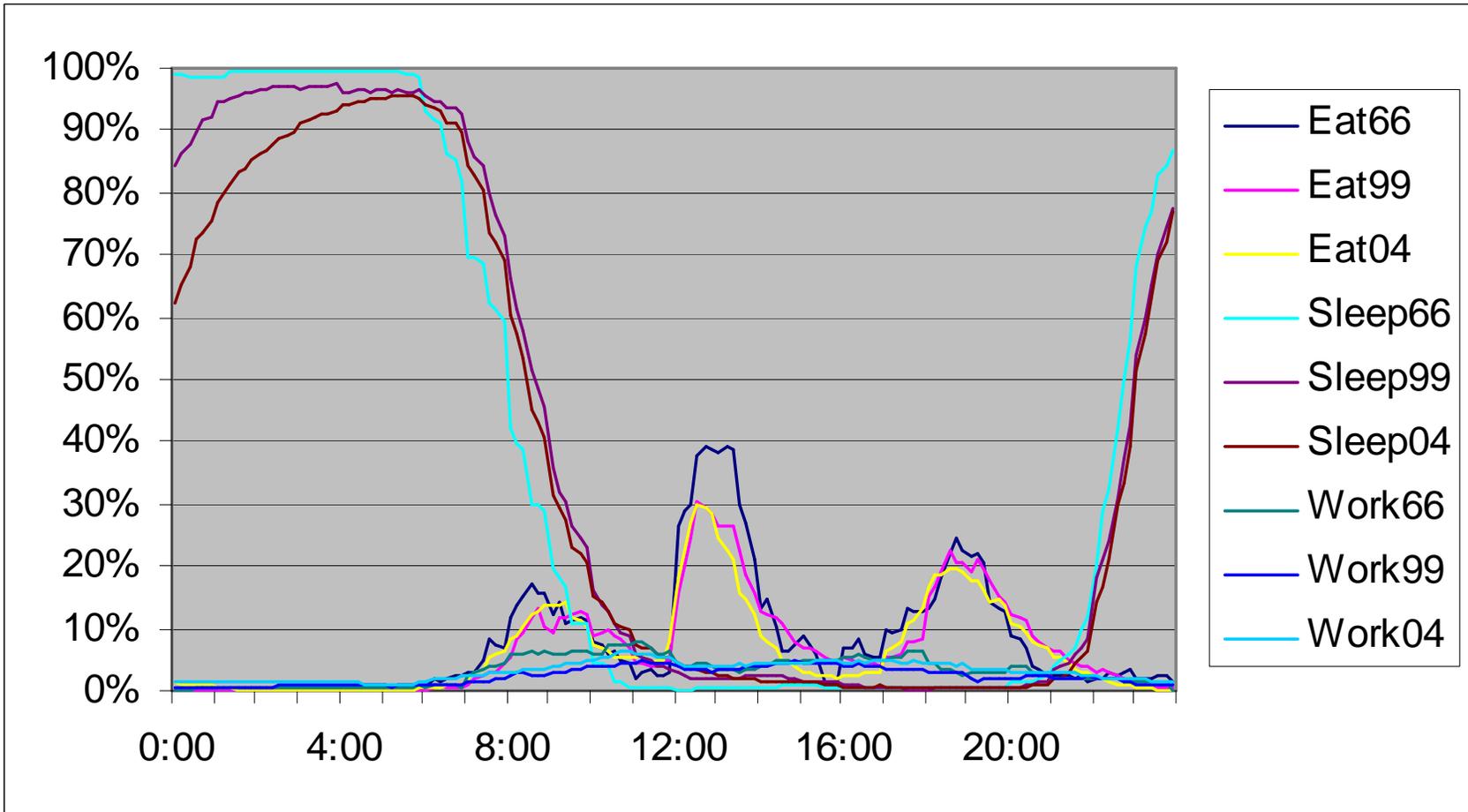
The daily rhythm of eating, sleeping and working on Saturdays differs from the rhythm on weekdays. The timing of breakfast and dinner, as shown in figure 3:2, differs considerably between 1966 on the one hand, and 1999 and 2004 on the other hand. In 1966, breakfast on Saturdays was not that different from breakfast on an average weekday. This is not surprising, as for most people, Saturday (morning) still was a working day. The maximum percentage engaged in paid work on a Saturday morning in 1966 was reached by 10:30, when over 36 percent was at work. In 1999 and 2004, that figure only amounts to 10 percent. Consequently, breakfast was a very different event on Saturdays in 1966 than in later research years. In 1966, breakfast on Saturdays is defined as on weekdays. In 1999 and 2004, work does not put its temporal frame on Saturday and Sunday morning, which enables more people to take breakfast. As a result, the weekend breakfast is a much more collective event than on weekdays in 1999 and 2004. Between 7:00 and 8:00, the percentage having breakfast is significantly higher in 1966 than in 1999. Between 9:00 and 10:00, the opposite occurs (Appendix D). The temporal boundaries of this leisurely Saturday breakfast were set at 7:30 and 10:10, an hour later than for the working week (Table 3:6). By those times about the same share of the population is still in bed on a Saturday as about an hour earlier on a weekday.

On Saturdays, as on weekdays, the lunch peak is reached at 12:20 in 1966 and 1999 (Figure 3:2). The lunch peak is lower on weekend days than on weekdays and lunch is spread more throughout the noon. Here, the opposite of what was found for breakfast occurs. The collective rhythm of work is devastating to the collective nature of the weekday breakfast and the dropping of a collective work schedule leads to breakfast being a more collective occasion on weekends. Conversely, while the collective nature of the weekday lunch should largely be attributed to the collective rhythm of work, lunch turns into a less collective phenomenon when the collective rhythm of

work is dropped on weekend days. Again the lunch peak was significantly higher in 1966 (on average 44 percent engaged in eating between 12:00 and 13:00) than in 1999 (on average 26.8 percent engaged in eating between 12:00 and 13:00) (Appendix D). Paid work put its temporal frame much more on Saturday afternoons in 1966 than in 1999. Therefore, we decided to use the same temporal boundaries for lunch on Saturdays as on weekdays for 1966. In 1999 and 2004, starting time for Saturday lunch is the same as on weekdays, but finishing time for Saturday lunch is set half an hour later than during the working week, namely at 14:20 (Table 3:6). In 1999 and 2004, lunch on Saturdays is a more leisurely event and accordingly it takes longer.

There are clear differences in dinner time between 1966 on the one hand, and 1999 and 2004 on the other hand. Again, the four o'clock break comes before dinner in 1966, with 16:50 as the artificial scission between these two meals. Although dinner on Saturday evenings should be a leisurely occasion in all research years -Sunday is a free day -, in 1999 and 2004 the late, leisurely character of dinner is much more pronounced: a smaller percentage is engaged in eating between 17:00 and 19:00 in 1999, but a significantly higher percentage between 20:00 and midnight (Appendix D). Most probably, the fact that Saturday was a workday had its effect on the organization of Saturday dinner in 1966. While over 17 percent had already gone to sleep by 22:00 in 1966, this is the case for only 8 percent in 1999. Therefore, Saturday dinner is studied separately in 1966, where the same temporal boundaries are applied as on weekdays. For 1999 and 2004, the dinner ending time is set one hour and a half later than on weekdays (Table 3:6).

Figure 3:3 The daily rhythm of eating, sleeping and working on Sundays in 1966 and 1999 (BEL'66-'99) and in 2004 (TOR'04)



*Proper mealtimes on Sundays*

**Table 3:7 Definition of the temporal boundaries of the breakfast, lunch and dinner periods on Sundays in 1966 and 1999 (BEL'66-'99) and in 2004 (TOR'04)**

Breakfast		Dinner (midday meal)		Lunch (evening meal)	
Starting time	Finishing time	Starting time	Finishing time	Starting time	Ending time
7:30	10:50	11:50	15:20	17:00	21:00

The temporal boundaries of Sunday meals are clearly different from the ones that were discerned on weekdays. In all three research years, Sunday is a free day, and work is largely absent from time-use on Sundays. Not surprisingly, breakfast takes place much later and draws out much longer (Figure 3:3). At the same moment in the morning, a larger percentage of the population is asleep on Sundays than on Saturdays. This difference is particularly striking for 1966: Saturday as a workday incited 70 percent of the population to rise before 7:30, on Sundays this is only 38 percent. In 1999 and 2004, Saturdays incited 8 percent more of the population to rise at 7:30 than on Sundays. The practice of sleeping late goes hand in hand with staying up late on a Saturday night, but also with having breakfast late on a Sunday morning. At 7:30, somewhat more than 5 percent of the population is eating in 1966 as well as in 2004. Therefore, breakfast starting time is set at 7:30 on Sundays (Table 3:7).

In all three research years, the breakfast peak is somewhat higher on Sundays than on an average weekday. Still, the peak is lower in 1999 and 2004 than in 1966. Sunday breakfast clearly is a less temporally collective event than before. The percentage engaged in eating in 1999 is significantly smaller between 7:00 and 9:00, is equal between 9:00 and 10:00, and is somewhat higher between 10:00 and 11:00 than in 1966 (Appendix D). In 1999 and 2004, around 4 percent is eating between 10:50 and 11:50, pointing to the practice of eating breakfast or brunch until noon. Even though the temporal boundaries are certainly more relaxed on a leisurely day as a Sunday, breakfast time assumes a morning character. Therefore, it does not seem reasonable to consider the entire morning as breakfast time. Despite the longer lie-in on Sundays and the longer extension of the percentage engaged in eating, 11:50 still shows a breaking point in the percentage eating. The midday meal still operates as a *Zeitgeber*. 10:50, an hour before the midday meal takes off, is set as the final boundary for

Sunday breakfast. It was decided to analyse breakfast within the same temporal interval on Sundays for all three research years (Table 3:7).

On Sundays, the meal at noon is the main meal of the day on Sundays, namely Sunday dinner. The meal at noon on Sundays draws out much longer than on weekdays and Saturdays. As the starting time for the meal at noon is the same as for Saturdays and average weekdays, it is also set at 11:50 (Table 3:7). The peak time and the finishing time, on the contrary, are situated later (Figure 3:3). In 1966 the peak on Sunday was situated at 12:50, while in 1999 and 2004 the peak is situated at 12:30. Finishing time in particular is considerably later and is set at 15:20 (Table 3:7). The wider time span appropriate for Sunday dinner entails that Sunday dinner assumes a less temporally collective character than the meal at noon on weekdays. Sunday dinner is also less temporally collective than before: in 1966 on average one in three Belgians was at the table between 12:00 and 14:00, in 1999 this is less than a quarter of the Belgians (Appendix D).

In contrast to what was found for breakfast and lunch, the evening meal on Sundays does not occur much later than on other days. In 1999 and 1966, the peak of the evening meal is reached at the same time as on weekdays. In 2004, this is somewhat earlier (Figure 3:3). The beginning time of evening meals on Sundays is set at 17:00 as on weekdays. As Sunday evening is followed by a weekday, Sunday dinner ending time is set at an earlier moment than on Saturdays, but somewhat later than on weekdays, namely 21:00 (see table 3:7). By that time, only 2.6 percent are eating in 1966, and 6 percent in 1999 and 2004

### **3.1.2.2 A slight increase in eating on atypical times**

In the previous section it was clearly shown that there are still collective times reserved for eating. Nevertheless, the collective nature of mealtimes is somewhat less pronounced in 1999 and 2004 than in 1966. The peaks characterising the percentage engaged in eating are wider and lower. Eating is more spread around “proper” mealtimes than before. This even compelled us to define wider temporal boundaries for mealtimes on Saturdays in 1999 and 2004, compared to 1966. This in itself is telling: due to the wider spread of eating around mealtimes a larger share of time within the day is considered as a proper time for eating. The broadening of proper

times for eating, of course, has an effect on the calculation of the share of eating performed during atypical times.

In this section, we investigate to what extent eating occurs during and beyond proper mealtimes. If temporal destructure regarding the timing of eating has occurred, then we should find that eating occurs more beyond proper mealtimes, and thus less during proper mealtimes, in 1999 than in 1966. We calculated the average percentage of total daily eating time performed on each of the proper mealtimes, i.e. the breakfast period, lunch period and dinner period, and each of the atypical mealtimes, i.e. the morning, the afternoon, the evening and the night. The tables in this section only relate to participants, which are respondents that ate on that particular day. As a result, the share of atypical times and the share of mealtimes are each other's complements.

Here again, we want to emphasize the importance of the different temporal boundaries drawn for Saturday meals in 1966 on the one hand, and 1999 and 2004 on the other hand. For that reason, we also present concentration coefficients for eating for each period of the day alongside the share of daily eating time spent during that period. The concentration coefficient is calculated as the share of eating performed during that period of the day divided by the share that period takes within the day. Concentration coefficients take into account the length of the time spans considered appropriate for eating. When the time spans deemed appropriate for a particular meal are wider than in 1966, the share of eating performed during that period may not be compared between 1966 and 1999, while concentration coefficients can be compared. A concentration coefficient with value one indicates an accidental spread of eating during that period. In that case, eating is spread proportionally during the 24 hours of the day; it is equally likely to occur at midnight and at noon. A concentration coefficient with a value higher than one indicates that eating is more likely to occur than what would be expected in case of an accidental spread. The higher the value of the concentration coefficient, the more eating is concentrated on that period of the day. A concentration coefficient between zero and one indicates that eating is less likely to occur than what would be expected in case of an accidental spread.

**Table 3:8 Percentage (and concentration coefficient) of eating performed on proper and atypical mealtimes on weekdays, by participants only (BEL'66 -'99)**

	% of day	Monday			Tuesday			Wednesday			Thursday			Friday			Weekday		
		66 n=280	Sig Δ 66-99	99 n=598	66 n=329	Sig Δ 66-99	99 n=598	66 n=337	Sig Δ 66-99	99 n=568	66 n=336	Sig Δ 66-99	99 n=591	66 n=311	Sig Δ 66-99	99 n=569	66 n=1592	Sig Δ 66-99	99 n=2924
Night (23:00-6:30)	31.3%	3.0% (0.10)	ns	1.9% (0.06)	4.5% (0.14)	***	1.9% (0.06)	3.0% (0.10)	ns	2.7% (0.09)	3.0% (0.10)	ns	3.5% (0.11)	3.0% (0.10)	ns	3.4% (0.11)	3.3% (0.11)	*	2.7% (0.09)
Morning (9:10-11:50)	11.1%	3.1% (0.28)	**	5.6% (0.50)	3.3% (0.30)	ns	4.2% (0.38)	2.8% (0.25)	**	5.2% (0.47)	3.2% (0.29)	**	5.9% (0.53)	4.2% (0.38)	ns	5.9% (0.53)	3.3% (0.28)	***	5.4% (0.49)
Afternoon (13:50-17:00)	13.2%	6.3% (0.48)	ns	5.1% (0.39)	6.8% (0.52)	**	4.4% (0.33)	7.9% (0.60)	**	5.5% (0.42)	8.0% (0.61)	**	5.3% (0.40)	7.1% (0.54)	**	4.4% (0.33)	7.3% (0.55)	***	4.9% (0.37)
Evening (20:30-23:00)	10.4%	2.9% (0.28)	**	5.6% (0.54)	2.6% (0.25)	***	7.2% (0.69)	1.4% (0.13)	***	5.7% (0.55)	2.8% (0.27)	***	6.9% (0.66)	3.5% (0.34)	***	7.7% (0.74)	2.6% (0.25)	***	6.6% (0.63)
<b>Atypical mealtimes</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>15.3%</b> <b>(0.23)</b>	<b>ns</b>	<b>18.2%</b> <b>(0.28)</b>	<b>17.2%</b> <b>(0.26)</b>	<b>ns</b>	<b>17.8%</b> <b>(0.27)</b>	<b>15.0%</b> <b>(0.23)</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>19.1%</b> <b>(0.29)</b>	<b>17.0%</b> <b>(0.26)</b>	<b>**</b>	<b>21.5%</b> <b>(0.33)</b>	<b>17.9%</b> <b>(0.27)</b>	<b>ns</b>	<b>21.3%</b> <b>(0.32)</b>	<b>16.5%</b> <b>(0.25)</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>19.6%</b> <b>(0.30)</b>
Breakfast (6:30-9:10)	11.1%	16.2% (1.47)	ns	15.0% (1.35)	17.2% (1.55)	ns	16.0% (1.44)	17.9% (1.61)	ns	16.3% (1.47)	17.8% (1.60)	ns	15.8% (1.42)	17.1% (1.54)	ns	16.2% (1.46)	17.3% (1.56)	**	15.9% (1.43)
Lunch (11:50-13:50)	8.3%	36.1% (4.35)	**	31.6% (3.81)	33.2% (4.00)	ns	30.8% (3.71)	36.8% (4.43)	***	31.5% (3.80)	34.0% (4.10)	**	30.0% (3.61)	33.2% (4.00)	**	29.1% (3.51)	34.6% (4.17)	***	30.6% (3.69)
Dinner (17:00-20:30)	14.6%	32.3% (2.21)	ns	35.2% (2.41)	32.4% (2.22)	*	35.5% (2.43)	30.3% (2.08)	*	33.1% (2.27)	31.3% (2.14)	ns	32.6% (2.23)	31.8% (2.18)	ns	33.4% (2.29)	31.6% (2.16)	**	34.0% (2.33)
<b>Proper mealtimes</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>84.7%</b> <b>(2.49)</b>	<b>ns</b>	<b>81.8%</b> <b>(2.41)</b>	<b>82.8%</b> <b>(2.44)</b>	<b>ns</b>	<b>82.2%</b> <b>(2.42)</b>	<b>85.0%</b> <b>(2.50)</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>80.9%</b> <b>(2.38)</b>	<b>83.0%</b> <b>(2.44)</b>	<b>**</b>	<b>78.5%</b> <b>(2.31)</b>	<b>82.1%</b> <b>(2.41)</b>	<b>ns</b>	<b>78.7%</b> <b>(2.31)</b>	<b>83.5%</b> <b>(2.46)</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>80.5%</b> <b>(2.37)</b>

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, ns: p≥0.05

*Eating on atypical times shows a slight increase on weekdays: an increase in eating during the morning period and the evening period*

Eating on atypical times on weekdays (as defined above) has increased significantly from 16.5 percent of daily eating time in 1966 to 19.6 percent in 1999 (Table 3:8). This increase is only significant on Wednesdays and Thursdays. The increase in eating beyond mealtimes holds only for the morning (9:10-11:50) and the evening (20:30-23:00) period. In 1999, 5.4 percent of weekday eating time occurs in the morning, while this was only 3.3 percent in 1966. Although eating during the morning period is more popular than before, it remains exceptional.

**Table 3:9 Percentage (and concentration coefficient) of total eating time performed on proper and atypical mealtimes on weekdays, by participants only (TOR'04)**

	% of day	Monday (n=1637)	Tuesday (n=1627)	Wednesday (n=1615)	Thursday (n=1613)	Friday (n=1607)	Week-day
Night (23:00-6:30)	31.3%	1.8% (0.06)	1.8% (0.06)	2.0% (0.06)	1.9% (0.06)	2.0% (0.06)	1.8% (0.06)
Morning (9:10-11:50)	11.1%	6.8% (0.61)	5.8% (0.52)	4.7% (0.42)	5.9% (0.53)	6.4% (0.58)	5.7% (0.51)
Afternoon (13:50-17:00)	13.2%	4.4% (0.33)	4.0% (0.30)	4.0% (0.30)	4.3% (0.33)	4.8% (0.36)	4.5% (0.34)
Evening (20:30-23:00)	10.4%	3.7% (0.36)	3.0% (0.29)	3.6% (0.35)	3.5% (0.34)	5.2% (0.50)	4.7% (0.45)
<b>Atypical mealtimes</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>16.6% (0.25)</b>	<b>14.6% (0.22)</b>	<b>14.4% (0.22)</b>	<b>15.5% (0.23)</b>	<b>18.4% (0.28)</b>	<b>16.7% (0.25)</b>
Breakfast (6:30-9:10)	11.1%	16.4% (1.48)	17.7% (1.59)	17.6% (1.58)	18.2% (1.64)	17.1% (1.54)	16.2% (1.46)
Lunch (11:50-13:50)	8.3%	32.0% (3.86)	32.2% (3.88)	33.6% (4.05)	32.6% (3.93)	31.2% (3.76)	32.4% (3.90)
Dinner (17:00-20:30)	14.6%	35.0% (2.40)	35.6% (2.44)	34.4% (2.36)	33.7% (2.31)	33.3% (2.28)	34.7% (2.38)
<b>Proper mealtimes</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>83.4% (2.45)</b>	<b>85.5% (2.51)</b>	<b>85.6% (2.52)</b>	<b>84.5% (2.49)</b>	<b>81.6% (2.40)</b>	<b>83.4% (2.45)</b>

In 1999 and 2004 (Table 3:9) the concentration coefficient during the morning amounts to about 0.50, which is still appreciably below 1. The increase in eating during the evening period is larger, from only 2.6 percent in 1966 to 6.6 percent in 1999. This increase is significant on all separate weekdays and the concentration coefficient is highest of all atypical times for eating. The concentration of eating during the evening period is especially pronounced on Fridays. This holds in 1999 (Table 3:8) as well as in 2004 (Table 3:9). This is not surprising, as Friday evenings set in the weekend and allow for more relaxed eating. In 1966, it was rather uncommon to eat later than 20:30. People lived somewhat earlier than they do

nowadays: they got up earlier, started work earlier and went to bed earlier, which explains the improbability of dining after 20:30. Nowadays, eating occurs later. This finding is corroborated by the Flemish data from 2004, where 4.7 percent of weekday eating time is performed in the evening (Table 3:9). The fact that eating in the evening is somewhat more prevalent in Belgium in 1999 than in Flanders in 2004, is due to the fact that the Walloons dine later than Flemings (Appendix F).

*A decrease in eating during the night and the afternoon on weekdays*

The increase in eating beyond proper mealtimes does not hold for the night period (23:00-6:30) and the afternoon period (13:50-17:00). During the night period the percentage of daily eating has decreased from 3.3 percent in 1966 to 2.7 percent in 1999 (Table 3:8). In 2004 eating during the night only accounts for 1.8 percent of weekday eating time. Eating is least likely to occur during the night period: this period of the day shows the lowest concentration of eating. The significant decrease in eating during the night is due to the fact that people live later nowadays (people get up later) and that breakfast is less likely to occur before 6:30, compared to 1966. The decrease in the share of eating occurring in the afternoon is due to the four o'clock break fading away as a meal. As shown in figure 3:1 (on p.99), eating was still concentrated around 16:00 in 1966, while this is no longer the case in 1999 and 2004.

**Table 3:10 Percentage (and concentration coefficient) of eating performed on proper and atypical mealtimes on weekend days, by participants only (BEL'66 -'99)**

Saturday	% of day	same temporal boundaries 66-99			Saturday (separate boundaries 99)	% of day	separate boundaries 99		Sunday	% of day			
		66 (n=254)	Sig Δ 66-99	99 (n=1414)			Sig Δ 66-99	99 (n=1414)			66 (n=226)	Sig Δ 66-99	99 (n=1510)
Night (23:00-6:30)	31.3%	2.3% (0.07)	ns	1.8% (0.06)	Night (23:00-7:30)	35.4%	ns	2.8% (0.08)	Night (23:00-7:30)	35.4%	3.2% (0.09)	***	1.4% (0.04)
Morning (9:10-11:50)	11.1%	3.3% (0.30)	***	11.9% (1.07)	Morning (10:10-11:50)	6.9%	*	5.2% (0.75)	Morning (10:50-11:50)	4.2%	1.5% (0.36)	**	3.4% (0.80)
Afternoon (13:50-17:00)	13.2%	6.4% (0.48)	ns	4.8% (0.36)	Afternoon (14:20-17:00)	11.1%	ns	4.8% (0.43)	Afternoon (15:20 – 17:00)	6.9%	3.8% (0.55)	ns	4.0% (0.58)
Evening (20:30-23:00)	10.4%	1.5% (0.03)	***	9.3% (0.89)	Evening (22:00-23:00)	4.2%	ns	2.3% (0.55)	Evening (21:00-23:00)	8.3%	1.6% (0.19)	*	3.2% (0.39)
<b>Atypical mealtimes</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>13.5% (0.20)</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>27.9% (0.42)</b>	<b>Atypical mealtimes</b>	<b>57.6%</b>	<b>ns</b>	<b>15.0% (0.26)</b>	<b>Atypical mealtimes</b>	<b>54.8%</b>	<b>10.1% (0.18)</b>	<b>ns</b>	<b>11.9% (0.22)</b>
Breakfast (6:30-9:10)	11.1%	16.8% (1.51)	***	11.1% (1.00)	Breakfast (7:30-10:10)	11.1%	ns	16.9% (1.52)	Breakfast (7:30-10:50)	13.9%	20.8% (1.50)	ns	20.0% (1.43)
Lunch (11:50-13:50)	8.3%	38.7% (4.66)	***	29.8% (3.59)	Lunch (11:50-14:20)	10.4%	***	29.8% (2.87)	Dinner (11:50-15:20)	14.6%	41.5% (2.84)	***	35.9% (2.46)
Dinner (17:00-20:30)	14.6%	31.0% (2.12)	ns	31.3% (2.14)	Dinner (17:00-22:00)	20.8%	***	38.3% (1.84)	Lunch (17:00-21:00)	16.7%	27.6% (1.65)	**	32.2% (1.93)
<b>Proper mealtimes</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>86.5% (2.54)</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>72.1% (2.12)</b>	<b>Proper mealtimes</b>	<b>42.3%</b>	<b>ns</b>	<b>85.0% (2.01)</b>	<b>Proper mealtimes</b>	<b>45.2%</b>	<b>89.9% (1.99)</b>	<b>ns</b>	<b>88.1% (1.95)</b>

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, ns: p≥0.05

*Eating on atypical times on weekend days: a slight increase in eating during the morning and the evening period*

In all three research years, eating occurs more during proper mealtimes on weekend days, especially Sundays, than on weekdays. On Sundays there has not been a significant change in eating beyond proper mealtimes between 1966 and 1999. On Saturdays, the decrease in eating beyond proper mealtimes is not significant, at least if one takes into account the wider time spans considered appropriate for weekend meals in 1999 and 2004. In 1999, the proper mealtimes on Saturdays and Sundays account for 42.3 percent and 45.2 percent of daily time (Table 3:10), while this amounts to only 34 percent on weekdays (Table 3:8). Despite the fact that the proportion of eating time beyond proper mealtimes has not increased significantly on weekend days, there is a slight increase in eating during the morning period on both weekend days and during the evening period on Sundays (Table 3:10 & Table 3:11). The concentration of eating in the morning is due to an increase in brunching. Contrary to weekdays, the morning period shows the highest concentration coefficient for eating of all atypical mealtimes. In 1999 and 2004, eating is more concentrated during the evening period than in 1966, on Saturdays. Again, the later dinner of Walloons (Appendix F) explains for the small difference between Belgium in 1999 and Flanders in 2004.

**Table 3:11 Percentage (and concentration coefficient) of total daily eating time performed on proper and atypical mealtimes on Saturdays and Sundays, by participants only (TOR'04)**

	% of day	Saturday (n=1595)		% of day	Sunday (n=1594)
Night (23:00-7:30)	35.4%	4.4% (0.12)	Night (23:00-7:30)	35.4%	3.0% (0.08)
Morning (10:10-11:50)	6.9%	5.3% (0.77)	Morning (10:50-11:50)	4.2%	4.0% (0.95)
Afternoon (14:20-17:00)	11.1%	3.2% (0.29)	Afternoon (15:20-17:00)	6.9%	2.4% (0.35)
Evening (22:00- 23:00)	4.2%	1.4% (0.33)	Evening (21:00-23:00 pm)	8.3%	2.5% (0.30)
<b>Atypical mealtimes</b>	<b>57.6%</b>	<b>14.3% (0.25)</b>	<b>Atypical mealtimes</b>	<b>54.8%</b>	<b>11.8% (0.22)</b>
Breakfast (7:30-10:10)	11.1%	20.6% (1.86)	Breakfast (7:30-10:50)	13.9%	23.3% (1.68)
Lunch (11:50-14:20)	10.4%	30.7% (2.95)	Dinner (11:50-15:20)	14.6%	33.8% (2.32)
Dinner (17:00-20:00)	20.8%	34.5% (1.66)	Lunch (17:00-21:00)	16.7%	31.1% (1.86)
<b>Proper mealtimes</b>	<b>42.3%</b>	<b>85.7% (2.03)</b>	<b>Proper mealtimes</b>	<b>45.2%</b>	<b>88.2% (1.95)</b>

### 3.1.2.3 Conclusion

In this section, we investigated the timing of eating as registered in the time-use surveys. We first defined the temporal boundaries of the three daily meals, on weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays. The tempograms clearly show the less temporally collective character of eating in 1999 and 2004 compared to 1966. Compared to 1966, people do not sit down for a meal so massively at the same time nowadays. However, nowadays eating still more or less occurs within the same temporal boundaries as in 1966. For weekdays and Sundays, the same temporal boundaries were used to define proper mealtimes. On Saturdays, however, it was impossible to use the same temporal boundaries in the three research years. Between 1966 and 1999, Saturday has evolved from a working day to a free day and this has had its consequences for the timing of eating on Saturdays.

Once we had defined proper mealtimes and atypical times for eating, we investigated what share of eating occurred during each of these time spans. We found some support for the increase of eating beyond proper mealtimes on weekdays, but not on weekend days. As far as the timing of eating is concerned, there is little proof for the temporal destructure of Belgian eating habits. Eating is much less concentrated beyond mealtimes than during mealtimes. Although atypical periods for eating account for 66 percent of the total time available on a weekday, only about 16 percent of total eating time occurs in these periods. As a result, concentration coefficients for eating beyond proper mealtimes on weekdays amount to 0.30, while concentration coefficients for eating on proper mealtimes amount to 2.37. Eating is not spread in an accidental way throughout the day. Nevertheless, the time-use surveys mainly grasp the longer eating occasions, and to a lesser extent the short eating occasions. This holds especially for the TOR'04 dataset. The underregistration of short eating occasions (which are most likely to occur beyond proper mealtimes, the snacks 'in between') and the exclusion of those who only snack (only participants with at least one eating occasion registered in the diary that day were included in the analyses) especially in the TOR'04 dataset results in an underestimation of eating beyond proper mealtimes. However, on the basis of these data, we can conclude that the main eating occasions, as they are registered in time-use surveys, remain concentrated on proper mealtimes. In this section, it was assessed to what extent eating occurs beyond

proper mealtimes. In the following section, we go into the duration of eating and more particularly during proper mealtimes. This means we study which meals take most time and which meals are most likely to be skipped.

### 3.1.3 The autonomous status of eating declines: eating takes less time

In this section, the duration of eating is the central point of attention. First we go into the time devoted to eating in daily time use. Then, we move on to assessing the importance of the three daily meals, in terms of the time they are allotted. In the second chapter of this thesis, it was argued that the status of eating as a separate activity depends on the time it is allotted in a person's time use. If there has been a decline in the time allocated to eating, this is considered as a decrease of the importance of the meal as a separate autonomous activity. This would sustain the thesis of the temporal deconstruction of eating practices as far as the duration is concerned.

*A significant decline of daily time spent on eating over time*

**Table 3:12 Average time spent on eating on all days of the week in 1966 and 1999 (BEL'66-'99)**

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Week-day	Sat	Sun
<b>1966</b>	1:42 (n=281)	1:37 (n=329)	1:39 (n=338)	1:42 (n=337)	1:41 (n=311)	1:40 (n=1596)	1:43 (n=254)	1:53 (n=226)
<b>Sig Δ 66-99</b>	***	***	***	***	**	***	ns	**
<b>1999</b>	1:22 (n=605)	1:20 (n=603)	1:20 (n=577)	1:22 (n=593)	1:31 (n=570)	1:23 (n=2947)	1:39 (n=1424)	1:40 (n=1523)

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, ns: p≥0.05

Table 3:12 shows that the average daily time devoted to eating has significantly declined between 1966 and 1999 on all days of the week except for Saturdays. In line with findings in other Western countries (Cheng, Olsen, Southerton and Warde, 2007: 44), Belgians spend less time on eating than before, and thus award less status to eating as a separate activity in their time use. These findings corroborate the thesis of the temporal deconstruction of the meal pattern, as far as the duration is concerned. The decline of the time allotted to eating is corroborated by the Flemish data from 2004. The figures for Flanders in 2004 (Table 3:13) are to a large extent comparable to what is found for Belgium in 1999 (Table 3:12).

**Table 3:13 Average time spent on eating as a primary activity on a full week and all days of the week (TOR'04 - n=1710)**

	<b>Full week</b>	<b>Mon</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>Wed</b>	<b>Thu</b>	<b>Frid</b>	<b>Week-day</b>	<b>Sat</b>	<b>Sun</b>
<b>Hot meal at work</b>	0:08	0:01	0:01	0:01	0:01	0:01	0:01	0:00	0:00
<b>Cold meal at work</b>	0:31	0:06	0:06	0:06	0:06	0:05	0:06	0:00	0:00
<b>Hot meal</b>	3:29	0:30	0:31	0:30	0:27	0:28	0:29	0:30	0:31
<b>Cold meal</b>	4:26	0:36	0:35	0:36	0:36	0:36	0:36	0:41	0:42
<b>Eating at restaurant</b>	1:10	0:05	0:04	0:06	0:05	0:09	0:06	0:19	0:18
<b>Total eating</b>	9:48	1:20	1:19	1:21	1:18	1:21	1:20	1:33	1:33

Nevertheless, as argued in the second chapter the serious underregistration of short eating occasions in the TOR'04 dataset entails that the daily duration of eating is somewhat shorter in TOR'04 than in NIS'99. On an average weekday, eating takes about 1h20' for Flanders in 2004, while this amounts to 1h23' for Belgium in 1999. On Fridays and Sundays, the time allotted to eating is considerably higher in 1999 than in 2004. On Fridays, the difference is largely due to the Walloons spending much more time on eating than the Flemish. On Sundays, there is no significant difference between the Flemish and the Walloon population.

The decline of eating time holds especially for weekdays and to a lesser extent for weekend days. On Saturdays, the time allotted to eating has not changed significantly, despite the fact that Saturdays changed from a workday to a free weekend day. On Sundays, there is also a significant decline in time spent on eating, but it is smaller than on weekdays. In the three research years, more time is devoted to eating on weekend days. The 2004 dataset shows that the average daily eating time differs significantly between weekdays on the one hand and both weekend days on the other hand<sup>9</sup>.

In 1966, Sundays still had a special status compared to Saturdays and the other days of the week as far as the time allotted to eating is concerned. Nowadays, eating is awarded the same high status on both weekend days: more time is awarded to eating on both weekend days compared to weekdays. Moreover, Fridays are also somewhat

<sup>9</sup> This was tested through a paired sample T-test, with the confidence interval set at 95%. The significance level for both paired sample tests was 0.000, indicating a highly significant difference between time spent eating on an average weekday on the one hand, and on a Saturday or a Sunday on the other hand.

incorporated into the more relaxed nature of the weekend. The general decline of 20 minutes which is found on all weekdays does not hold for Fridays. However, the more relaxed nature of eating on Fridays holds especially for the Walloon population. While the Flemish population spends 1h27' on eating on Fridays –still somewhat higher than what is found on other weekdays in 1999- the Walloon population spends on average 1h39' on eating on Fridays. In 2004, the average duration of eating on Fridays is not significantly different from the average duration on other days of the week. In 1966, there was no meaningful difference either in the time spent on eating between Fridays and other weekdays, but Friday night did not mark the beginning of the weekend then.

Cold meals, which are not taken at work or in a restaurant, are allotted most time on all days of the week and take even more time on weekend days than on weekdays. Hot meals, which are not taken at work or in a restaurant, take about half an hour per day, which is 12 minutes less than cold meals (Table 3:13). However, usually people only have one hot meal per day (dinner), while they have two cold meals (breakfast and lunch). This means that more time is spent on a hot meal, most probably the main meal of the day, than on a cold meal, the less important meals in the daily meal pattern. In the following sections, we go into the time spent on eating during each of the three meals in the daily meal pattern.

#### *The time allotted to the three daily meals*

Table 3:14 shows the evolution of the average duration of breakfast, lunch and dinner on weekdays and weekend days. The average duration of each meal is calculated as the average time spent on eating within the time span defined as the “proper” time for that meal. This means for example that the average duration of breakfast is calculated as the average time spent on eating within the time span defined as “breakfast time”. The general decline in time allotted to eating as discussed above, is corroborated for the three daily meals. On an average weekday, the time spent on breakfast has declined from 16 minutes to 11 minutes. This decline is significant on all separate weekdays. The decline in time allotted to breakfast is sustained by the Flemish data from 2004, although the average time spent on breakfast is slightly longer in Flanders

in 2004 (13 minutes) than in Belgium in 1999 (11 minutes), due to the fact that short breakfasts and snacks are very likely not to be registered in the TOR'04 dataset.

**Table 3:14 Average time spent on eating during the breakfast, midday meal and evening meal period in Belgium in 1966 and 1999 (BEL'66-'99) and Flanders in 2004 (TOR'04) per day of the week**

		Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Week-day <sup>10</sup>	Sat	Sun
Breakfast	<b>1966</b>	0:16 (n=281) ***	0:16 (n=329) ***	0:17 (n=338) ***	0:18 (n=337) ***	0:17 (n=311) **	0:16	0:17 (n=254) *	0:21 (n=226) *
	<b>Sig Δ 66-99</b>								
	<b>1999</b>	0:12 (n=605)	0:12 (n=603)	0:12 (n=577)	0:12 (n=593)	0:11 (n=570)	0:11	0:15 (n=1424)	0:18 (n=1523)
	<b>2004</b>	0:13 (n=1710)	0:14 (n=1710)	0:14 (n=1710)	0:13 (n=1710)	0:13 (n=1710)	0:13	0:16 (n=1710)	0:18 (n=1710)
Midday meal	<b>1966</b>	0:36 (n=281) ***	0:33 (n=329) ***	0:36 (n=338) ***	0:35 (n=337) ***	0:34 (n=311) **	0:34	0:38 (n=254) ***	0:47 (n=226) **
	<b>Sig Δ 66-99</b>								
	<b>1999</b>	0:26 (n=605)	0:26 (n=603)	0:25 (n=577)	0:24 (n=593)	0:26 (n=570)	0:25	0:27 (n=1424)	0:36 (n=1523)
	<b>2004</b>	0:26 (n=1710)	0:25 (n=1710)	0:26 (n=1710)	0:25 (n=1710)	0:24 (n=1710)	0:25	0:25 (n=1710)	0:31 (n=1710)
Evening meal	<b>1966</b>	0:32 (n=281) ***	0:30 (n=329) **	0:30 (n=338) **	0:31 (n=337) ***	0:32 (n=311) *	0:31	0:31 (n=254) **	0:32 (n=226) ns
	<b>Sig Δ 66-99</b>								
	<b>1999</b>	0:26 (n=605)	0:26 (n=603)	0:25 (n=577)	0:25 (n=593)	0:29 (n=570)	0:26	0:40 (n=1424)	0:32 (n=1523)
	<b>2004</b>	0:27 (n=1710)	0:27 (n=1710)	0:27 (n=1710)	0:25 (n=1710)	0:26 (n=1710)	0:26	0:36 (n=1710)	0:31 (n=1710)

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, ns: p≥0.05

Moreover, the percentage of breakfast skippers has grown considerably (Table 3:15). On an average weekday 22.8 percent of the Belgians skipped breakfast in 1966. In 1999, this percentage amounts to 36.7 percent. In 2004, the percentage of breakfast skippers is even higher (45.5 percent), which is most likely an overestimation. Breakfast is a meal with a short duration, and therefore less likely to be registered in the TOR'04 dataset than in the 1999 dataset.

<sup>10</sup> The average figure for weekdays represents the central tendency presented by the five weekdays and was calculated manually as the average of these five weekday figures. For that reason, we do not present the number of respondents, neither could we present a significance level for the difference between 1966 and 1999

**Table 3:15 Average number of meal skippers for breakfast, midday meal and evening meal in Belgium in 1966 and 1999 (BEL'66-'99) and Flanders in 2004 (TOR'04) per day**

		Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Week-day	Sat	Sun
<b>Breakfast</b>	<b>1966</b>	23.0%	24.5%	21.9%	24.6%	19.9%	22.8%	24.5%	21.3%
	<b>1999</b>	36.5%	34.9%	37.8%	35.6%	38.7%	36.7%	36.9%	28.8%
	<b>2004</b>	47.7%	44.2%	44.7%	44.6%	46.4%	45.5%	43.4%	40.3%
<b>Midday meal</b>	<b>1966</b>	6.8%	11.9%	8.6%	10.3%	10.5%	9.6%	6%	3.9%
	<b>1999</b>	21.2%	23.1%	20.4%	24.6%	24.4%	22.7%	21.0%	13.7%
	<b>2004</b>	27.8%	27.4%	26.5%	28.8%	30.2%	28.1%	31.2%	32.3%
<b>Evening meal</b>	<b>1966</b>	11.9%	9.4%	13.8%	13.2%	11.1%	11.9%	15.8%	18.1%
	<b>1999</b>	16.3%	16.9%	17.6%	22.1%	19.4%	18.5%	15.4%	19.1%
	<b>2004</b>	24.6%	23.9%	25.5%	28.0%	30.2%	26.4%	32.0%	34.7%

In all research years, breakfast takes more time and is less likely to be skipped on weekend days and especially on Sundays than on weekdays. On weekend days, the decline in breakfast time is smaller. The slight decline for breakfast time on weekend days is in line with the general slight decline of eating time on weekend days. On weekend days and especially on Sundays, the rise in breakfast skippers between 1966 and 1999 is also smaller than on weekdays. While the number of breakfast skippers increases by 14 percentage points on weekdays, this is only 7.5 percentage points on Sundays (Table 3:15). The above leads us to conclude that breakfast reveals a temporal destructure, as far as duration is concerned. The average time spent on breakfast has declined and the percentage of breakfast skippers has increased. Nevertheless, this temporal destructure holds especially for weekdays.

The time spent on the midday meal has also decreased significantly, on weekdays as well as weekend days. In 1966, the weekday meal at noon on weekdays took 34 minutes, in 1999 and 2004 this is only 25 minutes (Table 3:14). This decrease is significant on all separate weekdays. Moreover, the percentage of people who do not eat at noon on weekdays has increased from 9.6 percent in 1966 to 22.7 percent in 1999 (Table 3:15). In 2004, the percentage of lunch skippers even amounts to 28.1 percent. Time spent on eating during the meal in the evening has also declined, although to a lesser extent than the meal at noon. In 1966, 31 minutes were spent on the weekday meal in the evening. In 1999 and 2004, the evening meal takes 26 minutes. The meal at noon and the evening meal are both longer meals, which are registered well in TOR'04. Therefore, there is no difference in their average duration between TOR'04 and NIS'99. The decline in eating time for the evening meal amounts to 5 minutes, while this is 9 minutes for the meal at noon. The meal in the

evening takes as much time as the meal at noon in 1999 and 2004, while in 1966 the meal at noon still took most time. This finding holds for all separate weekdays in 1966. Moreover, in 1966 the percentage of meal skippers was higher for the meal in the evening than for the midday meal. In 1999 and 2004, the opposite holds.

The above leads us to conclude that the meal at noon has considerably lost importance compared to 1966. In 1966, the meal at noon must have been the most important meal for at least part of the population: its low skipping percentage and its longer duration sustain this hypothesis. The meal in the evening was a meal of lesser importance than the midday meal for at least part of the population in 1966. In 1999 and 2004, on the contrary, the meal in the evening is the main meal of the day on weekdays. Despite the higher status (from lunch to dinner) which the evening meal has achieved nowadays, the time devoted to eating in the evening has declined, and the number of meal skippers has increased. The main meal of the day took more than half an hour in 1966. In 1999 and 2004 this is only 26 minutes, and the percentage of dinner skippers has grown from one in ten to more than one in five. The above findings sustain the deconstruction of the weekday lunch and weekday dinner, as far as duration is concerned.

On weekend days, the decline in time spent on midday and evening meals is less pronounced than on weekdays. On Saturdays the decline in general eating time is not even significant (Table 3:12 on p.116). The duration of the evening meal on Saturdays has even increased from 31 minutes in 1966 to 40 minutes in 1999 and 36 minutes in 2004. The percentage of meal skippers on Saturday evening has not increased either. However, it should be emphasized that the operationalization of the duration of Saturday dinner is different in 1966: a wider time span is deemed appropriate for Saturday dinner in 1999 and 2004 compared to 1966, which increases the chances that dinner is allotted more time and the decreases the chances that a person has not eaten. Clearly, in 1999 and 2004, the evening meal is the main meal of the day on Saturdays as on weekdays, judging on its duration and its chance of being skipped. In 1966, on the contrary, the main meal on Saturdays was most likely to be the meal at noon. The low percentage of meal skippers (only 6 percent) and its longer duration than the evening meal (38 minutes versus 31 minutes) attest to the importance of the midday meal in 1966, despite the shorter time span deemed appropriate for this meal

compared to the evening meal. As on weekdays the evening meal has increased its status from a less important meal (lunch) to the main meal (dinner) of the day. As such, the evening meal on Saturdays does not show any signs of deconstruction as far as its duration is concerned. The midday meal, on the contrary, has decreased its status from the main meal of the day to a less important meal. This is revealed by its shorter time span and its higher percentage of skippers, which corroborate the temporal deconstruction of midday meals on Saturdays.

On Sundays, the meal at noon was and has remained the main meal of the day. In 1966, the meal at noon on Sundays was the main meal of the day and even the most important meal of the week. This is sustained by the fact that only 3.9 percent of the Belgians skipped this meal. This is the lowest proportion of skippers of all of the week in 1966. Moreover, the average duration of Sunday dinner amounts to 47 minutes, which makes it the longest meal of the week. Although the increase of meal skippers and the decline of meal duration sustain the deconstruction of Sunday dinner, the meal at noon on Sundays remains the most important meal on Sundays. In 1999 Sunday dinner even remains the most important meal *of the week*, with an average duration of 36 minutes and 13.4 percent of skippers. In 2004, on the contrary, the evening meal on Saturdays is the most important meal of the week, with an average duration of 36 minutes. Sunday dinner only takes 31 minutes in 2004. However, when it comes to the likelihood of being skipped, the evening meal on weekdays remains the main meal of the week in 2004. Weekday dinner is skipped by 26 percent in 2004, which is about 5 percent lower than the proportion of Sunday dinner skippers.

In this section we assessed to what extent eating was stripped of its status as a culturally valued activity, claiming time in a person's daily time use, by assessing the time allotted to eating as a primary activity. The status of eating as a culturally valued activity is also put at stake by simultaneous attention-demanding activities. In the next section we assess to what extent eating is pushed to the "second" order by simultaneous attention-demanding activities.

### 3.1.4 Eating pushed to the “second” order?

So far eating was only taken into account as far as it is registered as the primary or the main activity. Indeed, eating is only considered to structure one’s daily time use as far as it occurs as a primary activity: only then it assumes a separate, autonomous status, and only then other activities are modelled taking into account the temporal structure of the meal pattern. When eating occurs as a parallel activity, it cannot operate as a structuring, autonomous activity. Analogously, eating also loses its autonomy when another activity is performed simultaneously. As argued by Douglas, the meal puts its frame on the gathering and excludes that other activities are performed simultaneously (Douglas, 1997: 41). In this section, we investigate to what extent eating is robbed of its separate status, not through a reduction of the time allotted to it, but to a reduction of the status it is allowed. Since we have no information on the prevalence of secondary activities in the merged Belgian dataset, we are not able to compare this dimension of temporal destructure over time. We are only able to assess to what extent the autonomous status of eating is threatened nowadays by simultaneous activities or by occurring as a parallel activity. In a first section, we go into the activities that are performed while eating as a main activity, and check to what extent these activities may be considered as disruptive to the eating occasions. In a second section, it is assessed to what extent eating occurs as a secondary activity and whether this is an indication of “multitasking”, namely performing several activities at the same time.

#### **3.1.4.1 Combined eating: primary eating combined with a secondary activity**

Eating as a primary activity takes 9h48’ on average per week in Flanders in 2004. About half of that time (4h58’) is pure primary eating time, with eating performed as a primary activity while doing no other, parallel activity. Another 4h49’ per week is spent primarily on eating while secondarily doing something else. The latter is called combined eating: eating as a primary activity is combined with another secondary activity. As shown in table 3:16, 87.6 percent of the Flemings engages in another activity while eating at least once during a full week in 2004. This figure not necessarily points to the decreasing importance of eating. Firstly, there are serious differences in the participation rate of combined eating, according to the type of

eating. Combined eating hardly occurs with meals at work and restaurant meals. Participation rates and the average duration for combined meals at work and restaurant meals are very low. Combined eating occurs most with cold meals and somewhat less with hot meals.

Moreover, not all combined eating can be considered as a disrupted eating occasion. Table 3:16 presents the time spent on the various types of combined eating. We distinguish between 11 categories of activities that can be combined with eating (see Appendix B for the original and reduced list of activities for the BEL '66-'99 dataset and Appendix C for the original and reduced list of activities for the TOR '04 dataset). The grey zones represent the 11 main categories of secondary activities, i.e. paid work, feeding work, household work, personal care, sleep, leisure outdoors, leisure indoors, watching TV, travelling, remaining activities and drinking. For each activity, we present the total duration of that type of combined eating, e.g. eating while doing feeding work as a secondary activity takes 16 minutes per week. Alongside the duration of each type of combined eating, we also present the importance of that type of combined eating within the total duration of combined eating. Eating while doing feeding work takes 7.53 percent of all weekly time spent on combined eating. The percentages in the grey zones, i.e. the share of all main activity categories in combined eating, count up to 100 percent.

**Table 3:16 Participation rate of combined eating, average duration of combined eating and their share (column percentages<sup>o</sup>) in total combined eating on a full week, according to the nature of the secondary activity (TOR'04 - n=1710)**

	Hot meal at work		Cold meal at work		Hot meal		Cold meal		Restaurant meal		All meals	
<b>Participation rate</b>	4.0% (n=69)		16.1% (n=275)		69.6% (n=1189)		79.9% (n=1366)		17.36% (n=297)		87.6% (n=1497)	
<b>Average weekly time of combined eating per respondent</b>	0:02		0:13		1:42		2:24		0:25		4:49	
<i>While doing ... as a secondary activity</i>												
	Av. dur.	% in comb. eating	Av. dur.	% in comb. eating	Av. dur.	% in comb. eating	Av. dur.	% in comb. eating	Av. dur.	% in comb. eating	Av. dur.	% in comb. eating
<b>Paid work</b>											0:02	1.02%
- Break at work												
<b>Feeding work</b>					0:06	8.05%	0:09	8.23%			0:16	7.53%
<b>Household work</b>					0:03	3.48%	0:04	4.01%			0:08	3.72%
<b>Personal care</b>							0:01	1.19%			0:02	0.85%
<b>Sleep</b>												
<b>Leisure outdoors</b>					0:01	1.03%					0:02	0.93%
- Going to a party												
- Paying a visit or receiving visitors					0:01	0.69%					0:01	0.41%
<b>Leisure indoors</b>			0:05	39.50%	0:33	32.88%	1:13	45.69%	0:01	7.88%	1:54	39.43%
- Listening to the radio			0:03	21.57%	0:29	28.39%	0:57	35.37%			1:31	30.45%
<b>Watching TV</b>					0:15	15.09%	0:12	8.29%			0:27	9.94%
<b>Travelling</b>									0:01	5.24%	0:02	1.01%
<b>Remaining</b>	0:01	53.60%	0:06	42.60%	0:31	28.72%	0:29	20.86%	0:17	64.68%	1:25	25.72%
- Coffee klatch											0:01	0.57%
- Talking	0:01	42.81%	0:04	29.13%	0:27	25.64%	0:23	16.12%	0:14	52.35%	1:11	20.05%
<b>Drinking</b>	0:00	5.10%			0:09	9.63%	0:13	10.87%	0:03	14.47	0:27	9.77%
<b>Non-disruptive</b>	0:02	67.76%	0:08	63.38%	1:08	64.77%	1:35	62.99%	0:19	73.34%	3:14	61.68%
<b>Disruptive</b>	0:00	32.24%	0:05	36.62%	0:34	35.23%	0:48	37.01%	0:06	26.66%	1:34	38.32%

However, for some activity categories we need to go into some more detail. Indeed, not all activities within a main activity category disrupt the eating occasion. For that reason, we distinguish between disruptive secondary activities and non-disruptive activities. Non-disruptive activities are rather typical for the meal, like talking, drinking and listening to the radio. Non-disruptive activities may also elucidate the situation by specifying that eating occurs during a work break, a party, a visit or a coffee klatch. The white zones in table 3:16 specify the non-disruptive activities within the main activity category specified in the above-mentioned grey zone. All activities in italic represent non-disruptive activities. The share of all non-disruptive and disruptive secondary activities in total combined eating time is presented in the two lower rows of table 3:16. The empty cells in table 3:16 correspond to combined eating with an average duration of zero minutes. In that case, the corresponding percentages are not mentioned, due to the low importance of this type of combined eating.

As shown in table 3:16, most time spent on combined eating occurs while performing a non-disruptive activity. Leisure indoors is the most important secondary activity, accounting for 39.43 percent of all combined eating, the equivalent of 1h54' per week. Leisure indoors stands almost entirely for listening to the radio (30.45 percent out of 39.43 percent). The second most important simultaneous activity is the category of remaining activities, which stands almost entirely for talking (20.05 percent out of 26.72 percent). Next to listening to the radio and talking, drinking also accounts for a considerable part (10 percent) of non-disrupted combined eating. As a result, 62 percent of combined eating time corresponds to activities that are expected not to disrupt the meal. This means that only 38 percent of all combined eating time can be considered as disruptive. By this we mean that the secondary activity is likely to disrupt the primary eating activity due to averting attention from the eating activity. 38 percent of primary eating times is temporally destructured, with eating losing its autonomous status due to other attention-demanding activities occurring at the same time. Watching TV and doing feeding work are the most important parallel activities that jeopardize the autonomy of the meal (Lemorel, 1992: 363).

The nature of secondary activities also depends on the nature of the primary eating activity (Table 3:16). Not surprisingly, hot meals are mainly combined with non-disruptive parallel activities, like listening to the radio and talking. Nevertheless, after listening to the radio and talking, hot meals occur most with simultaneously watching TV. Cold meals occur somewhat more with disruptive activities than hot meals. Cold meals also predominantly occur with listening to the radio, talking and drinking. Watching TV and meal preparation are next. Not surprisingly, cold meals are more often accompanied by radio listening than hot meals, while people talk more during hot meals than during cold meals. Meals at work and restaurant meals mainly occur with simultaneous talking: over half of all combined eating during restaurant meals bears upon talking. This will be discussed in further detail in 3.2.2 when tackling the social interaction during the three daily meals.

**Table 3:17 Participation rate of combined eating, average duration of combined eating and their share (column percentages) in total combined eating on Tuesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays, according to the nature of the secondary activity (TOR'04 - n=1710)**

	Tuesday		Saturday		Sunday	
<b>Participation rate</b>	63.2% (n=1080)		60.27% (n=1030)		57.90% (n=990)	
<b>Average time of combined eating per respondent</b>	0:39		0:46		0:43	
<i>While doing ... as a secondary activity</i>						
	<b>Av. dur.</b>	<b>% in comb. eating</b>	<b>Av. dur.</b>	<b>% in comb. eating</b>	<b>Av. dur.</b>	<b>% in comb. eating</b>
<b>Paid work</b>						
- Break at work						
<b>Feeding work</b>	0:02	6.43%	0:01	3.89%	0:02	5.40%
<b>Household work</b>	0:01	3.13%	0:01	2.80%	0:01	2.89%
<b>Personal care</b>						
Sleep						
<b>Leisure outdoors</b>						
- Going to a party						
- Paying a visit or receiving visitors						
<b>Leisure indoors</b>	0:16	44.99%	0:17	44.16%	0:14	39.85%
- Listening to the radio	0:12	33.89%	0:14	37.14%	0:12	34.55%
<b>Watching TV</b>	0:03	8.81%	0:04	8.60%	0:03	9.37%
<b>Travelling</b>						
<b>Remaining</b>	0:10	24.09%	0:15	25.75%	0:15	28.02%
- Coffee klatch						
- Talking	0:08	19.46%	0:13	21.95%	0:13	23.95%
<b>Drinking</b>	0:03	9.82%	0:04	11.59%	0:04	11.75%
<b>Non-disruptive</b>	0:24	63.84%	0:33	71.47%	0:31	71.50%
<b>Disruptive</b>	0:14	31.16%	0:12	28.53%	0:12	28.50%

Table 3:17 presents the prevalence of combined eating on weekend days and weekdays. The structure of this table is identical to the one presented in table 3:16. However, in this table we distinguish between Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. We do not present the duration and participation rate for the whole working week, as the participation rate for the working week may not be compared to the participation rate on a Saturday or a Sunday. Conversely, participation rates calculated over one single day can be compared. In this table, Tuesdays are considered as being representative of a weekday. In Dutch time-use surveys, Tuesdays are used as the prototypical weekday, serving as a model for time use on any weekday (Breedveld, 1999: 145-153).

As table 3:17 shows, combined eating takes somewhat more time on weekend days than on weekdays. The total time spent on combined eating is significantly higher on weekend days than on Tuesdays, but is not significantly different on Saturdays and Sundays. However, the participation rates on Saturdays and Sundays are lower than on Tuesdays. This attests to the longer average duration of eating occasions on

weekend days. The various activities combined with eating are very similar for weekend days and weekdays, both in terms of the average durations as well as their share in the total time allocated to combined eating activities. The same conclusions hold as drawn from table 3:16: more than 60 percent of the combined eating time refers to non-disruptive secondary activities. On weekends, this is true for 71.50 percent of all the combined eating time. Not surprisingly, people register talking and drinking more during weekend meals, and especially during Sunday meals. The special, leisurely character of weekend meals results in drinking and talking more often experienced as essential to (and therefore registered as a secondary activity) during weekend meals than on weekday meals.

#### **3.1.4.2 Secondary eating: eating as a secondary activity occurring with other, primary activities**

Eating not only devaluates when a disruptive activity is performed simultaneously. The meal is also supposed to have lesser importance when it occurs as a secondary activity. As mentioned earlier, it is up to the respondent to decide which activity he or she considers as a primary or a secondary activity. When eating occurs as a secondary activity, this means that another (i.e. primary) activity occurs at the same time, which is considered as the main activity. Secondary eating takes an average of 2h40' per week<sup>11</sup>. As argued in section 2.1.1.2, we prefer to work with the number of secondary activities rather their average duration, in order to avoid distortion.

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<sup>11</sup> The original duration for secondary eating is 2h42'. This figure includes eating performed both as a primary and secondary activity, for example eating a hot meal as a primary activity while eating in a restaurant as a secondary activity. These eating activities count double as they are included in both primary and secondary eating. From our point of view this type of eating is to be classified as primary eating, given the fact that eating is also performed as a primary activity and no heterologous activity was performed secondarily.

**Table 3:18 Participation rate of secondary eating, average number of secondary eating occasions and their share (column percentages) in the total number of secondary eating occasions on a full week, according to the nature of the primary activity (TOR'04 - n=1710)**

	Hot meal at work		Cold meal at work		Hot meal		Cold meal		Restaurant meal		All meals	
<b>Participation rate</b>	0.94%		6.04%		20.41%		31.70%		3.86%		55.7%	
	(n=16)		(n=110)		(n=349)		(n=542)		(n=66)		(n=757)	
<b>Average number of secondary eating occasions per week per respondent</b>	0.02		0.13		0.33		0.70		0.05		1.22	
<i>While doing ... as a primary activity</i>												
	Av. number	% in second. eating	Av. number	% in second. eating	Av. number	% in second. eating	Av. number	% in second. eating	Av. Number	% in second. eating	Av. number	% in second. eating
<b>Paid work</b>	0.01	73.0%	0.12	19.36%	0.02	4.17%	0.05	8.25%	0.01	8.86%	0.22	14.41%
- Break at work			0.03				0.01	1.27%			0.04	2.77%
<b>Feeding work</b>					0.13	33.46%	0.17	20.11%			0.31	20.27%
<b>Household work</b>					0.02	5.00%	0.06	9.18%			0.08	7.06%
<b>Personal care</b>					0.01	2.95%	0.17	20.59%			0.18	12.87%
<b>Sleep</b>												
<b>Leisure outdoors</b>					0.10	36.99%	0.07	14.51%	0.02	57.28%	0.20	23.29%
- Going to a party					0.02	6.83%					0.03	3.66%
- Paying a visit or receiving visitors					0.07	24.54%	0.03	8.15%			0.11	12.24%
<b>Leisure indoors</b>					0.01	2.68%	0.03	4.97%			0.04	3.99%
- Listening to the radio												
<b>Watching TV</b>					0.02	8.14%	0.07	12.55%			0.09	9.58%
<b>Travelling</b>							0.02	2.62%	0.01	15.13%	0.03	2.41%
<b>Remaining</b>					0.01	2.44%	0.03	4.31%			0.03	3.51%
- Coffee klatch												
- Talking											0.01	0.62%
<b>Drinking</b>					0.01	2.55%	0.02	2.58%			0.03	2.30%
<b>Specification of context</b>	0.00	8.59%	0.03	19.36%	0.09	32.14%	0.00	10.73%	0.01	16.02%	0.17	18.88%
<b>No specification of context</b>	0.02	91.41%	0.10	80.64%	0.24	67.86%	0.65	89.27%	0.04	83.98%	1.05	81.12%

Table 3:18 shows the average number of secondary eating occasions and their share in the total number of secondary eating occasions on a full week, according to the nature of the primary activity. We distinguish between 11 types of secondary eating, according to the primary activity eating occurs with (see also Appendix B for the original and reduced list of activities for the BEL'66-'99 dataset and Appendix C for the original and reduced list of activities for the TOR'04 dataset). The grey zones represent the 11 main categories of primary activities, i.e. paid work, feeding work, household work, personal care, sleep, leisure outdoors, leisure indoors, watching TV, travelling, remaining activities and drinking. For each main category of primary activities, we present the total rate of that type of secondary eating, e.g. doing feeding work as a primary activity while eating occurs 0.31 times per week. Alongside the rate of each type of secondary eating, we also present the importance of that type of secondary eating within the total number of secondary eating occasions. Eating while doing feeding work takes 20.27 percent of the weekly number of secondary eating

occasions. The percentages in the grey zones -that is the share of all main activity categories in combined eating- count up to 100 percent. The empty cells in table 3:18 correspond to secondary eating occurring zero times. In that case, the corresponding percentages are not mentioned, due to the low importance of this type of secondary eating.

Within a full week, an average of 1.22 secondary eating occasions occurs, and 55.7 percent of the population engages in secondary eating. There are considerable differences in the occurrence of secondary eating, subject to the type of meal. Restaurant meals and meals at work hardly occur as secondary activities. Low participation rates attest to that. The same conclusions were drawn for combined eating: secondary activities hardly ever occur during restaurant meals and meals at work (see 3.1.4.1). Secondary eating is most prevalent with cold meals. This occurs predominantly while doing personal care (20.59 percent of all secondary cold meals) or feeding work (20.11 percent of all secondary cold meals). This probably points to the practice of making sandwiches or getting dressed for work in the morning while having breakfast. Leisure outdoors and watching TV also frequently occur with secondary cold meals. Secondary hot meals occur less than secondary cold meals. A third of all secondary hot meals correspond to eating while preparing meals. Secondary hot meals, to a considerable measure, (somewhat more than 31 percent), also tally with going to a party or visiting friends. This holds for secondary eating occasions in general. Going to a party or visiting friends should be considered as a specification of the eating context, rather than as a disruptive, simultaneous activity that pushes eating to the “second” order. The same is true for the coffee klatch and the break at work, although these account for only a very small part of secondary eating. In table 3:18, these activities are presented in the white zones, which are a specification of the activity category specified in the above-mentioned grey zone. The total share of non-disruptive secondary eating occasions, that is the total share of context specifications, is presented in the second lower row of table 3:18. In general, 18.88 percent of all secondary eating can be considered as a specification of the meal context. This figure amounts to 32.14 percent for hot meals, while it only amounts to 10.73 percent for cold meals. The rest of all secondary eating occasion refers to eating really pushed to the “second” order and occurring during other activities. The autonomous status of eating is thus also subject to temporal deconstruction by

occurring as a secondary activity. Most secondary eating (81.12 percent) attests to eating losing its autonomous status and being pushed to the secondary order. In general, feeding work (20.27 percent) is very common as a simultaneous activity with secondary eating. The same is true for paid work (14.41 percent), closely followed by personal care (12.87 percent). Watching TV accounts for less than 10 percent of all secondary eating occasions.

**Table 3:19 Participation rate of secondary eating, average number of secondary eating occasions and share(column percentages) in the total number of secondary eating occasions on Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, according to the nature of the primary activity (TOR'04)**

	Tuesday		Saturday		Sunday	
Participation rate	15.3% (n=261)		15.1% (n=259)		15.1% (n=258)	
Average number of secondary eating occasions per respondent	0.18		0.18		0.18	
	Av. number	% in second. eating	Av. number	% in second. eating	Av. number	% in second. eating
<b>Paid work</b>	0.05	26.76%	0.02	7.88%	0.01	5.08%
- Break at work	0.01	4.38%				
<b>Feeding work</b>	0.04	18.25%	0.05	27.57%	0.04	19.59%
<b>Household work</b>	0.01	7.99%	0.01	4.56%	0.01	3.22%
<b>Personal care</b>	0.03	17.82%	0.02	11.29%	0.01	6.28%
<b>Sleep</b>						
<b>Leisure outdoors</b>	0.01	8.46%	0.05	31.40%	0.08	45.75%
- Going to a party			0.01	7.09%	0.01	7.94%
- Paying a visit or receiving visitors	0.01	4.23%	0.02	14.69%	0.05	27.39%
<b>Leisure indoors</b>	0.01	3.54%			0.01	3.59%
- Listening to the radio						
<b>Watching TV</b>	0.02	9.43%	0.01	6.83%	0.02	9.44%
<b>Travelling</b>						
<b>Remaining</b>	0.01	3.06%	0.01	3.12%	0.01	2.57%
- Coffee klatch						
- Talking						
<b>Drinking</b>						
<b>Specification of context</b>	0.02	9.14%	0.04	22.97%	0.06	35.33%
<b>No specification of context</b>	0.17	90.86%	0.14	77.03%	0.12	64.67%

Table 3:19 presents the prevalence of secondary eating on weekend days and weekdays. The structure of this table is identical to the one presented in table 3:18. Here again Tuesdays are considered as being representative of a weekday (Breedveld, 1999: 145-153). As shown in table 3:19, secondary eating occurs as often on weekdays as on weekend days. Nevertheless, the nature of primary activities occurring with secondary eating is different for weekend days than for weekdays. On Tuesdays, the largest part of secondary eating occasions occurs during feeding work (18.25 percent), paid work (26.76 percent), and personal care (17.82 percent). On weekend days, and especially on Sundays, visits and parties account for most of all

secondary eating. Feeding work comes second. On Saturdays and particularly on Sundays, secondary eating is more a reflection of the festive context of the eating occasion, compared to weekdays. On Sundays and Saturdays respectively, 35.33 and 22.97 percent of all secondary eating corresponds to a specification of the context. On weekdays, this is only 12 percent. As for combined eating (see 3.1.4.1), it may be concluded that on weekend days secondary eating is not so much an indication of eating pushed to the “second” order.

#### **3.1.4.3 Eating pushed to the “second” order: the number of disrupted eating occasions**

The two preceding sections clearly showed that combined eating and secondary eating are two different things. When eating is the most important activity, it is registered as a primary activity. When the respondent is taken up by another activity more than by eating, then eating is registered as a secondary activity. Combined eating (i.e. primary eating with other secondary activity) has a much higher participation rate than secondary eating (87.6 percent versus 55.7 percent per week). In more than 60 percent of weekly combined eating time, eating occurs with a non-disruptive secondary activity, like eating during a party or a visit, or while listening to the radio, while talking or drinking. Secondary eating, on the contrary, is more likely to attest to eating losing its autonomous status. Only 19 percent of all weekly secondary eating occasions can be considered as specifications of the context, the rest is an indication of eating being pushed to the “second” order. For most activities that are combined with eating, it is clear whether they imply more attention than eating. As such, listening to the radio, drinking or talking while primarily eating are considered as a specification of the eating context, as eating supposedly demands more attention than the activity performed simultaneously.

Although radio listening was not considered as part of the ideal meal setting in Charles and Kerr’s (1988) study, we decided that listening to the radio as a parallel activity is not to be considered as disrupting the eating occasion. Listening to the radio as a secondary activity attests to providing some background noise rather than compelling the respondent’s full attention. On the other hand, when listening to the radio, drinking or talking are registered as primary activities with eating as a

secondary activity, we hypothesized that in that case eating is pushed to the “second” order. These situations refer to taking an appetizer or having a cosy chat, accompanied by a nibble, rather than a meal. This type of secondary eating hardly ever occurs, which may be due to the fact that short eating occasions are underregistered in the TOR’04 dataset. Other activities, like a break at work, a coffee klatch, a party or a visit, always function as a context specification since they intrinsically allow for eating, without really necessitating it. Whether these activities are registered as primary or secondary activities in the time-use diary does not matter: these pursuits are not really activities, demanding one’s full attention. Rather, they are context specifications, allowing for eating to be performed simultaneously.

Another series of activities challenge as much attention as eating. Activities like working, cooking, personal care or watching TV undeniably compel the eater’s attention. These often occur simultaneously with eating, both as a primary and a secondary activity. In our view, it is irrelevant whether eating is registered as a primary or a secondary activity with these disruptive, attention-demanding activities. When eating happens simultaneously with one of these activities, it is necessarily pushed to the “second” order. Therefore, we decided to consider both disruptive, attention-demanding activities accompanied by eating (irrespective of the primary or secondary order of the eating activity) and less attention-demanding activities (listening to the radio, drinking or talking) registered as a primary activity with eating as a secondary activity as indications of eating being pushed to the “second” order. As both primary and secondary eating are included, we use the average number, rather than the average duration of eating occasions, as an indication of eating being pushed to “second” order. The higher the number of such disrupted occasions, the more destructured the meal pattern.

Eating pushed to the “second” order is more frequent on weekdays than on weekend days. Table 3:20 shows the various types of disrupted eating. For each type, it is shown how many times it occurs per day and per week and what its share is in the weekly number of disrupted eating occasions. Especially on Sundays, the average number of disrupted eating occasions is very low (0.38). With a participation rate of 28.4 percent, disrupted eating is least likely on Sundays. This finding points at the formal nature of Sunday meals, which are less like to be disrupted by simultaneous

activities than meals on other days of the week. On Tuesdays, on the contrary, on average 0.55 disrupted eating occasions occur, and 38.7 percent of the Flemings engage at least once in disrupted eating. On weekends, disrupted eating is not only less common, but some activities do not occur while eating then (like paid work) or do so much less than on weekdays (like feeding work). In general, watching TV (0.80 out of 3.40 weekly occasions), feeding work (0.73 out of 3.40 weekly occasions) and leisure indoors (0.63 out of 3.40 weekly occasions) account for most disrupted eating. Watching TV (29.8 percent), feeding work (25.96 percent) and leisure indoors (25.1 percent) also have the highest participation rates, with at least one in four Flemings engaging in one of these disrupted eating types at least once per week.

**Table 3:20 Participation rate and average number of eating occasions with eating pushed to the “second” order, by type of disrupted eating, on Tuesdays, Saturdays, Sundays, the working week and the full week (TOR’04 - n=1710)**

Primary activity	Secondary activity	Tuesday	Working week	Saturday	Sunday	Full week	Part. rate/ type (full week)	
Eating	Paid work (except Break at work )	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.20	9.65%
Paid work (except Break at work )	Eating	0.04	0.16	0.01	0.01	0.18		
Eating	Feeding work	0.07	0.33	0.04	0.05	0.42	0.73	25.96%
Feeding work	Eating	0.04	0.22	0.05	0.04	0.31		
Eating	Household work	0.03	0.16	0.03	0.03	0.21	0.29	15.28%
Household work	Eating	0.01	0.07	0.01	0.01	0.08		
Eating	Personal care	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.06	0.24	10.65%
Personal care	Eating	0.03	0.15	0.02	0.01	0.18		
Eating	Sleep	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.35%
Sleep	Eating	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
Eating	Leisure outdoors (except for party and visits)	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.08	6.51%
Leisure outdoors (except for party and visits)	Eating	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.07		
Eating	Leisure indoors (except for radio listening)	0.11	0.49	0.07	0.05	0.59	0.63	25.1%
Leisure indoors	Eating	0.01	0.03	0.00	0.01	0.04		
Eating	Watching TV	0.10	0.53	0.09	0.09	0.72	0.80	28.9%
Watching TV	Eating	0.02	0.07	0.01	0.02	0.09		
Eating	Travelling	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.06	4.9%
Travelling	Eating	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.03		
Eating	Remaining (except talking and coffee klatch)	0.05	0.23	0.03	0.03	0.29	0.33	16.7%
Remaining (except coffee klatch)	Eating	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.03		
Drinking	Eating	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.03	1.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>0.55</b>	<b>2.62</b>	<b>0.42</b>	<b>0.38</b>	<b>3.40</b>		
<b>Participation rate for disrupted eating in general</b>		<b>38.7%</b>	<b>67.7%</b>	<b>31.4%</b>	<b>28.4%</b>	<b>72.6%</b>		

**Key:** On a full week, on average 0.02 eating occasions with paid work performed as a secondary activity occur and 0.18 paid work occasions with eating performed as a secondary activity occur, resulting in 0.20 eating occasions per week, disrupted by paid work. This means that such an occasion occurs on average once in five weeks. 9.65 percent of the population has engaged at least once in a full week in eating and working simultaneously. 72.6 percent of the population has engaged in either of these eating occasions with eating pushed to the “second” order at least once in a full week.

In this section, it was clearly shown that eating still occurs in terms of a temporally structured three meal pattern, with breakfast in the morning, lunch at noon and dinner in the evening. In the following sections, it is investigated to what extent this three-meal pattern still reveals a social and a spatial structure.

### **3.2 Social destructure of the meal pattern**

In this section, the social context of eating is tackled. More precisely, we examine the company present during meals, and we focus on the importance of particular meal partners. It is our aim to see to what extent eating has become a solitary rather than a commensal affair. The previous section on temporal destructure showed that the amount of time spent on eating is not equally distributed among the entire population. To avoid confusion of the temporal and the social aspects of eating, the relative share of a particular social context within the total primary eating time is used here.

The relative share of the eating duration in a specific social context gives weight to a particular meal partner in a person's meal pattern, but is independent of the total time a person has spent on eating. If you spend three hours on eating per day, but only one with your partner, you spend one third of your eating time with your partner. The same holds if you have spend only one hour on eating per day, and 20 minutes with the partner. In both examples, the partner is equally important as a commensal partner. This means that this definition grasps the importance of a meal partner within a person's meal pattern, irrespective of the total duration spent on eating.

One could argue that such information is just as well grasped by the number of eating occasions with a particular meal partner. However, the latter assumes that each eating occasion has the same weight in defining the social context of a person's meal pattern. If you spend 10 minutes for breakfast with your mother, but 40 minutes for dinner with your girl friend, then your girl friend plays a more important role in the social context of your meal pattern than your mother. The relative share of the eating duration in various social contexts allows for this differentiation, while the number of eating occasions with a particular meal partner does not.

In the second chapter of this study, we have argued that the social context of eating is likely to be subject to more measurement error in the TOR'04 dataset. The underregistration of short eating occasions entails an underestimation of solitary eating and an overestimation of commensality. This is revealed by a higher level of solitary eating in NIS'99 than in TOR'04 and a lower level of commensality in NIS'99 than in TOR'04. We expect the difference between NIS'99 and TOR'04 to be smaller for the social context of the more important meals of the day, namely lunch and dinner. These meals are more likely to be registered to the same extent in both time-use surveys.

Next to the higher measurement error in the TOR'04 dataset for short eating occasions, the difference between the findings for NIS'99 and TOR'04 may also be due to different registration procedures for social context. In 1966 and 1999, respondents were only asked to indicate who was present during an activity. Respondents could indicate whether or not an adult of the household, a child of the household or another person (a non-household member) were present or whether they were alone during that activity. In the TOR'04 survey, the registration of the social context occurred in a double manner. First, the presence of a person was assessed by indicating whether the activity occurred alone (no others present), with others present or together (the presence of others entailed a shared activity). Then, the presence of specific conversation partners was assessed. The respondent was asked whom he had talked to during the activity. A list of 14 different types (see appendix E) of conversation partners was presented. As such, the registration of the social context occurs in a much more detailed manner in the TOR'04 study than in the Belgian time-use studies of 1966 and 1999. Nevertheless, in this thesis we are mainly interested in assessing the evolution in solitary eating and eating with the household members. This can be examined in a satisfactory manner with all available datasets.

### 3.2.1 The social structure of eating practices

As shown in table 3:21, the social context of eating has altered significantly between 1966 and 1999. This holds for weekdays as well as for weekend days.

**Table 3:21 Average time spent on eating and relative share (column percentages) in total eating time on weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays, according to social context (BEL'66-'99)**

	1966						1999					
	Average weekday (n=1596)		Saturday (n=254)		Sunday (n=226)		Average weekday (n=2947)		Saturday (n=1424)		Sunday (n=1523)	
<b>Average eating time</b>	1:40		1:43		1:53		1:22		1:36		1:39	
<i>n</i>	1596	1592	254	253	226	226	2485	2882	1459	1418	1490	1444
<b>Alone</b>	0:14	14.34%	0:09	10.38%	0:10	8.28%	0:18 ***	25.79% ***	0:13 **	18.87% ***	0:12 ns	16.64% ***
<b>With adults of the household</b>	1:05	65.59%	1:17	74.57%	1:30	82.72%	0:38 ***	48.29% ***	1:01 **	60.85% ***	1:04 ***	64.78% ***
<b>With children of the household</b>	0:37	41.91%	0:43	45.17%	0:52	48.75%	0:15 ***	26.44% ***	0:26 ***	29.97% ***	0:28 ***	33.48% ***
<b>Primary interaction</b>	1:14	73.08%	0:35	82.35%	1:35	86.04%	0:43 ***	55.88% ***	1:06 ***	66.41% ***	1:09 ***	70.28% ***
<b>With others</b>	0:15	17.90%	0:25	15.39%	0:19	16.43%	0:23 ***	33.0% ***	0:33 ***	34.16% ***	0:32 **	33.96% ***

Statistically significant differences between 1966 and 1999: \*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, ns: p≥0.05

### *An increase in eating alone*

A first important change in the social structure of eating practices is the increase in solitary eating. This increase is especially pronounced on weekdays. The share of eating alone has increased from 14 percent of the weekday eating time in 1966 to over a quarter of weekday eating time in 1999. On Saturdays and Sundays, we come to similar conclusions, although the increase in solitary eating is smaller than on weekdays. On weekdays, the share of eating alone has increased by 11 percentage points, on weekend days the increase amounts to 8 percentage points. The findings for Flanders in 2004 confirm the increase in solitary eating. As expected, the TOR'04 dataset reveals a lower percentage of solitary eating than the NIS'99 dataset: only 18.7 percent of working week eating time occurs alone (Table 3:22). This is due to the serious underregistration of short, solitary eating occasions in the TOR'04 dataset. The general increase in solitary eating on all days of the week sustains the destructure thesis.

**Table 3:22 Average time spent on eating and relative share (column percentages<sup>o</sup>) in total eating time on the working week, Tuesdays<sup>12</sup>, Saturdays and Sundays, according to social context and interaction partners (TOR'04)**

	Tuesday		Working week		Sig %	Saturday		Sig %	Sunday	
Average eating time	1:19		6:41		ww-Sun	1:33		Sat-Sun	1:33	
<i>In the following social context</i>										
<i>n</i>	1710	1683	1710	1621		1710	1586		1710	1579
<b>Alone</b>	0:14	20.4%	1:10	18.7%	***	0:09	13.8%	ns	0:08	12.0%
<b>Someone else present</b>	0:25	34.1%	2:14	35.1%	**	0:31	34.1%	**	0:28	31.9%
<b>Together</b>	0:37	45.5%	3:11	46.2%	***	0:52	52.1%	***	0:55	56.1%
<i>With the following interaction partners</i>										
<i>n</i>	1710	1686	1710	1616		1710	1584		1710	1583
<b>No interaction</b>	<b>0:14</b>	<b>19.8%</b>	<b>1:06</b>	<b>18.1%</b>	***	<b>0:08</b>	<b>13.4%</b>	ns	<b>0:07</b>	<b>11.8%</b>
<b>Primary interaction</b>	<b>0:48</b>	<b>61.9%</b>	<b>4:13</b>	<b>63.4%</b>	***	<b>1:14</b>	<b>78.4%</b>	**	<b>1:15</b>	<b>80.5%</b>
Partner	0:38	47.9%	3:31	49.2%	***	1:03	64.6%	***	1:05	67.5%
Children in HH	0:17	23.8%	1:31	24.8%	***	0:29	32.3%	ns	0:30	33.6%
Parents in HH	0:05	7.5%	0:26	7.1%	***	0:06	8.5%	ns	0:07	9.1%
Siblings in HH	0:02	3.0%	0:11	3.0%	***	0:03	3.9%	ns	0:03	4.4%
Other members HH	0:00	1.0%	0:04	1.0%	**	0:01	1.8%	ns	0:02	1.9%
<b>Secondary interaction</b>	<b>0:10</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	<b>1:01</b>	<b>13.9%</b>	***	<b>0:26</b>	<b>19.3%</b>	ns	<b>0:26</b>	<b>21.4%</b>
Non-resident family	0:05	6.1%	0:32	7.5%	***	0:12	9.8%	***	0:15	13.0%
Friends, acquaintances	0:05	4.8%	0:29	6.6%	***	0:15	10.3%	ns	0:13	9.2%
Neighbours	0:00	0.5%	0:01	0.4%	ns	0:00	0.4%	ns	0:00	0.6%
<b>Work-related interaction</b>	<b>0:10</b>	<b>13.6%</b>	<b>0:47</b>	<b>12.6%</b>	***	<b>0:02</b>	<b>2.7%</b>	**	<b>0:01</b>	<b>1.7%</b>
Colleagues	0:09	13.1%	0:45	12.1%	***	0:02	2.5%	**	0:01	1.5%
Clients, persons to whom services are extended	0:00	0.9%	0:03	0.9%	***	0:00	0.3%	ns	0:00	0.2%
<b>Tertiary interaction</b>	<b>0:02</b>	<b>2.3%</b>	<b>0:13</b>	<b>2.9%</b>	**	<b>0:05</b>	<b>4.1%</b>	ns	<b>0:06</b>	<b>4.3%</b>
Persons extending services	0:02	1.9%	0:10	2.2%	*	0:03	2.8%	ns	0:04	3.2%
Unknown	0:00	0.6%	0:02	0.5%	***	0:02	1.3%	ns	0:02	1.5%
Others	0:00	0.4%	0:02	0.5%	ns	0:00	0.7%	ns	0:00	0.7%

<sup>o</sup> The column percentages for the social context count up to 100 percent. The column percentages for the various interaction types count up to more than 100 percent as more than one type of interaction partner could be registered per activity. The sum of durations does not add to the average for the same reason. The white zones are a specification of the interaction types specified in the above-mentioned grey zone. \*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, ns: p≥0.05

### *A decrease in eating with household members*

The social destructure of our eating habits not only appears from the increase in eating alone, but also from the decrease in sharing meals with the proper meal partners. Sharing meals with household members -that is the primary interaction circle- is much less likely nowadays than it was in 1966. In all research years, primary commensality is more likely on weekend days, and especially on Sundays, than on weekdays. The leisurely character of the weekend results in a larger share of eating time spent together. Clearly, Sunday still is the moment *par excellence* to share a

<sup>12</sup> Tuesday was considered as a typical weekday. For more information see 4.2.2.1.

meal, especially with the family. Nevertheless, in 1999 the Belgians only spend as large a share on eating with household members on Sundays as they did on weekdays in 1966.

The decline in eating with the primary commensal circle holds for all types of household members. In 1966, Belgians spent 65.59 percent of weekday eating time with an adult (parent or partner) of the household. In 1999, Belgians spent somewhat less than half of their weekday eating time with an adult (parent or partner) of the household. The TOR'04 dataset (Table 3:22) distinguishes between different types of adult household members: the partner and the parents. 49 percent of working week eating time is spent with the partner in 2004. Eating with the parents takes up only 7 percent of weekday eating time, but this is no surprise given the fact that only respondents between 18 and 75 are included in the 2004 Flemish time-use survey. On Saturdays and Sundays, the percentage of eating time shared with adult household members was and remains larger than on weekdays. On Saturdays, the share of eating time with an adult household member has declined by 14 percentage points, and on Sundays, by 18 percentage points. Children also take a smaller part in the daily meal pattern. In 1966, 41.91 percent of weekday eating time was shared with co-resident children. In 1999 and 2004, this amounts to about a quarter of weekday eating time. On weekends, about one third of daily eating time is spent with children in 1999 and 2004, while this amounted to almost 50 percent in 1966.

In general, sharing meals with the household members is much less likely to occur nowadays than it was before. In 1966, 73.08 percent of weekday eating time occurred with at least one household member present. In 1999, this is only 55.88 percent (Table 3:21). This is in line with French findings. Larmer (2002) also finds a decrease in family commensality: the share of time spent on eating with the household members has decreased from 55.4 percent in 1985 to 49.6 percent in 1999. The Flemish data corroborate the declining importance of the primary commensal circle. However, as expected the importance of commensal eating occasions is somewhat overestimated in the TOR'04 dataset due to the underregistration of short, solitary eating occasions. The presence of the primary commensal circle is especially valued on Sundays, the most important family day. On Sundays, we find a decline of the primary commensal circle from 86.04 percent of eating time in 1966 to 70.28 percent in 1999. The general

decrease in eating with household members, the most important commensal circle, sustains the social destructure of eating on all days of the week.

*An increase in eating with non-household members*

While eating with the most important commensal circle, namely the household members, has decreased significantly over time, eating with others has grown more popular. This finding is in line with French findings (Larmet, 2002). In 1966, only about 18 percent of weekday eating time was spent with non-household members, and this share was even smaller on weekend days. In 1999, about one third of weekday eating time occurs with others, and similar findings hold for weekend days. The 2004 time-use survey allows for distinguishing between meal interaction with various types of non-household members (Appendix E). These are classified according to a widespread typology of interaction, distinguishing between secondary, tertiary, and work-related interaction (Glorieux, 1995) (Table 3:23). Interaction with non-resident family, friends or acquaintances is considered as secondary interaction. This type of interaction takes 13.9 percent of working-week eating time, and consequently secondary commensality is the second most common type of commensality. Secondary interaction takes a larger share of eating time on weekend days than on weekdays. The share of eating time spent with non-resident family is significantly higher on Sundays than on Saturdays, while the share of eating time spent with friends or acquaintances is larger on Saturdays than on Sundays, although this difference is not statistically significant. This finding sustains the importance of Sunday as a family day. The Sunday meal involves both resident and non-resident family. While non-resident family and friends or acquaintances are equally common as meal partners, sharing meals with neighbours is exceptional (only 0.5 percent of weekly eating time). This finding is in line with earlier studies. Douglas (1997: 41) argued that the structure of eating occasions reveals the social structure within society: the lack of a strong, intimate bond with neighbours results in a lack of meals with neighbours. Sobal and Nelson (2003: 186) also found 'that neighbouring does not often extend to the level of intimacy of commensality'. On weekdays secondary interaction is closely followed by work-related interaction, accounting for 12.6 percent of working week eating time. Work-related interaction includes all interaction with colleagues, fellow students or persons to whom services are extended. On weekends however, work-

related interaction is very unlikely to occur. Finally, a third type of interaction with non-household members is discerned. Tertiary interaction includes all interaction with persons extending services and with unknown persons. Tertiary interaction is the least common type of meal interaction. As expected, sharing food with strangers is not a common practice (Douglas, 1982). Most tertiary meal interaction happens during restaurant meals.

**Table 3:23 Average time spent on eating and relative share (column percentages) in total eating time on a full week, according to social context and interaction partners present (TOR'04)**

	Hot meal at work		Cold meal at work		Hot meal		Cold meal		Restaurant meal		All meals	
<b>Average weekly eating time</b>	0:08		0:31		3:29		4:26		1:10		9:48	
<i>n</i>	1710	166	1710	510	1710	1647	1710	1635	1710	706	1710	1694
<b>Alone</b>	0:00	3.4%	0:03	12.6%	0:21	11.5%	1:01	23.9%	0:00	1.8%	1:27	16.3%
<b>Someone else present</b>	0:03	39.7%	0:11	36.4%	1:10	34.6%	1:29	35.1%	0:19	28.1%	3:13	34.4%
<b>Together</b>	0:05	57.0%	0:16	51.0%	1:55	54.0%	1:52	41.0%	0:50	70.1%	4:59	49.3%
<i>With the following interaction partners</i>												
<i>n</i>	1710	166	1710	509	1710	1647	1710	1636	1710	708	1710	1695
<b>No interaction</b>	0:00	4.6%	0:03	12.9%	0:18	10.7%	1:00	24.0%	0:00	1.1%	1:23	15.8%
<b>Primary interaction</b>	0:00	5.6%	0:00	2.0%	2:51	82.4%	3:03	69.1%	0:46	65.5%	6:43	68.3%
Partner	0:00	4.5%	0:00	1.5%	2:18	65.2%	2:28	54.2%	0:43	58.8%	5:30	54.6%
Children in HH	0:00	0.0%	0:00	0.1%	1:11	36.9%	1:07	27.5%	0:12	20.8%	2:32	27.4%
Parents in HH	0:00	0.8%	0:00	0.4%	0:21	10.0%	0:15	6.9%	0:01	2.7%	0:39	7.3%
Siblings in HH	0:00	0.0%	0:00	0.0%	0:11	4.9%	0:05	2.5%	0:01	2.3%	0:18	3.3%
Other members HH	0:00	0.3%	0:00	0.0%	0:04	1.9%	0:02	1.1%	0:00	1.3%	0:08	1.3%
<b>Secondary interaction</b>	0:00	6.5%	0:01	4.3%	0:41	17.6%	0:28	10.9%	0:42	53.4%	1:55	15.1%
Non-resident family	0:00	0.4%	0:00	0.1%	0:28	12.2%	0:17	6.3%	0:14	18.2%	1:00	9.7%
Friends, acquaintances	0:00	6.2%	0:01	3.3%	0:14	5.7%	0:11	4.7%	0:31	37.8%	0:58	9.0%
Neighbours	0:00	0.0%	0:00	0.1%	0:01	0.5%	0:00	0.3%	0:01	1.5%	0:02	0.5%
<b>Work-related interaction</b>	0:07	86.9%	0:26	83.7%	0:03	1.3%	0:06	2.7%	0:07	10.0%	0:51	9.4%
Colleagues	0:07	85.3%	0:25	82.0%	0:02	1.1%	0:06	2.5%	0:06	8.8%	0:49	9.0%
Clients, persons to whom services are extended	0:00	6.0%	0:01	4.0%	0:00	0.3%	0:00	0.2%	0:01	1.5%	0:04	0.7%
<b>Tertiary interaction</b>	0:00	6.4%	0:00	2.8%	0:02	1.0%	0:04	1.3%	0:17	26.6%	0:25	4.0%
Persons extending services	0:00	6.1%	0:00	2.2%	0:01	0.6%	0:02	0.7%	0:14	21.7%	0:19	3.0%
Unknown	0:00	1.4%	0:00	0.2%	0:00	0.3%	0:01	0.4%	0:04	6.0%	0:07	1.2%
Others	0:00	0.1%	0:00	0.6%	0:00	0.3%	0:00	0.3%	0:01	2.8%	0:03	0.6%

° The column percentages for the social context count up to 100 percent. The column percentages for the various interaction types count up to more than 100 percent as more than one type of interaction partner could be registered per activity. The sum of durations does not add to the average for the same reason. The white zones are a specification of the interaction types specified in the above-mentioned grey zone.

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, ns: p≥0.05

*The relationship between the type of eating occasion and commensality*

As shown by table 3:23, there is a clear relationship between the type of meal and the social context in which it occurs. Eating alone, and in the absence of interaction, occurs especially during cold meals. Conversely, eating alone and without conversation hardly ever occurs during restaurant meals (1.8 percent) and hot meals at work (3.4 percent). This is not surprising and corroborates the fact that especially in public places (restaurants, canteens) eating alone is avoided as much as possible, because it is experienced as uncomfortable (Camp, 1989: 109-110; Sobal, 2000: 120). 34.4 percent of weekly eating time is spent with others present, without it being considered as really done together. This means that the presence of others during the eating occasion is not considered as genuine commensality. For example, the relationship with colleagues or other work-related acquaintances does not automatically assume that eating hot meals in the canteen in the presence of these persons is experienced as sharing a meal. Sharing meals with others and defining this as a commensal activity, takes 49.3 percent of weekly eating time. This percentage is even higher for hot meals and amounts to 70.1 percent for restaurant meals. Cold meals (except for those at work) are somewhat less social occasions. The type of commensal partner also varies according to the type of eating occasion. Primary interaction is most frequent with hot meals. 82.4 percent of weekly hot meals are spent with household members. Not surprisingly, hot and cold meals at work are most likely to occur with colleagues. Although restaurant meals are most likely to occur with household members, a considerable share of these meals is also spent with non-resident family or friends and even with colleagues.

So far, we have discussed the connection between the commensality type and the nature of the eating occasion (hot, cold, at work, in restaurants). In the first chapter on the normative significance of the meal, it was argued that although sharing meals with the household members was highly valued in general, this held especially for the main meal of the day, namely dinner. In the next section, we go into the social character of the three meals in the daily meal pattern and how this has evolved over time.

### 3.2.2 The social structure of the three daily meals

In the previous section, it was clearly shown that there has been a significant increase in eating alone and a significant decrease in primary commensality. In this section, we investigate to what extent the social destructure holds for the three daily meals in particular. Table 3:24 presents the average share of the time spent on a particular meal (breakfast, midday meal or evening meal) in a particular social context, namely alone or in the presence of household members (irrespective of the presence of non-household members). These figures may just as well be interpreted as the average share of the population for whom that particular meal was spent entirely in that social context. To put it differently, the average share of breakfast time spent alone equals the percentage of the population that has spent that breakfast entirely alone. The reason for this equivalence is the fact that respondents characterise each meal entirely by the same social context. A meal that occurs alone is most likely to occur entirely alone, and not only in part.

As shown in table 3:24, the increase in solitary eating holds for all meals. The meal with the largest increase in solitary eating is breakfast. The percentage of weekday breakfast time spent alone has increased from 18 percent in 1966 to 39 percent in 1999. Weekday breakfast is the most solitary meal of the week in all three research years. On weekend days, and especially on Sundays, breakfast is less likely to be a solitary affair. Nevertheless, the percentage of breakfast time spent alone has increased on both weekdays and weekend days, which sustains the social destructure of breakfast. The increase in solitary eating is confirmed by the Flemish data from 2004. As expected, the share of solitary breakfasts is considerably lower in the TOR'04 dataset (27.6 percent) than in the NIS'99 dataset (39 percent). The underestimation of solitary breakfasts in the TOR'04 dataset is due to an underregistration of short breakfasts.

**Table 3:24 Average share of breakfast time, midday-meal time and evening-meal time spent alone and with household members in Belgium in 1966 and 1999 (BEL'66-'99) and in Flanders in 2004 (TOR'04) per day of the week (only participators to breakfast, lunch or dinner on that day)**

			Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Week-day <sup>13</sup>	Sat	Sun		
<b>B</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>alone</b>	<b>1966</b>	20.8% (n=216)	13.5% (n=248)	21.9% (n=264)	16.7% (n=254)	17.2% (n=249)	18.0%	18.9% (n=192)	12.1% (n=178)	
			<b>Sig Δ66-99</b>	**	***	***	***	***	***		**	***
			<b>1999</b>	34.0% (n=385)	37.9% (n=393)	41.9% (n=359)	37.7% (n=382)	43.8% (n=349)	39.1%	30.3% (n=899)	28.7% (n=1084)	
	<b>2004</b>	27.3% (n=894)	29.2% (n=954)	27.8% (n=946)	27.4% (n=947)	26.2% (n=917)	27.6%	18.4% (n=968)	16.0% (n=1021)			
	<b>a</b>	<b>household</b>	<b>1966</b>	76.2% (n=216)	79.8% (n=248)	71.8% (n=264)	78.0% (n=254)	76.7% (n=249)	76.6%	80.2% (n=192)	85.0% (n=178)	
			<b>Sig Δ66-99</b>	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	
<b>1999</b>			53.4% (n=385)	49.4% (n=393)	50.2% (n=359)	53.6% (n=382)	50.0% (n=349)	51.3%	61.3% (n=899)	61.5% (n=1084)		
<b>2004</b>	66.0% (n=894)	64.6% (n=954)	65.8% (n=946)	67.6% (n=947)	69.9% (n=917)	66.8%	77.2% (n=968)	80.5% (n=1021)				
<b>M</b>	<b>i</b>	<b>alone</b>	<b>1966</b>	16.1% (n=262)	15.6% (n=290)	17.5% (n=309)	17.6% (n=302)	14.4% (n=278)	16.2%	9.9% (n=239)	6.6% (n=217)	
			<b>Sig Δ66-99</b>	**	*	ns	**	**		**	**	
			<b>1999</b>	27.1% (n=477)	22.9% (n=464)	22.8% (n=459)	26.7% (n=447)	23.4% (n=431)	24.6%	16.9% (n=1125)	13.2% (n=1314)	
	<b>2004</b>	20.2% (n=1234)	19.8% (n=1241)	18.5% (n=1257)	21.2% (n=1218)	19.6% (n=1194)	19.9%	11.6% (n=1176)	8.8% (n=1158)			
	<b>d</b>	<b>household</b>	<b>1966</b>	60.8% (n=262)	58.4% (n=290)	56.8% (n=309)	59.9% (n=302)	60.7% (n=278)	59.3%	78.9% (n=239)	87.8% (n=217)	
			<b>Sig Δ66-99</b>	***	***	**	***	***	***	***	***	
<b>1999</b>			40.5% (n=477)	32.7% (n=464)	44.9% (n=459)	37.5% (n=447)	43.9% (n=431)	39.9%	65.8% (n=1125)	71.5% (n=1314)		
<b>2004</b>	45.6% (n=1234)	41.6% (n=1241)	48.8% (n=1257)	43.6% (n=1218)	46.0% (n=1194)	45.1%	77.9% (n=1176)	82.3% (n=1158)				
<b>E</b>	<b>v</b>	<b>alone</b>	<b>1966</b>	5.3% (n=248)	4.1% (n=298)	8.2% (n=291)	4.1% (n=293)	5.7% (n=276)	5.5%	4.7% (n=214)	5.5% (n=185)	
			<b>Sig Δ66-99</b>	***	***	***	***	***		***	*	
			<b>1999</b>	17.0% (n=506)	16.5% (n=501)	17.6% (n=475)	19.1% (n=462)	16.5% (n=459)	17.3%	13.0% (n=1205)	11.5% (n=1232)	
	<b>2004</b>	11.2% (n=1289)	13.3% (n=1301)	11.9% (n=1274)	12.0% (n=1231)	10.8% (n=1194)	11.9%	9.4% (n=1163)	10.2% (n=1117)			
	<b>n</b>	<b>household</b>	<b>1966</b>	92.1% (n=248)	93.7% (n=298)	88.3% (n=291)	91.8% (n=293)	92.2% (n=276)	91.6%	90.6% (n=214)	87.7% (n=185)	
			<b>Sig Δ66-99</b>	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	
<b>1999</b>			68.0% (n=506)	71.9% (n=501)	69.1% (n=475)	70.1% (n=462)	72.8% (n=459)	70.3%	68.0% (n=1205)	70.5% (n=1232)		
<b>2004</b>	82.0% (n=1289)	79.6% (n=1301)	81.6% (n=1274)	80.4% (n=1231)	81.7% (n=1194)	81.0%	81.5% (n=1163)	81.0% (n=1117)				

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, ns: p≥0.05

For the midday meal and the evening meal, the increase in solitary eating is less pronounced. On an average weekday, the percentage of lunch time spent alone has increased from 16.2 percent in 1966 to 24.6 percent in 1999. The proportion of dinner time spent alone has increased from 5.5 percent in 1966 to 17.3 percent in 1999. As expected, the difference in the social context of eating between the TOR'04 dataset and the NIS'99 dataset is smaller for lunch (24.6 percent in 1999 versus 19.9 percent

<sup>13</sup> The figure for the average weekday represents the central tendency presented by the five weekdays and was calculated manually as the average of these five weekday figures. For that reason, we do not present the number of respondents, neither could we present a significance level for the difference between 1966 and 1999.

in 2004) and dinner (17.3 percent in 1999 versus 11.9 percent in 2004) than for breakfast (39 percent in 1999 versus 27.6 percent in 2004). This is due to the fact that longer eating occasions, such as lunch and dinner, are equally likely to be registered in both time-use datasets. The above findings confirm the social deconstruction of the midday meal and the evening meal on weekdays: these are more likely to be eaten alone nowadays than in 1966.

The important status of the evening meal on weekdays is corroborated by its commensal nature. The meal in the evening is the most important meal of the day on weekdays: it is the meal which is least likely to be spent alone. The commensal nature of the evening meal holds for all three research years. The commensal nature of dinner is even more pronounced on weekend days and especially on Sundays. In 1966, Sunday dinner (meal at noon) was spent entirely alone by only 6.6 percent of the Belgian population. In 1999 and 2004, this percentage amounts to 13.2 percent and 8.8 percent respectively. A very low percentage of solitary eating is also found with the evening meal on Saturdays and Sundays. This holds for all three research years. The commensal nature of the evening meal on Saturdays confirms its status as the main meal on Saturdays. On Sundays, both the evening meal and the midday meal attest to be commensal events. Even Sunday breakfast is a more commensal meal than weekday breakfast. Sunday remains the ideal day for creating and sustaining social bonds.

The social deconstruction of meals is not only shown by the increase in solitary eating, it is also shown by a decrease in eating with the most important commensal circle, namely the household members. We find a general decrease in the percentage of eating time spent with household members for breakfast, lunch and dinner, as shown by table 3:24. Of all meals, breakfast attests most to social deconstruction: the percentage of weekday breakfast time spent with household members has decreased from 76.5 percent in 1966 to 51.3 percent in 1999. The decrease in eating with the primary commensal circle by 25 percentage points is almost exactly the mirror image of the increase in eating alone (increase by 21 percentage points). Indeed, breakfast is either spent alone, either with the primary commensal circle, but almost never with a non-household member alone. As such, a decrease in having breakfast with the primary circle reflects itself in an equal increase in solitary eating.

The decline in eating time spent with household members is smaller for weekday lunch and weekday dinner than for weekday breakfast. Weekday lunch is least likely of all weekday meals to be spent with the primary commensal circle. 39.9 percent of the Belgian population spends weekday lunch with household members in 1999. This is 20 percentage points less than in 1966. Obviously, the active population succeeds less in sharing lunch with household members over noon than in 1966.

The main status of the evening meal on weekdays is also revealed by the prevalence of primary commensality. In 1999, 70.3 percent of weekday dinner time is spent with at least one household member. This is considerably higher than what is found for lunch and for breakfast. Nevertheless, even the main meal of the day attests to a decrease in primary commensality, on weekdays as well as on weekends. The status of Sunday dinner as the main meal of the day is confirmed by the highest level of primary commensality on Sundays. This holds for all three research years. Nevertheless, Sunday dinner is not necessarily the main meal of the week in all three research years, judging on its likeliness to be shared with household members. Sunday dinner is in fierce competition with Saturday dinner. Both meals attest to a high level of primary commensality.

### **3.3 Spatial deconstruction of the meal pattern**

In the previous section, we tackled the social structure of our eating practices. We assessed the social context of daily eating time and the three daily meals. In this section, we assess the spatial context of Belgian eating practices and the three daily meals in particular. As in the second section on the social context of eating, relative measures, rather than absolute durations, are used to assess the spatial context of eating practices. The absolute duration of eating at home is both an indication of the duration as well as the importance attached to the home as a meal location. The relative share of eating time in a specific location within the total primary eating time is a much better indicator to assess the spatial context of eating. We prefer to work with the relative share of all locations in the total eating time to assess the importance of a particular location in a person's meal pattern.

Registration procedures for spatial context are highly similar in the three time-budget surveys. All studies distinguished between the home place, the workplace and someone else's house. In 1966 and 1999, a further distinction was made between other places and public eating places. In 2004, a further distinction was made between other places and while travelling (Appendix E). We do not expect to find considerable differences between the NIS'99 dataset and the TOR'04 dataset as far as the spatial context is concerned. However, the underregistration of short eating occasions in the TOR'04 dataset may entail an underestimation of eating at other places. In this thesis, we are mainly interested in the evolution of daily eating practices and therefore also in eating at home. This can be assessed with all available datasets in a satisfactory and comparable manner.

### 3.3.1 The spatial structure of eating practices

**Table 3:25 Average time spent on eating according to spatial context on weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays and relative share in total eating time in 1966 and 1999 (BEL '66-'99)**

	Weekday				Saturday				Sunday			
	1966		1999		1966		1999		1966		1999	
<b>Average duration of eating</b>	1:40		1:22		1:43		1:36		1:53		1:39	
<i>n</i>	1596	1592	2947	2924	254	254	1424	1443	226	226	1523	1477
<b>At home</b>	1:24	84.3%	0:59 ***	76.6% ***	1:33	90.8%	1:07 ***	76.5% ***	1:38	89.6%	1:12 ***	78.5% ***
<b>At work, school, university</b>	0:10	11.2%	0:09 ns	11.2% ns	0:03	4.0%	0:00 ***	1.0% ***	0:00	0.5%	0:00 ns	0.8% ns
<b>At somebody else's house</b>	0:01	1.1%	0:03 ***	2.9% ***	0:02	2.7%	0:09 **	7.8% ***	0:07	6.4%	0:08 ns	7.4% ns
<b>Restaurant, bar or café</b>	0:02	2.1%	0:06 ***	4.9% ***	0:02	2.4%	0:14 ***	9.2% ***	0:05	2.9%	0:12 *	7.8% **
<b>Other place</b>	0:01	1.3%	0:04 ***	4.3% ***	0:00	0.1%	0:06 ***	5.6% ***	0:00	0.6%	0:06 **	5.6% ***
<b>Total</b>		100%		100%		100%		100%		100%		100%

Statistically significant differences between 1966 and 1999: \*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*:  $p < 0.01$ , \*:  $p < 0.05$ , ns:  $p \geq 0.05$

Table 3:25 shows that there has been a significant change in the location of eating between 1966 and 1999. First of all, there has been a considerable decline in eating at home. This finding is in line with earlier findings in the UK (Cheng, Olsen, Southerton and Warde, 2007: 47). The decline in eating time at home is significant on all days of the week, but is even more pronounced on weekend days. On weekdays, the percentage of eating time spent at home has decreased from 84.3 percent in 1966 to 76.6 percent in 1999. This is in line with Flemish findings for 2004, where 74.6 percent of working week eating time occurs at home. Eating at home is somewhat more likely on weekend days than on weekdays, although this holds more in 1966

than in 1999 and 2004 (Table 3:26). In 1966, the home was almost an exclusive location for weekend eating occasions, accounting for about 90 percent of weekend day eating time. In 1999 and 2004, the home accounts for three quarters to four fifths of weekend day eating time. Despite the decrease in eating at home, the home still remains the most important place to eat. Larmet comes to similar results based on the analysis of French time-budget studies. Although the time allotted to eating at home has decreased slightly between 1985 and 1999, about 75 percent of eating time was still spent at home in 1999 (Larmet, 2002).

**Table 3:26 Average time spent on eating and relative share in total eating time on the working week, Tuesdays<sup>14</sup>, Saturdays and Sundays, according to spatial context (TOR'04)**

	Tuesday		Working week		Sig % ww- Sun	Saturday		Sig % Sat- Sun	Sunday	
Average eating time	1:19		6:41			1:33			1:33	
<i>At the following location</i>										
<i>n</i>	1710	1692	1710	1617		1710	1594		1710	1583
<b>At home</b>	0:58	77.5%	4:50	74.6%	***	1:04	80.0%	ns	1:03	78.5%
<b>At work</b>	0:08	12.2%	0:38	10.7%	***	0:01	1.8%	ns	0:00	1.2%
<b>At somebody else's house</b>	0:02	2.8%	0:13	3.1%	***	0:03	3.3%	**	0:04	4.8%
<b>Other place</b>	0:08	7.5%	0:51	11.6%	***	0:23	15.0%	ns	0:22	15.5%
<b>Total</b>		100%		100%			100%			100%

Next to the home, the workplace has also lost importance as a meal location, but only on Saturdays. This is due to a change in working-time regulation. In 1966, Saturday morning was a working day for most people, while this is no longer the case in 1999 (see also 3.1.2.1). In contrast to the home and the workplace, other people's houses, public eating places and other locations have grown more important as meal locations between 1966 and 1999. Eating at other people's house occurs especially on weekends and has grown more popular on weekdays and on Saturdays over time. On Sundays, there is no sign of an increase in eating at somebody else's house, a practice that was already common in 1966. In 1999, however, eating at somebody else's house is no longer restricted to bonding with the wider family or friends on Sundays, the ideal family and visiting day. Weekdays and especially Saturdays (no longer a working day in 1999) are also suitable to socialize with non-household members. This finding applies even more to Flanders in 2004: weekdays and weekend days hardly differ as to the share of eating time spent at somebody else's house.

<sup>14</sup> Tuesday was considered as a typical weekday.

Eating in public eating places has grown more popular in 1999 compared to 1966. In 1966, only 2.1 percent of weekday eating time was spent at public eating places. This was only slightly higher on weekend days. In 1999, 4.9 percent of weekday eating time is spent at public eating places. On Saturdays and Sundays, this percentage even amounts to 9.2 percent and 7.8 percent respectively. The time-use diary from the Flemish 2004 survey does not discern public eating places from other locations, but it does consider eating in a restaurant as a separate activity. In 2004, 6.9 percent of working-week eating time is spent in a restaurant, on Saturdays this amounts to 11.1 percent and on Sundays to 11.5 percent.

**Table 3:27 Average time spent on eating while travelling and relative share in total eating time on a full week, according to means of transport (TOR'04)**

	Hot meal at work		Cold meal at work		Hot meal		Cold meal		Restaurant meal		All meals	
<b>Average weekly eating time while travelling</b>	0:00	4.6%	0:00	2.6%	0:04	1.6%	0:02	0.9%	0:27	37.2%	0:34	5.9%
<i>Using the following means of transport</i>												
<i>n</i>	1710	163	1710	508	1710	1650	1710	1639	1710	700	1710	1692
<b>Walk</b>	0:00	1.5%	0:05	0.8%	0:17	0.7%	0:01	0.5%	0:07	10.7%	0:10	1.7%
<b>(Motor) Bike</b>	0:00	0.5%	0:00	0.0%	0:06	0.1%	0:00	0.1%	0:01	2.9%	0:01	0.3%
<b>Car</b>	0:00	2.6%	0:04	1.0%	0:17	0.7%	0:00	0.3%	0:18	23.2%	0:21	3.5%
<b>Other means</b>	0:00	0.0%	0:04	1.0%	0:04	0.1%	0:00	0.0%	0:00	0.5%	0:00	0.4%

In 2004, eating at other places not only includes eating in public eating places, but also partly corresponds to eating while travelling. In the BEL'66-'99 dataset, eating activities while travelling were not registered in either research year. In 2004, 5.9 percent of Flemings' weekly eating time occurs while travelling (see table 3:27). However, this figure is a serious overestimation of eating while travelling, due to incorrect registration in the time-use diaries. Research into Belgian travelling behaviour, as registered in time-use diaries, showed that the registration of a means of transport often referred to the travelling performed just before that activity rather than during that activity (Koelet and Glorieux, 2006: 38). That explains why 27 minutes of the 34 minutes of weekly eating while travelling, occur with restaurant meals. Restaurant meals, in most cases, demand for prior travelling to the restaurant. When we take into account the serious overestimation for eating while travelling – certainly for restaurant meals and possibly also for other types of meals – we come close to the figure of eating while travelling as found in 3.1.4.3 (disrupted eating). Eating while travelling and travelling while eating both take two minutes per week, when registered as parallel activities. We may conclude that eating while travelling is very exceptional behaviour.

So far, we can conclude that eating is more spatially destructured than before. Eating has been de-localised from one or two (home and workplace) exclusive locations in 1966 to a larger variety of locations, like other people’s home, public eating places, and other indeterminate locations.

*The relationship between the type of eating occasion and its location*

The location of eating is closely connected to the type of eating occasion, as shown in table 3:28. Restaurant meals almost exclusively happen at another indeterminate location, most likely the restaurant. Hot and cold meals are equally likely to occur at home. However, a larger share of hot meals also occurs at other people’s home. 26 minutes of hot and cold meals also occur at another place without being defined as restaurant meals. Hot and cold meals are equally likely here. These meals probably refer to small hot (take away hamburgers or pizza) and cold (sandwiches) snacks that are eaten outside in a park or in the streets, sometimes while driving or walking.

**Table 3:28 Average time spent on eating and relative share in total eating time on a full week, according to spatial context (TOR’04)**

	Hot meal at work		Cold meal at work		Hot meal		Cold meal		Restaurant meal		All meals	
<b>Average weekly eating time</b>	0:08		0:31		3:29		4:26		1:10		9:48	
<i>At the following location</i>												
<i>n</i>	1710	163	1710	508	1710	1650	1710	1639	1710	700	1710	1692
<b>At home</b>	0:00	0.0%	0:00	0.0%	3:00	89.2%	3:57	89.3%	0:00	1.4%	6:58	73.2%
<b>At work</b>	0:07	81.8%	0:28	89.6%	0:00	0.5%	0:04	2.1%	0:00	0.9%	0:40	7.9%
<b>At somebody else’s house</b>	0:00	0.6%	0:00	1.4%	0:12	5.4%	0:08	3.3%	0:00	0.4%	0:21	3.4%
<b>Other place</b>	0:01	17.6%	0:02	9.0%	0:13	4.9%	0:13	5.4%	1:06	97.4%	1:38	15.5%
<b>Total</b>		100%		100%		100%		100%		100%		100%

Nevertheless, as argued above, only a small part of eating really occurs while travelling. Self-evidently, hot and cold meals “at work” happen almost exclusively at the workplace. A small percentage of hot meals at work (17.6 percent) and cold meals at work (9.0 percent) happen at another place (than the desk at the workplace or the canteen). The cold work-related meals probably refer to having a sandwich at a sandwich bar, while the hot work-related meals correspond to business lunches or to the meals taken outside the workplace when no canteen is available. The above findings testify to the relationship between the nature of the eating occasion and its location. In the first chapter of this study on the normative significance of the meal, it was argued that the home location of eating was especially valued for the main meal

of the day, namely dinner. In the following section, we go into the location of the three daily meals and assess to what extent this has evolved over time.

### 3.3.2 The spatial context of the three daily meals

Table 3:29 shows the average share of eating time spent at home during each of the three daily meals (breakfast, midday meal and evening meal). As with the social context of the three daily meals, these figures can be interpreted in two ways: as the percentage of the population for whom that particular meal was spent entirely at home or as the average share of that particular meal time spent at home. The reason for this equivalence is the fact that respondents characterise each meal entirely by the same spatial context. A meal that occurs at home is most likely to occur entirely at home, and not only in part.

**Table 3:29 Average share of breakfast time, midday meal time and evening meal time spent at home in Belgium in 1966 and 1999 (BEL'66-'99) and Flanders in 2004 (TOR'04) per day of the week (only participators to breakfast, lunch or dinner on that day)**

		Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Week-day <sup>15</sup>	Sat	Sun
Breakfast	<b>1966</b>	95.9% (n=216)	91.2% (n=248)	92.9% (n=264)	94.7% (n=254)	94.1% (n=249)	93.8%	98.2% (n=192)	97.5% (n=178)
	<b>Sig Δ66-99</b>	ns	ns		ns	ns		ns	ns
	<b>1999</b>	95.0% (n=385)	93.3% (n=393)	96.5% (n=359)	93.8% (n=382)	94.8% (n=349)	94.7%	95.1% (n=899)	94.1% (n=1084)
	<b>2004</b>	93.5% (n=894)	93.1% (n=954)	93.6% (n=946)	93.1% (n=947)	94.3% (n=917)	93.6%	93.6% (n=968)	92.2% (n=1021)
Midday meal	<b>1966</b>	72.1% (n=262)	66.8% (n=290)	67.8% (n=309)	71.0% (n=302)	69.3% (n=278)	69.4%	86.1% (n=239)	90.0% (n=217)
	<b>Sig Δ66-99</b>	**	***	ns	***	**		*	***
	<b>1999</b>	61.2% (n=477)	51.7% (n=464)	63.7% (n=459)	57.9% (n=447)	59.6% (n=431)	58.8%	80.1% (n=1125)	76.8% (n=1314)
	<b>2004</b>	58.3% (n=1234)	59.4% (n=1241)	60.9% (n=1257)	56.1% (n=1218)	59.1% (n=1194)	58.8%	82.2% (n=1176)	78.3% (n=1158)
Evening meal	<b>1966</b>	97.9% (n=248)	98.1% (n=298)	96.3% (n=291)	96.6% (n=293)	97.5% (n=276)	97.3%	94.6% (n=214)	85.5% (n=185)
	<b>Sig Δ66-99</b>	***	***	**	***	***		***	*
	<b>1999</b>	91.3% (n=506)	91.1% (n=501)	89.8% (n=475)	89.2% (n=462)	81.2% (n=459)	88.5%	74.0% (n=1205)	78.2% (n=1232)
	<b>2004</b>	89.6% (n=1289)	89.4% (n=1301)	89.5% (n=1274)	88.1% (n=1231)	83.6% (n=1194)	88.1%	76.1% (n=1163)	76.2% (n=1117)

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, ns: p≥0.05

<sup>15</sup> The average figure for weekdays represents the central tendency presented by the five weekdays and was calculated manually as the average of these five weekday figures. For that reason, we do not present the number of respondents, neither could we present a significance level for the difference between 1966 and 1999

The change in the location of meals is much less pronounced than the change in the social context. Table 3:29 shows that the home place remains the main location for eating, although that does not hold to the same extent for all meals. Breakfast is most likely to be taken at home. In 1966, breakfast was almost exclusively a home occasion. Although the percentage of breakfast time spent at home has decreased slightly, this decline is not statistically significant on any day of the week, except for Wednesdays. As such, there is no sign of the spatial destructure, more particularly the delocalisation, of breakfast: this meal stays tied to one location, namely the home. However, due to the underregistration of short breakfasts, the share of breakfasts ‘on the go’ is very likely to be underestimated.

Weekday lunch is less likely to occur at home than weekday breakfast and weekday dinner. This was already the case in 1966, when 69.4 percent of weekday lunches were taken entirely at home. This percentage has decreased to 58.8 percent by 1999 (and 2004). Weekday lunch is not only more likely to occur without primary commensality, but it is also more likely to occur at another place than the home. This finding attests to the increasing importance of the workplace as a location for weekday lunch. Nevertheless, on weekdays, eating at home is most culturally expected for the main meal of the day, the evening meal. The percentage of weekday dinners spent at home has decreased from 97.3 percent in 1966 to about 88 percent in 1999 and 2004. This decline is found to be statistically significant on all separate weekdays. This finding attests to the spatial destructure of the main meal on weekdays. Although weekday dinner remains mainly tied to the home place, the home has lost its exclusive character as a location for this meal.

The decline of the home as the location for dinner is even more pronounced on weekend days. The main meal on Saturday, which is the meal in the evening, is much less likely to occur at home. In 1966, 94.6 percent of the Belgians took Saturday dinner at home. In 1999 and 2004 respectively, this holds for only three in four Belgians and Flemings. The decrease in eating at home also holds for Sunday dinner. The percentage of Sunday dinner time spent at home has decreased from 90 percent in 1966 to 76.8 percent in 1999 and 78.3 percent in 2004. Clearly, the main meal on weekend days is more *delocalised* than the main meal on weekdays. However, as

mentioned before, for special meals like Sunday dinner or the evening meal on Saturdays, not only the home is considered as an ideal location but also the restaurant.

### 3.3.3 The specific location of the three daily meals

As shown in table 3:26 and table 3:25, eating still predominantly takes place in the domestic area. From the studies on the normative significance of the meal, we inferred that the home, more particularly the dining room, is considered as the ideal place to eat. Parents and children have to be gathered round the dinner table in the private realm of the home. The available time-budget data do not allow for assessing the location of eating in a detailed manner. Fortunately, the questionnaire accompanying the TOR'04 time-use survey asked for the specific location of breakfast, lunch and dinner on weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays. For each of these meals, respondents indicated where they *usually* took that meal. Respondents could chose between the following options: at the dinner table, in the sofa, at the desk, while standing or travelling or at another location. Since we do not have similar information from the BEL'66-'99 dataset, the evolution of the specific location of eating and the prevalence of eating at the dinner table cannot be assessed from a historical point of view either.

**Table 3:30 Location of breakfast, lunch and dinner on an average working day, Saturday or Sunday as registered in the questionnaire (TOR'04)**

	Weekday			Saturday			Sunday		
	morning	noon	evening	Morning	noon	evening	morning	noon	evening
<b>No meal at that time</b>	15.7%	2.1%	0.4%	10.9%	2.6%	0.5%	10.5%	2.1%	0.6%
<b>At the table</b>	85.6%	82.4%	93.8%	93.1%	94.3%	93.6%	93.7%	95.4%	93.9%
<b>In the sofa</b>	3.1%	2.0%	4.8%	3.1%	2.1%	4.7%	3.8%	2.0%	4.9%
<b>At the desk</b>	2.2%	6.7%	0.5%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
<b>Standing or travelling</b>	7.7%	5.3%	0.3%	2.7%	2.1%	0.8%	1.8%	1.3%	0.3%
<b>Other location</b>	1.4%	3.5%	0.6%	0.7%	1.2%	0.6%	0.4%	1.1%	0.7%
<b>Total</b>	100% (n=1421)	100% (n=1654)	100% (n=1684)	100% (n=1504)	100% (n=1646)	100% (n=1682)	100% (n=1509)	100% (n=1653)	100% (n=1681)

As shown in table 3:30, most meals are taken at the table, but this is more prevalent on weekends and during the evening meal in the working week. The meal at noon on Sunday registers the highest percentage (95.4 percent) of eating occurring at the dinner table. Conversely, the lowest percentage (only 2 percent) of eating in the sofa is also found for the Sunday (and the weekday) meal at noon. These findings confirm the exceptional nature of watching TV and the exclusive part of the dinner table, during the proper meal *par excellence*, Sunday dinner (Charles and Kerr, 1988). Other locations but the dinner table are much less common, especially on weekend days.

Eating in the sofa mostly occurs in the evening, followed by breakfast in the morning and the meal at noon. Not surprisingly, eating at the desk occurs almost exclusively on weekdays. 6.7 percent of weekday lunches and 2.2 percent of all weekday breakfasts occur at the desk. Weekday meals, and especially weekday breakfasts, also regularly occur while standing or travelling.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to answer the first research question central to this study: has there been a destructurement of eating practices in Belgium? By means of time-use data from 1966 and 1999, we studied to what extent the change in eating practices could be considered as a destructurement, as far as use of time, social contact and use of space are concerned. The comparison of eating practices over time has undeniably shown that there has been a considerable change, which can largely be considered as a destructurement. This holds for use of time, social contact and use of space. The change in eating practices is least pronounced for the spatial context of eating. Eating remains mainly tied to the home place, although the main meal of the week Sunday dinner, and its contemporary competitor Saturday dinner are much more likely to occur at another place than the home. The main status of Saturday dinner and Sunday dinner is not only emphasized by their location at home, but also by occurring in public eating places like the restaurant.

In contrast to the modest changes in the location of eating practices between 1966 and 1999, the social context and the use of time for eating attest to a more advanced process of destructurement. The social destructurement of eating practices is revealed by a significant increase in solitary eating and a significant decrease of the primary commensal circle. This evolution holds for all meals on all days of the week. Nevertheless, the increase in eating alone is strongest for the least important meal of the day, namely breakfast. The evening meal on weekdays and the meal at noon on Sundays remain the moment for the primary commensal circle to bond. This finding confirms the main status of these meals. Nevertheless, the meal on Saturday evening has also assumed a highly commensal nature and has become one of the most important meals of the week, as far as primary commensality is concerned.

The main status of the evening meal on Saturdays is also corroborated by its longer duration. While all other meals reveal a decreasing duration between 1966 and 1999, the evening meal on Saturdays is the only meal that contradicts this trend. However, the time span deemed appropriate for Saturday dinner was wider in 1999 than in 1966, which partly explains for the increasing average duration. The temporal deconstruction of Belgian eating practices not only appears from eating losing its importance as a culturally valued activity, claiming part of people's daily time. The declining status of eating also appears from the fact that a part of Flemish eating practices do not allow eating to have an autonomous status. Eating is pushed to the "second" order by simultaneous, attention-demanding activities. Such disrupted eating activities occur 1.22 times per week. This is exceptional compared to eating in general, which occurs on average more than twice a day. Disrupted eating occasions occur mainly during the working week and to a lesser extent on weekends. The largest part of disrupted eating refers to multi-tasking, more particularly eating while preparing meals or making sandwiches, getting ready for work, or while continuing paid work. Nevertheless, a considerable part of disrupted eating also occurs while reading or watching TV.

The daily rate of eating has also been subject to serious deconstruction. The percentage taking three daily meals has declined considerably. The meal that is most often skipped is breakfast. The most important meal of the day, dinner, is least likely to be skipped, and this is also true for the main meal of the week, Sunday dinner. Although the percentage of the population that does not engage in eating at the times collectively reserved for it (breakfast, lunch and dinner skippers) has increased, this has not increased the consumption of meals on other times of day: the percentage of eating time performed beyond proper mealtimes has only increased slightly. Most eating time remains concentrated on the times reserved for it. However, again it should be emphasized that by means of the time-use data, we underestimate the rate of short eating occasions and therefore most likely, the rate of small snacks 'in between'.

This chapter finally leads us to conclude that eating practices are organized in a more deconstructed manner nowadays than they were in the 1960s. This raises a second question: what is the deconstructed manner of eating due to? The following chapters are aimed at answering this question. In the fourth chapter, we tackle various factors that

are often associated in the literature with the deconstruction in eating practices. In the fifth, sixth and seventh chapters, we study to what extent these factors promote deconstructed eating habits.



## **Chapter 4 Norms and conditions affecting the meal pattern**

In the previous chapter, we have researched to what extent Belgian eating practices have changed over the last four decades. The general conclusion from this analysis is that our eating practices have evolved in the direction of more temporal, social and spatial deconstruction. This fourth chapter is a theoretical introduction to the second research question, namely the reasons behind the deconstruction of eating practices in Flanders and Belgium. In the next three chapters, we investigate empirically which factors affect the temporal, social and spatial organization of our eating practices. In this chapter, we tackle the factors that are believed to affect the meal pattern and cause deconstructed eating practices.

On the one hand, the changes in eating practices may be put down to changes in the normative constraints guiding eating practices. Norms and ideals are believed to affect eating practices to a lesser extent than before. In her study of the eating habits of the Parisian bourgeoisie, Sjögren-de Beauchaine (1988: 98) concluded that 'In accordance with today's mentality, it is accepted that circumstances, not rules, decide' on the meal. Eating practices are believed to increasingly become a pragmatic matter. Some authors (Fischler, 1979; Poulain, 2002a: 54) even claim that there no longer are hegemonic rules that apply to our eating habits. Social scientists thus increasingly believe in the decaying influence of normative constraints. In the first section of this chapter, we tackle the effect of changing normative constraints on the organization of eating practices.

However, the decay of norms guiding eating practices may itself be due to changing conditions. The extent to which norms affect practices also depends on the conditions. The conditions to model eating behaviour have altered considerably in the last decades and these conditions are believed to have undermined the normative regulatory system of eating behaviour. In the course of this chapter, it is regularly argued that there is a strong link between norms and circumstances in affecting eating practices. It is often hard to distinguish between the effect of circumstances and the effect of attitudes. In this study, we only want to make an analytical distinction between the effect of norms and the effect of conditions. The strong link between

norms and circumstances is especially clear from social class differences in eating habits. In the second section of this chapter, we go into the differential organization of eating practices by social class. However, differences in food-related attitudes and practices not only relate to social class. In the last decades of the twentieth century, a number of socio-economic evolutions have resulted in another relationship towards eating. This changed relationship may also entail a different organization of eating practices, by demanding or allowing for a more destructured organization of eating.

The changed relationship towards food assumes that ‘All kinds of [food] requirements *can* legitimately be met with greater flexibility’ (Poulain, 2002a: 54) [personal addition, personal marking], while some other social developments *demand* that food requirements are met with greater flexibility. Poulain refers to the following changes in conditions that have affected eating practices: the feminization of the labour market, the uninterrupted day at the office, urbanization, redefinition of gender roles, food industrialisation, and the declining share of food and increasing share of leisure in household expenditures (Poulain, 2002a: 43). In the third section of this chapter, we tackle the decline of material constraints on the availability of food. More particularly, we go into the effect of food industrialisation, urbanization and the increase in the standard of living on the organization of eating practices. In the fourth section, we discuss the influence of the feminization of the labour market and the decline of the institution of the housewife on eating practices. In the fifth section, we go into the changes in the composition of households. More particularly, we tackle the impact of the decline of the traditional family on the organization of eating practices. In a sixth and last section, we go into the changes in the organization of paid work. We assess how the continuous working day and the expansion of the service sector could affect the organization of eating practices and how this might promote more destructured eating practices.

#### **4.1 Norms affecting the meal pattern**

According to some social scientists (Fischler, 2001; Beardsworth and Keil, 1997) the change in eating practices is due to a change in the normative constraints concerning the meal pattern. In the first chapter of this study, we have dealt with the norms guiding Western eating behaviour. The various studies on the normative significance

of the proper meal and the proper meal pattern allowed for drawing a clear picture of what Western eating practices should look like. These studies generally conveyed a message of a clear hegemonic, and therefore impeccable, structure guiding our eating habits. This hegemonic structure is believed to be on the decline nowadays. In turn, this decline is believed to affect eating practices and result in a more destructured meal pattern.

#### 4.1.1 Destructuration of the meal pattern as the result of changing normative constraints

One of the first social scientists to tackle the connection between the change in normative constraints guiding eating behaviour and the change in eating practices was Fischler (1979). He discerned the trend of meal destructuration in the late 1970s. He assumed this trend was already in an advanced state in the US, but he also found signs of meal destructuration in France and in other European countries at that time. According to Fischler, the codes or structures traced in eating habits by structuralist researchers like Douglas and Lévi-Strauss are on the wane and structuralist analyses of the meal are no longer up to date (Wood, 1995). The destructuration of eating practices entails that the meal disappears for the benefit of the snack. As we wrote earlier, in contrast to a meal, a snack is a strictly individual eating occasion, which implies a great level of freedom for the eater. Snacks can be eaten in any place, at any time, with anyone, and have no fixed content.

Fischler puts the destructuration of eating practices down to a change in normative constraints guiding eating behaviour, namely a lack of regulation in every aspect of food behaviour: what can be eaten, in what order, in what combinations, with whom, where, when, how food has to be prepared, and so on. He called this situation “gastro-anomy”, referring to a disconnection from the greater, meaning-providing symbolic order. Fischler’s ideas on gastro-anomy and meal destructuration received a lot of attention, not only by scientists. E.g. in Flanders, the concept of gastro-anomy has been used by the media (De Standaard, 18/09/2004) to indicate the crisis caused by the transition from domestic food production to industrial food production.

*From a traditional food situation guided by a hegemonic code to a lack of hegemonic rules guiding food behaviour*

According to Fischler, we currently face a new normative situation with regard to our eating habits, namely a lack of a hegemonic code guiding food behaviour. This is a completely different situation compared to the traditional food situation where a clear hegemonic code is conveyed. The same ideas on the upheaval of a hegemonic code guiding food behaviour are also found with other scholars. Beardsworth and Keil (1992a) consider the current normative situation regarding food behaviour as a decay of the traditional master menu. In traditional societies, modelling food behaviour is believed to be a self-evident matter. According to Fischler, the normative situation with regard to eating habits was a gastronomic situation in pre-industrial societies. The concept of gastronomy was launched by Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826) in 1825 in his work on taste and it refers to the knowledge (*nomos*) of the stomach (*gaster*), a type of self-knowledge, an art and a virtue (Ferguson, 2003: 9). Fischler considers gastronomy as a situation in which one knows how to model one's food behaviour. A hegemonic cultural code is conveyed by a number of structural constraints and social institutions. According to Fischler, in traditional societies, culture and tradition hand a complex of univocal rules that regulate eating practices. This complex of univocal rules is called a culture's cuisine or culinary system.

Fischler considers the human relationship towards food as essentially problematic. As an omnivore, humans (have to) eat a variety of food, but novel food may entail a risk to health or life, as it may be toxic (Rozin, 1998b). This eternal, paradoxical problem is called the omnivore's paradox. However, the intrinsically problematic human relationship towards food is generally appeased by a culture's culinary system. This culinary system gives food an identity, and turns it into identifiable food. In traditional societies, such a hegemonic culinary system is believed to exist and to model eating practices. Beardsworth and Keil agree with Fischler on the fact that in traditional societies traditional gastronomic rules applied and an inviolable culinary code guided food behaviour. The traditional situation was characterised by the hegemony of a master menu. Beardsworth and Keil use the concept *menu* to refer to the principles that guide the selection of foodstuffs from the available alimentary totality, the entirety of all foodstuffs considered as palatable in a given society at a

specific moment in time. The traditional regulation of food behaviour assumed the existence of a single hegemonic logic, a consensus on the principles that are to guide food behaviour. In the first chapter of this study, we discerned a clear ideology guiding people's eating behaviour: people's ideas on what their eating practices should look like generally conveyed the same message. This ideology of the proper meal and the three-meal pattern may be considered as a clear hegemonic cultural code.

According to Beardsworth and Keil, and Fischler, these hegemonic principles guide people's eating behaviour in a self-evident manner. This means that their application goes without saying, without reflection. Modelling one's food behaviour is believed to be an unproblematic affair, since these hegemonic guiding principles are considered as legitimate and therefore inviolable. Their legitimate status is due to their well-established status: the traditional master menu has been transmitted throughout various generations, and people have been socialised with these principles (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992b). These traditional principles are believed to be largely conveyed by the family, which is believed to be the primary source of food socialization. The importance of the primary interaction circle in conveying basic guidelines regarding eating behaviour is found with various authors. According to Bourdieu, the family plays a central part in the shaping of culinary taste, as this taste is not influenced by the educational system. *'Et c'est sans doute dans les goûts alimentaires que l'on retrouverait la marque la plus forte et la plus inaltérable des apprentissages primitifs, ceux qui survivent le plus longtemps à l'éloignement ou à l'écroulement du monde natal et qui en soutiennent le plus durablement la nostalgie: le monde natal est, en effet, avant tout le monde maternel, celui des goûts primordiaux et nourritures originaires, du rapport archétypal à la forme archétypale du bien culturel'* [It is beyond doubt that it is in the area of culinary taste that one finds the strongest and the least changeable of all basic knowledge, which survives the longest after the abandonment or the disintegration of the family of origin and which maintains nostalgia in the most enduring manner: the family of origin is chiefly the maternal world, the world of basic taste and original foods, the world of the most archetypal relationship towards the most archetypal cultural good...] (Bourdieu, 1979: 85). In her study on childhood food memories, Lupton concludes that food socialization as a child has far-reaching effects in adult life. Childhood food memories

were closely linked to family sociability and food was mostly described within the context of family meals. The importance of parental control in food socialization was emphasized, as well as the meanings of food as being morally good or bad, or good or bad for health (Lupton, 1994). Grieshaber (1997) points to the importance of mealtime rituals in normalising children and influencing their later eating habits. Home cooking would still outweigh other influences in people's experience and meaning attached to food (Warde, 1997: 184). These studies corroborate the role of the family as an important institution in conveying norms for guiding eating practices. Nevertheless, some social scientists believe that the maternal influence in transmitting a hegemonic culinary code is on the wane. These ideals would increasingly face competition from other ideals and norms and would lose their hegemonic value.

*The hegemonic code guiding food behaviour proclaimed by the family has been replaced by a variety of equivalent rules proclaimed by a variety of socializing institutions*

According to Fischler, 'Parental authority [is] being increasingly subject to competition from extra-family influences such as school, the media, and commercials, [as such] food habits of the younger generations are no longer shaped by coherent, traditional matrilocal culinary patterns' (Fischler, 1980: 949). The coherent, traditional matrilocal culinary patterns would increasingly meet with competition from other socialization sources. Sjögren-de Beauchaine found that in Parisian bourgeois families, family food ideologies devalue as the mass media increasingly influence children's eating habits. Before, the life of the bourgeoisie exhibited a certain form of *self-sufficiency*, promoting the way of life in that family, as the only one possible (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 34).

Nowadays, children are more fed by other instances than by the family, which results in the internalisation of other values than the coherent, traditional matrilocal culinary patterns (Fischler, 1980: 949). Blaxter (1983) also found that women from older generations believed that present-day mothers have less control over children's eating behaviour than before. Counihan came to similar conclusions in Florence. Young Florentine mothers were considered to have less control over the feeding situation than their own mothers. 'Foods increasingly represented not the values of home,

family, and women, but the values of consumerism' (Counihan, 1999: 57). Parents' decreasing influence on children's eating habits was partly due to women's labour-market engagement. 'Florentine children were supposed to accept their parents' habits, opinions, values, and power along with their food. Working women, who give up much of their food-provisioning responsibilities, lose this influence. Their children are largely raised by others - sometimes by day-care centres, often by grandmothers - eating others' food and internalizing others' values' (Counihan, 1999: 58). In section 4.4, we go deeper into the effect of the decline of the "institution of the housewife" on changing eating practices. As shown here, the change in norms guiding eating behaviour is closely linked to changes in conditions. Mother's engagement on the labour market and the decline in father's authority have resulted in the family food ideology becoming a matter of negotiation rather than unilateral socialization. Prout and James (1990: 404 in Grieshaber, 1997) have pointed to children's capacity in undermining parental food ideologies and their active, rather than passive, role in socialization during mealtimes. Research by Valentine stresses 'the power of children as young as eight to be agents in their own lives, [...], which can entail the renegotiation of the consumption practices of the entire household' (Valentine, 1999).

#### *A "cacophonie alimentaire"*

As the control over the production of food seems to be no longer entirely in the hands of a domestic or local unit, food increasingly becomes a mere object of consumption, '*sur lequel règnent des "chefs de produits" et des "spécialistes en marketing"*' [governed by producers and marketing experts] (Poulain, 2003b: 39). A growing variety of socialization agents comes to play a part in food socialization in contemporary society: the mass media, advertisements, professional groups, the medical profession, governmental institutions, ideological groups, and so on. These different sources of food socialization all convey very different, often contradictory messages.

In this respect, Poulain considers Fischler's nomination of the situation as gastro-anomy as deceiving. Modernity is not only characterised by a crisis of the existing normative system, but just as much by an inflation of contradictory, compelling discourses (Poulain, 2003b: 89). This is what Fischler terms as *cacophonie*

*alimentaire*. As such, food modernity is not characterised by a lack of rules (anomy in the narrow sense of the word), but rather by an abundance of contradictory restrictions and a legitimacy loss of the traditional normative system (Poulain, 2002b). According to Poulain (2003b:71), '*La gastro-anomie n'est donc pas l'absence de règles, mais bien le trop-plein, la multiplication des "il faut" qui tombent sur le mangeur moderne*' [Gastro-anomy is thus not the absence of rules, but rather the abundance, the multiplication of "one should do this" which the modern eater is burdened with].

These novel sources of food rules do not directly influence eating behaviour by offering direct instructions on what to do or not to do. Instead, they offer a variety of choices and emphasize the importance of personal choice. This situation is believed to entail an overload of information and guiding principles available to direct eating behaviour. According to Fischler, our modern world is characterised by a continuous dietetic rumour. Government, industrials, publicity, and the media continuously try to modify our eating behaviour. '*Ce brouhaha diététique se fond dans une véritable et planétaire cacophonie alimentaire: les discours diététiques se mêlent, s'affrontent ou se confondent aux discours culinaires et gastronomiques, les recueils de régimes au recueil de recettes, les manuels de nutrition aux guides gastronomiques. Partout montent de la prescription et de la prohibition, des modèles de consommation et des mises en garde: dans cette cacophonie, le mangeur désorienté, à la recherche de critères de choix, trouve surtout à nourrir son incertitude*' [This dietetic bustle is based on a genuine, planetary alimentary cacophony: dietetic discourses intermingle, act counter to or go along with culinary and gastronomic discourses, diet collections intermingle, act counter to or go along with recipe collections, nutrition manuals mix with gastronomic guides. Everywhere there are prescriptions and prohibitions, consumption models and warnings, in this cacophony, the disoriented eater, seeking for choice criteria, can chiefly feed his uncertainty] (Fischler, 2001: 202).

The decay of normative regulation is the central theme in Fischler's thesis. The consequence is more diverse food behaviour of individuals without any kind of basic guiding principle. Heteronomy gives way to autonomy, with rules arising from the individual himself. Autonomy might give rise to anomy (Fischler, 1996a). Beck also pointed to the fact that the increasing emphasis on self-reflexivity and self-regulation might in some cases give rise to a sense of anomy, 'a time of overflowing wishes and

desires, no longer disciplined by social barriers', as described by Durkheim (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1996: 31).

The modern eater in a society characterised by abundance and variety has to reconcile a variety of dietary advices and gastronomic temptations (Lemorel, 1992: 362). As a result, individual food behaviour is no longer an unproblematic self-evidence. It is the result of individual reflection and active choice from various guidelines or *menu-principles*. Individuals construct their own diet relying on and choosing from a variety of menus. As a consequence, menu-pluralism is 'a situation in which many alternative schemes to structure food choice and eating patterns are *on offer*' [personal marking] (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997: 68). 'In a menu-pluralistic setting, the availability of a variety of menu principles (rational, moral, hedonistic, etc.) provides the individual with a good deal of flexibility (within certain social and economic constraints, of course) when it comes to the construction of his or her own personal dietary regimen' (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997: 239). Menu-pluralism can be considered as a multiplication of ideological justifications for food behaviour.

Beardsworth and Keil discern two types of menus that are available in a situation of menu-pluralism: rational menus and moral menus. Rational menus include explicit principles aimed at realising a specific goal. They are based on scientific or quasi-scientific principles. The convenience menu, the budget menu, and the hedonistic menu are all variations on the rational menu. The convenience menu aims at minimising the time and effort spent on meal purchase, preparation, and presentation. The budget menu aims at minimising financial costs spent on food. The hedonistic menu aims at creating gustative pleasure. The second type of menus, moral menus, especially takes ethical considerations into account, like political or ecological considerations, fair trade principles, or animal rights. Each consideration pushes man in a different direction and gives rise to different eating behaviour. The individual has to model his own food behaviour based on various, often contradictory logics. As a result, individuals direct their food behaviour according to a personal combination of guiding principles.

Reflexivity plays an important role in this approach. Fischler believes that modelling one's food behaviour is less evident than in traditional societies. For the first time,

modelling food behaviour increasingly becomes a matter of individual choice. He refers to Morin stating that: *‘Les critères d’accomplissements religieux, moraux, même politiques, tendent à reculer au profit de la recherche de satisfactions et jouissances individuelles: selon l’heureuse formule d’Edgar Morin, “de la vacance des grandes valeurs, naît la valeur des grandes vacances”* [The criteria of religious, moral or even political accomplishment tend to decline for the benefit of the search for individual satisfaction and pleasure: according to the sharply-worded phrase by Edgar Morin: the value of vacation rises from the vacation of great values] (Morin, 1975 in Fischler, 2001: 189). Fischler considers this situation as a short-term problem, typical for modernity and not for the general human relationship towards food in general (Fischler, 1980: 947).

The individual has to make his own decisions based on an increasing amount and variety of guiding sources. The result is an idiosyncratic concoction, a growing individual eclecticism (Fischler, 2001). Individual constructions and creations are the manifestations of this trend. Food behaviour becomes *bricolage*, a hybridization, an assemblage according to individual preferences. Eating habits are increasingly considered as an individual matter, to show one’s lifestyle and self-discipline, and thus a matter of reflexivity and rationality (Ritzer, 1996: 76), rather than something self-evident. Eating is increasingly pictured as a purely individual activity taking place according to personal reflection. Gofton agrees with Falk in that eating increasingly loses its function as a social, controlling, structuring ritual. The meal has evolved from a collective event to a taste event. While other activities in the modern household have taken over the social functions of the family meal, eating as such becomes a mere way of expressing oneself through the reflexive practices of symbolic creation, like all other types of consumption nowadays (Falk, 1994: 35-36). According to Gofton, there has been a ‘great civilizing move from communion to communication’. The meal is no longer the time to bond, but one of the many opportunities to express and communicate one’s own identity (Gofton, 1995a: 172-173). The result of this individual reflexivity on an abundance of normative constraints is an unbridled variety of eating practices and the decay of the collective structure apparent in our eating practices.

In his later work, Fischler has pointed to the specific characteristics of American eating culture, in contrast to European eating culture, as regards its susceptibility to

meal deconstruction (Fischler, 1996b). According to Fischler, the alimentary cacophony is even more overwhelming in the US compared to France (Fischler, 1996a). In contrast to the US, most European countries still have an eating culture that attaches great importance to the meal pattern and the social nature of the meal. The presence of a hegemonic cultural code regarding eating behaviour in most European countries would impede the deconstruction of eating practices. *‘Les Français, les Italiens et même quelques autres Européens ne sont pas disposés à consommer, comme des Américains, des hamburgers à 10 heures ou à 17 heures. C’est pourquoi, à 12h30 précises, des queues se formèrent devant les restaurants, les attractions se vidant d’autant. En dehors des heures des repas, le mouvement s’inversait, perturbant la régulation de files d’attente’* [The French, the Italians, and even some other Europeans are not willing to eat hamburgers at 10:00 or at 17:00, like Americans do. That is the reason why, at 12:30 precisely, queues are formed in front of restaurants, while attractions are left. Beyond mealtimes, this trend is reversed, turning around the regulation of rows] (Fischler, 1996b: 878). The uninhibited attitude towards food as is the case in the US cannot be simply transferred to Europe simply because fast-food outlets are spread on the European continent. According to Fischler, the deconstruction of European eating habits has not yet reached the American level. Other sociologists have agreed with Fischler that the culinary openness (that is a lack of a hegemonic cultural code as far as eating behaviour is concerned) is much larger in the US (Mintz, 2002: 28-31).

#### 4.1.2 The decay of a hegemonic cultural code guiding food practices and its importance in affecting eating practices

This study aims to investigate whether deconstructed eating practices are due to changing norms, more particularly the decay of a hegemonic code guiding food behaviour. However, the thesis of gastro-anomy cannot be assessed completely by means of this study. We agree with Beardsworth and Keil, who argue that the thesis of gastro-anomy is difficult to study in practice. Confusion regarding the principles guiding eating behaviour shall better be tested by means of qualitative research, which is aimed at grasping complex relationships. Nevertheless, we believe that the available data allow for grasping the thesis of the decline of a hegemonic code guiding eating behaviour in a meaningful manner. Unfortunately, the available

questionnaire data do not allow for assessing whether norms guiding eating behaviour have changed over time. We only have information on norms guiding eating behaviour from the 2004 Flemish time-use study. This information is suitable to state whether a hegemonic code guiding eating behaviour exists. *If the gastro-anomy thesis is valid, then we should find that there are no or only weakened hegemonic rules guiding eating behaviour. On the operational level this may mean two things. On the one hand, the decay of a hegemonic code may be revealed by the fact that a given norm guiding eating behaviour is not valued by a large share of the population and as such does not offer a hegemonic code to model eating behaviour. On the other hand, it is also possible that there is considerable unanimity on a given norm concerning eating behaviour, but that this norm does not affect eating practices. This means that other factors, namely conditions, prevent the norm from being put into practice or that other, contradictory ideals neutralize the effect of this norm on the eating practices.*

The TOR'04 dataset includes some information on the norms guiding the temporal, social and spatial structure of the meal. I prepared a limited set of attitudes that aimed to assess the normative conceptions of the meal. This set of thirteen statements was included in the TOR'04 questionnaire. With these statements I aimed to see to what extent the ideology of the proper meal and the proper meal pattern are still valued nowadays. Each statement is aimed at grasping the attitude towards the temporal, social or spatial structure within the meal pattern by a positive or a negative statement concerning that ideal structure. Respondents had to evaluate each statement by giving their opinion on a 5-point scale from 1 'fully disagree' to 5 'fully agree'. Unfortunately, there was no room to include more items to assess the normative conceptions of the meal. As a result, most variables measuring the normative conception of the meal that are used in the explanatory models are single item. Given the fact that only a very restricted number of statements could be included in the questionnaire, most attitudes on a specific aspect of the meal pattern (timing, duration, social context, location, ...) are only based on a single item. Moreover, we failed to pay sufficient attention to the direction of the items in formulating the statements: only three of the 13 were negative. This might partly explain for the lack of fit between these 13 statements. Therefore, these statements will be used separately in the various models explaining one type of destructured eating practices. The extent to

which these norms are valued is expressed by the percentage of the population that considers these norms as important.

Statements assessing the norms guiding the temporal structure of eating habits

1. the timing of eating
  - I eat when I am hungry
  - Eating in between meals is not done
  - I think it is important to eat at set times
  - I mind if others are late for the meal
2. the autonomous status of eating: duration and disrupted eating occasions
  - TV ruins the meal
  - You might as well eat while doing something else
  - It is important to take the time to eat peacefully
  - I don't care for pleasantly lingering at the dinner table

Statements assessing the norms guiding the social structure of eating habits

- I don't mind eating alone

Statements assessing the norms guiding the spatial structure of eating habits

- The table is the place to eat, not on the streets or in the sofa
- I prefer eating at home

The last two statements assessed the importance attached to the Sunday meal and the sociable character of the Sunday meal:

- The meal on Sunday is the most important meal of the week
- The meal on Sunday is the family occasion par excellence

The TOR'04 questionnaire also included other statements measuring the attitude towards the Sunday. These items were included in another question that was aimed to measure the meaning of the Sunday. This question is part of the standard set of questions included in the Flemish time-use surveys by TOR. I was not involved in and as such had no impact on the preparation of these questions. Nevertheless, a number of statements measuring the meaning of the Sunday revealed a strong coherence with the two last statements of the question I included in the questionnaire myself. All

these statements, which all assessed the meaning of the Sunday meal, were subject to a factor analysis, using orthogonal rotation. Four of the items on the meaning of the Sunday and the two items from the set of questions on food attitudes appeared to reflect one single attitude. The factor analysis revealed one dimension, with an eigenvalue of 2.733, which explained for 45.55 percent of total variance.

**Table 4:1 Component loadings for items in the sociable Sunday meal- scale (TOR'04)**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Component loading</b>
Sunday is a day for sociability	0.638
Sunday is a day for having a good meal	0.732
Sunday is a day for the family	0.641
Sunday means convivial cooking	0.580
The meal on Sunday is the family occasion par excellence	0.778
The meal on Sunday is the most important meal of the week	0.660

The component loading of each item is presented in table 4:1. This scale had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.756 (Billiet and Waeye, 2003) and all items were preserved. The individual factor scores on this dimension were retained as a continuous variable. The higher the score on this variable, the more one agrees with the importance of a sociable Sunday meal. Therefore, this variable is called the importance of the Sunday meal-scale.

In the abovementioned we argued that changing norms result in changing practices. This argumentation assumes that a rather homogeneous set of rules regarding the meal pattern experiences competition from a variety of contradictory norms. In the first chapter of this study, we discerned a rather uniform ideology guiding people's eating practices. Nevertheless, differences exist in the extent to which this ideology is applied, but also in the extent to which this ideology is valued. In the next section, we go into social class differences in the implementation of this ideology and the value attached to it.

## **4.2 The effect of social class on the meal pattern**

Various studies have revealed social class differences in eating practices and the value attached to the ideology of the proper meal pattern. Bourdieu discerned considerable differences between social classes in the way eating practices were organized. According to Bourdieu, the different eating practices revealed in various social classes are due to different attitudes towards eating habits. The working classes revealed a less regulated attitude towards food, characterised by abundance and liberty. The *franc-manger* of the working classes is characterised by a lack of restrictions and limitations (Bourdieu, 1979: 216-217). The higher social classes, more particularly the bourgeoisie, reveal a much more restricted attitude towards eating. For them, eating is a highly formalized and orderly affair, where eating is stripped of its animal nature, and is turned into a real social ceremony (Bourdieu, 1979: 218).

Bourdieu puts the genesis of different tastes by social class down to differences in material circumstances. In contrast to the higher social classes, the working class is mainly affected by the material circumstances of living. Their practices and attitudes (*goût de nécessité*) are mainly the result of the conditions they live in. Their way of living is a reflection of the restrictions they are subject to. The bourgeoisie, on the contrary, is much less affected by a restriction of material circumstances. Instead, it tries to develop a genuine taste (*goût de luxe*), which already assumes a liberty of choice and thus an absence of material restrictions (Bourdieu, 1979: 198). The bourgeoisie tries to confirm its higher social status exactly by self-imposing strict rules on eating practices. The upper class is convinced of the desirability of its own way of life. It is more inclined to preserve family rituals in a formalized and continued form, from one generation to the next, to continue to confirm its high social status. Bossard and Boll expect the lower social classes to be less attached to family rituals as they have little connection with the past (Bossard and Boll, 1966: 176).

Other authors have also discerned social class differences in the organization of eating practices. These different eating practices could be due to different attitudes depending on social class as well as to different material circumstances that turn similar attitudes into different practices. The differences between social classes in the

temporal, social and spatial structure of their eating practices are discussed in the following sections.

*Social class differences in attitudes and practices concerning the temporal structure of eating*

Various studies have found considerable differences between the working classes and the bourgeoisie in the temporal structure apparent in their eating practices. The ideal of three daily meals converted to reality seems to be highly dependent on one's social class, with the bourgeoisie much more likely to have three daily meals (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 104). In Charles and Kerr's study, no single adult from the working classes had three daily meals, despite the fact that this remains a widespread ideal (Charles and Kerr, 1986a). Social class differences not only exist as far as practices are concerned, but also concern the value attached to the three-meal pattern. An exploratory study of French eating practices by Herpin showed that social class has a strong influence on the status attached to the three daily meals. Families of higher professionals, like executives, have their main meal predominantly in the evening. Middle class families, on the contrary, highly emphasize breakfast and lunch, while the evening meal is rather restricted. Working class families do not emphasize any of the three meals in particular, but have all of them in a reduced format (Herpin, 1988). In a questionnaire study with 6,014 French children, aged ten and eleven years old, Fischler (1996c) found that children from executives and intellectual professions spent more time at dinner than children from other socio-professional classes (Fischler, 1996c: 25).

The time schedule of meals also depends on social class. While the higher social classes adhere to a more movable meal pattern during the weekend, compared to the working week, the working classes only scarcely rid themselves of a set meal pattern, even on weekends. The working-class meal pattern is highly determined by external factors such as TV-programming (Fischler, 1996c; Herpin, 1988). This brings us to the autonomous status attached to eating. Charles and Kerr found that, although the television and the radio were not considered as part of the ideal meal setting, in practice the radio or the television were often on during mealtimes. Only in one out of three families this never happened. In families of the middle class, the radio was only

on during breakfast, while both radio and television were not part of the meal setting during other meals. In her study of the eating habits of the Parisian bourgeoisie, Sjögren-de Beauchaine (1988) also found that television was never mentioned as part of the meal setting. In France, Herpin (1988) found that the higher social class had a smaller chance of watching TV during dinner than the middle class, which had a smaller chance of watching TV than the lower social class. In his questionnaire study with French children, Fischler (1996c) also met with important social differences in the use of television during dinner. In 72.7 percent of working class families the TV was put on, while this held for 53.2 percent of executives' families (Fischler, 1996c: 22). These practical differences in TV-use were confirmed by attitudinal differences. While 51.3 percent of the children from executives and intermediary professionals claimed that their family agreed with the statement 'one does not watch television while eating', only 41.3 percent of the children from workers claimed that their family agreed with this statement. The absence of television from the meal setting was closely connected to the proper nature of the meal. TV was exceptional on Sundays, during the proper meal *par excellence*. For the Sunday meal there was little class differentiation, because for that specific meal all social classes considered it important to conform to the rules of the proper meal (Charles and Kerr, 1988).

*Social class differences in attitudes and practices concerning the social structure of eating*

Social groups also differ considerably as to the social function ascribed to meals. Families of higher professionals consider the main meal in the evening more than other social groups as the occasion *par excellence* for tertiary sociability, i.e. with friends and acquaintances (Herpin, 1988). Neumark-Sztainer and colleagues (2003: 320) found that the number of family meals was associated with the socio-economic status in a positive manner. Fischler (1996c) also met with differences in social class, as far as the sociable, family-oriented nature of the meal is concerned. Children from executives and intellectual professions valorised the family being together during the meal more than children from working-class families (Fischler, 1996c: 18-19).

The importance attached to the sociable nature of the meal according to social class, also appears from the importance attached to family table talk. This was pre-

dominantly a matter for the higher social classes and the middle classes. In her study on feeding work, De Vault found that although all respondents emphasized the meal's importance as a social event, women from the middle classes and especially from professional background, also mentioned their efforts in stimulating the conversation during the meal. Women from the working classes, on the contrary, were more often considered not to talk during the meal and more often saw the meal as a silent event (De Vault, 1994: 49). Analogously, in Charles and Kerr's study, 63.5 percent of the women considered it important to talk during the meal. While one in three women from the lowest social classes thought that it was harmful to talk during the meal, this vision was shared by only 7 percent of women from the middle classes. The ideas from working-class women were often due to their childhood experiences. Many of them were not allowed as a child to speak at the table unless they were spoken to (Charles and Kerr, 1988: 187). Fischler also found a social gradient in the acceptability of children speaking at the dinner table: while almost 29 percent of children from blue-collar worker families agreed with the unacceptability of talking at the dinner table, this held for only 10.9 percent of children from executives' families (Fischler, 1996c: 46).

*Social class differences in attitudes and practices concerning the spatial structure of eating*

The location of the meal at the dinner table may also vary by social class. The habit of sharing the family meal at the dinner table was most prevalent among the middle class. The central role of the dinner table for the middle class, promoted by bourgeois culture, was confirmed by the Dryer study among bourgeois families in the US (Dryer and Dryer, 1973) and Sjögren-de Beauchaine's study among the Parisian bourgeoisie (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988), where the dinner table was essential to the meal ritual. The higher prevalence of the dinner table as a meal setting in the middle class was not only due to bourgeois culture. The lower social classes often lacked the means to organize a family meal at the dinner table. The dinner table was not large enough or the dining room and the kitchen often did not allow for a dinner table large enough for the whole family to gather round it. Charles and Kerr found that many families from the lower social class had to disperse over various rooms of the house for dinner.

The emphasis on a strict location for the meal with the middle class also entailed a greater emphasis on table manners, as an inherent part of the meal ritual. There was a great differentiation according to social classes in the importance attached to good manners at the table. According to Sjögren-de Beauchaine, the bourgeoisie has always put great emphasis on table manners, as an exclusive way to distinguish itself from other social groups. The importance attached to table manners was strongly linked to the location of the meal at the table. The table is considered as an essential element in directing children's behaviour during the meal. It is a controlled area for modelling children's eating behaviour. In most families, dinner takes place at the dinner table and it is an organized, non-chaotic event. During her study of the Parisian bourgeois eating habits, Sjögren-de Beauchaine was hardly ever confronted with deviant behaviour (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 154-156). Children had a specific place at the table, and knew which behaviour was not tolerated. A study by Schefflen in an urban ghetto led to completely different results. The lack of space led to different behavioural patterns (Dryer and Dryer, 1973). Good table manners were only required in an ideal meal setting, namely a shared meal at the table. In Charles and Kerr's study, 85 percent of the women said that table manners were important, although, in practice, it was often very hard to teach them to children. The meal's location was decisive in this respect. 'We don't sit at table so how can she have table manners?' (Charles and Kerr, 1988: 189). If the meal never took place at the table, some mothers did not bother to teach their children good table manners.

The above has made it clear that a hegemonic cultural code regarding eating habits may result in different eating practices. Social class differentiation exists as far as the ideology of the three-meal pattern and the proper meal is put into practice by different social classes. Moreover, social classes may hold different attitudes as far as the organization of eating is concerned. This means that the ideology of the three-meal pattern and the proper meal may be valued differently by social classes. Social classes vary in the importance they attach to this ideology. We argued that the lower social classes consider meals and watching TV as more compatible activities than the higher social classes. Nevertheless, the ideology of the proper meal pattern is considered important in Western European society. In many cases, the same ideals are shared by different social groups, but material circumstances may impede the lower social

classes from practicing that ideal. Different material circumstances may result in a different manner of implementing the same ideals. A lack of space in the dining room, for example, may entail that the lower social classes are less likely to eat dinner at the dinner table. On the other hand, hindering material circumstances may eventually lead to less value being attached to these ideals. Due to the fact that dinner occurs less at the dinner table with the lower social classes, these are less likely to invest great effort in the teaching of table manners.

We expect to find the following social class differences in our analyses. *We assume that the lower social classes attach a lower importance to a highly formalized manner of eating and are therefore more likely to engage in destructured eating practices.*

In the TOR'04 questionnaire, social class is included as a categorical variable reflecting the EGP92-scheme of social class after Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero (Table 4:2).

**Table 4:2 EGP92-scheme in the TOR'04 dataset**

TOR'04-coding	Social Class	EGP92-code
1	Higher-grade professionals, administrators and officials, managers, academics	I
2	Lower-grade professionals, administrators and officials, supervisors of non-manual employees	II
3	Routine non-manual employees, higher grade	IIIa
4	Routine non-manual employees, lower grade	IIIb
5	Small proprietors, artisans etc with <10 employees	IVa
6	Small proprietors, artisans etc without employees	IVb
7	Farmers and small-holders; self-employed workers in primary production	IVc
8	Lower-grade technicians; supervisors of manual workers	V
9	Skilled manual workers	VI
10	Semi- and unskilled manual workers	VIIa
11	Agricultural and other workers in primary production	VIIb

This variable is calculated based on a detailed description of the current or the last job, including the tasks performed, the level, and the sector of the job. The EGP92 –

social class indication overlaps to a great extent with respondents' personal evaluation of their professional category. This may be considered as an important validation. We decided to use the EGP92-schema instead of respondents' personal evaluations of their professional category in our analyses because the former did not include the category 'other' and was based on a large variety of information. Since the social class variable is based on the current or the last job, respondents who have never worked have no valid answer on this question: the EGP92-variable had 10.7 percent missing data, of which half were students and a quarter were respondents who had never worked, but who were no (longer) students. The rest of missing values on the EGP92-variable were respondents for whom the EGP92-value could not be calculated because they had too many missing answers on the various questions necessary to calculate an EGP92-value. In the bivariate analysis, EGP was introduced as a categorical variable, consisting of 11 categories, and as a continuous variable with social class arranged from high (1) to low (11). We want to draw the reader's attention to the reverse manner of interpreting the effect of the EGP92-indicator. The higher the EGP92-code, the lower the social class. We also deduced a number of new dummies from the original 11-category EGP92-indicator. These dummies indicate whether or not the respondent was a white-collar worker, a blue-collar worker, or someone who is self-employed.

In the first section of this chapter we have argued that the changes in eating practices could be due to changing norms. If people do not value the three-meal pattern and the family meal at the dinner table anymore, then we expect to find less structured eating practices. In this section, we argued that despite its importance within Western society, the three-meal pattern and the family meal are not valued equally by all social classes, which may entail different eating practices. However, the deconstruction of eating practices may not only be due to changing norms, but also to different circumstances. Changing norms and circumstances often go hand in hand, as shown in this section. In the next section, we focus on changes in circumstances that allow for more deconstructed eating practices. In the following sections, the focus is on changing conditions that demand a more deconstructed organization of eating.

### **4.3 Material constraints on the availability of food allow for a more destructured organization of eating practices**

Scholars agree on the fact that the industrialised West is characterised by a completely different relationship towards food compared to the past and compared to other regions in the world nowadays. In general, the decline of scarcity and the situation of abundance and variety are believed to be largely responsible for the modern Western approach towards eating (Laudan, 2000). The modern, Western food situation differs from traditional and previous situations on many levels. Food shortage entails a “traditional” attitude towards food. The material constraints on the availability of food often entail long periods of shortage alternated with short periods of abundance. These material constraints are reflected in the cultural code guiding eating behaviour and they are transmitted by various institutions. In Western societies, the church prescribed clear periods of fastening and celebration, which were observed to a large extent. The period between Ash Wednesday and Easter was a yearly period of fastening, and on Fridays people traditionally renounced the consumption of meat. Conversely, religious celebrations like Easter or Christmas were celebrated by means of an abundance of food.

The massive expansion of available food, entailing an increase of choice, is believed to have a considerable impact on the normative approach towards food (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997). Nowadays, the material constraints on the availability of food have largely disappeared. Such a situation is historically exceptional and is particular to the modern, industrialized West. The majority of the population in industrialised countries has plenty of food. Shortage is a reality for only a minority. Seasonal and geographical boundaries do not matter anymore (Beardsworth, 1995: 126-127). Man’s relationship towards food no longer, or at least only to a small extent, depends on local domestic production. The industrialised production of food entails that, for the first time in history, the relationship towards food has chiefly become a commercialised relationship (Counihan, 2004: 4; Scholliers, 2007). Private households are no longer the main responsible for the production of foods. Food is bought at supermarkets and paid for. The commercialised relationship towards food is especially apparent since the 1950s, when income levels rose, which gave rise to an increase in purchasing power.

The commercialised relationship towards food not only holds for the production of foods, but also increasingly holds for the preparation of foods. Part of the preparation process of food now occurs in factories rather than in the home kitchen. This type of food products is called convenience food. Convenience food can be eaten immediately or can be prepared with minimum effort, being thus ready-to-eat or ready-to-cook (Swoboda and Morschett, 2001: 179). These foods presuppose very limited preparation time, culinary skills, and energy input of the person preparing or consuming the product. The limited energy input not only involves the physical effort of meal preparation just before food consumption, but also the 'mental energy, usually in the form of the effort involved in planning ahead' (Marquis, 2005: 55). Most of physical input necessary in meal preparation is transferred 'from the home kitchen to the food processor and distributor' (Traub and Odland, 1979 in Richardson, Pearson and Capps, 1985: 12).

The spread of convenience food goes hand in hand with the spread of electrical domestic appliances like the freezer and the microwave oven. Particular types of convenience food, like frozen, ready or half-prepared meals or ingredients are kept in the freezer and heated up when necessary. Electrical appliances offer the opportunity to prepare meals in a fast and efficient manner. The coming of the microwave also promoted the use of the freezer. Freezing and rapid defrosting went hand in hand. From the mid 1980s on, the freezer was praised for its potential 'for juggling and managing time: rapid access, rapid preparation and security of long-term storage: [are] all time-related arguments' (Shove and Southerton, 2000: 311). Shove and Southerton conclude that 'If the freezer is 'necessary', then it is so not because it is necessary to have frozen food, but because it has become increasingly important to manage time and domestic labour in ways that only freezers allow' (Shove and Southerton, 2000: 313).

Freezers and microwave ovens are widely spread nowadays. The ownership of these appliances is no longer highly associated with one's income level (Hornsby-Smith, 1984). According to Oropesa (1993: 575), the time constraints of dual-earner households with full-time employed wives provided the need, and their higher incomes provided the necessary means to purchase expensive technology in the early

1980s. Later on, however, as these technologies got more reasonably priced, full-time employment of the wife in a dual-earner family could no longer explain for the ownership of these technologies. In the Flemish time-budget study from 2004, 93.8 percent claim that they have a freezer and 89.1 percent claim that they have a microwave oven. The household-budget study of 1998 found that 67.6 percent of Flemish households had a microwave oven, and that the penetration level of microwave ovens had increased by 7.5 percent over the last two years. The penetration level of freezers had remained at 70 percent in that same period.

The introduction of electrical appliances together with particular types of convenience food creates new opportunities to organize the feeding work and consequently the meals within the family. As preparing a meal presupposes little effort, time, and skill, anyone can prepare a meal when these appliances and convenience food are available. Mother's feeding work is no longer imperative to the availability of food and the ability to eat. Mother's work can be reduced to providing alone. According to De Vault (1994: 75), 'Now, the co-ordinative work of supplying family members as they "flow" through the household is at the heart of feeding work'. The preparation itself can be done by other family members, i.e. self-servicing. This creates a higher level of independence between family members, which can also lead to another trend: the disappearance of commensality. As individual members no longer depend on mother's work, but can cater to their own preferences any time they want, electrical domestic appliances might promote diversity rather than unity in the household (Livingstone, 1992 in Warde, 1997; Valentine, 1999). Mealtimes become less significant to the collective rhythm of the family, as every family member may create his own mealtime (Bell and Valentine, 1997).

Another way of convenient food provision is through eating out. Like convenience food and electrical appliances, eating out and especially fast-food outlets are associated with a high level of efficiency. Especially in terms of effort, eating out is a more efficient alternative than the home-cooked meal, which requires shopping, cooking, eating, and cleaning up afterwards (Ritzer, 1996: 36). Yet, restaurant meals still require a lot of time. It implies that you travel, order, and wait before you eat. Compared to the conventional restaurant, the fast-food restaurant is more efficient. However, meals in conventional restaurants are often considered as social events and

as a pleasant escape from the everyday routine (Martens and Warde, 1997; Warde and Martens, 1999). Fast food is a quintessentially Tayloristic phenomenon. The US are forerunners in the same process of “McDonaldisation” (Ritzer, 1996), which supposes a tendency for efficiency, quantity, accountability, and technological control in every aspect of daily life (Prahl and Setzwein, 1999: 198). Especially the drive-through formula saves the customer a lot of time. No time wasted to park your car, order and eat your meal in the restaurant. Instead, you stay in your car, order, pay, and eat, while you literally drive-through. Fast-food is a typical phenomenon of the modern Western society with its rational attitude towards everything, including food. Drive-ins are the symbols of saving time (Ritzer, 1996; Prahl and Setzwein, 1999: 198). The urban area, in particular, facilitates this type of convenience food consumption. The urban region offers a great variety of food opportunities compared to the rural region. Fast-food outlets, conventional restaurants and take-away shops are more widespread in urban areas, and as such they offer a greater opportunity for organising meals in a non-traditional way. In his study in France, Poulain found a positive relationship between the level of urbanization of the place of residence and the number of food contacts (both food and drink) (Poulain, 2003b: 60). In a 1997 questionnaire study on eating practices in the Nordic countries and Denmark, Kjaernes discovered that the inhabitants of larger cities (>100,000 inhabitants) in Finland ate more often than others. In Denmark, on the contrary, people living in large cities revealed a lower rate of eating. No such trends were found in Norway or Sweden (Kjaernes, 2001a: 10&17). It is not necessarily the characteristics of the urban area and its abundance of restaurants, fast-food outlets, chip stands or food vending machines, that allow for and also promote destructured eating habits. The population in urban areas not only has a greater opportunity but probably also a greater need to model their eating habits in a more destructured, non-traditional manner. The way of life and consumption is different in metropolitan areas as a result of its particular composition of the population, with respect to activity status, household type, social class, and educational level (Warde and Martens, 1999: 124; Lupton, 2000a). The concentration of workers in urban areas and the separation of the home and the workplace have stimulated the spread of eating out, especially in urban areas (Prahl and Setzwein, 1999: 198).

The industrial food production offers a number of new opportunities for food consumption and the organization of eating practices. The increased availability of food through convenience food, freezers, microwaves, eating out and so on may neutralize the temporal, social and spatial structure in our eating practices. According to Schneider, 'Affluence has produced expectations that we should be able to eat whatever we want, wherever we want, however we want, with whomever we want, all in accordance with the *postmodern* motto "anything goes"' (Schneider, 1997: 91). These convenient food solutions have created a situation of food's omnipresence in space and time, which may entail more temporally, socially and spatially deconstructed eating practices.

*Temporal deconstruction as a result of increased food availability*

According to Mintz, the overall availability of food has resulted in a more temporally deconstructed meal pattern, with the rate and the timing of eating showing less structure. 'Food availabilities in modern society have tended to "smooth out" or to eliminate the structure of meals and the calendar of diet in daily life. Especially the intervention of sweet moments between meals has affected the importance of the meals and made meals itself more 'snack-like'' (Mintz, 1983: 1966). In the early 1990s, Grignon, Sabban and Aymard were wondering whether the increasing standard of living and the increasing technical standards did not lead to a diminishing time devoted to food, more precisely whether food was not increasingly a matter of the time reserved for it, rather than a *Zeitgeber* (Aymard, Grignon and Sabban, 1996). Technological changes, like the introduction of the freezer and the microwave oven are likely to affect the strict timing of meals (Glorieux, 1985: 3). The microwave oven, the freezer, eating at restaurants and living in an urban region all allow for eating to be timed in another way than before when food consumption was dependent on mother's efforts in the kitchen. There is no need to wait for mother's home-cooked meal.

*Social deconstruction as a result of increased food availability*

Convenience food and take-away meals are often assumed to clear the way for the disintegration of the family meal. Convenience food would increase a tendency to

snack, rather than to sit down at the table for a family meal (Marquis, 2005: 53). If the increased availability of food allows one to time a meal at any moment of the day, this also means that the eating occasion is more likely to be a solitary occasion and therefore less likely to be a commensal occasion. Food needs not necessarily be consumed within the context of the family meal anymore.

*Spatial destructure as a result of increased food availability*

The increased availability of food detaches eating from its exclusively domestic atmosphere. Nowadays, other places but the home also become more important as locations for the meal (Prahl and Setzwein, 1999). The decrease of temporal limitations to eating goes hand in hand with the decline of spatial limitations. Food is not only available 24/7, but also on the corner of every street. Fast-food restaurants, restaurants, drive-ins, wayside restaurants, take-away shops, sandwich bars, hot dog stands, and food dispensers make food omnipresent. The omnipresence of food increases as the urbanization increases. Food cannot only be bought everywhere, it can also be consumed everywhere. Market research points to the popularity of eating on-the-go and forecasts glorious times for snack producers (Singh and Nosalik, 2001). The variety of foodstuffs that does not ask for consumption at the table with plate, fork, and knife is growing rapidly. This finger food ranges from traditional types like a packet of chips, a hot dog, a roll, a hamburger or a pizza, to novel types like pita sandwiches or pasta or noodles in a cup (Schoefs, 2002). All these finger foods allow for immediate consumption on the streets while walking, in the car while driving, or even at the desk while working. Food not only becomes more adapted to consumption in any place. Various locations besides the dinner table at home are also accommodated for food consumption. Drive-ins are especially designed for rapid supply directly to the consumer in his car, while cars become increasingly equipped for food and drink consumption. The increasing availability of food thus leads to the spatial destructure of eating.

*The increasing availability of food and its significance for studying meal deconstruction*

It is not self-evident to study the effect of the wider availability of food on the deconstruction of eating practices by means of the quantitative data available here. However, we believe that some indicators in the time-use survey are able to assess the effect of the wider availability of food. The first indicator of the decline of material constraints is the availability of electrical appliances in the household, namely the ownership of a microwave oven and the ownership of a freezer. ***We assume that the availability of a freezer or a microwave oven promotes***

- ***a temporally deconstructed meal pattern: more eating beyond proper mealtimes***
- ***a socially deconstructed meal pattern: more eating in social isolation and less with the primary commensal circle***

The decline of material constraints is also assessed by means of the family income. A high income increases the opportunities for meal organization in an indirect way through the purchase of electrical appliances like microwave ovens, but also through an easier access to food in general (at any time, in any place for example through eating out). ***We assume that the availability of a high household income promotes***

- ***a temporally deconstructed meal pattern: more eating beyond proper times***
- ***a spatially deconstructed meal pattern: less home meals***

The monthly household income was included in the TOR'04 questionnaire as a categorical variable with 40 categories. This variable was reduced to a categorical variable including 12 categories of equal length, which was introduced both as a categorical and as a continuous variable. The income variable included 8.3 percent of missing cases, which is very acceptable for this type of question.

In this section, we have discussed how the wider availability of food allows for another, more flexible organization of eating practices. In the next sections, we assess the effect of three other recent social evolutions that do not allow, but *demand* a more flexible organization of eating practices: the decline of the “institution of the housewife”, the decline of the “traditional” family and the changes in the organization of paid work. These pragmatic factors impede that eating practices are organized in

terms of a three-meal pattern or in terms of a family meal at the dinner table. The impact of the decline of the “institution of the housewife”, the decline of the “traditional” family and the changes in the organization of paid work on the organization of eating practices will be tackled successively in the following three sections.

#### **4.4 The decline of the “institution of the housewife” makes the proper meal pattern less self-evident**

The proper meal pattern is also believed to be put at stake by the increase in female labour-market participation and the decline of the “institution of the housewife”. Belgium had its lowest female participation rate in the 1950s (Geldhof, 2001). This situation was a historic anomaly. In the rural society, women combined rural labour with household labour (Flandrin and Montanari, 1996, 717-718). Later on, more women worked outside the house, in factories or as servants in better-off households. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the housewife as a housekeeper and a homemaker has been considered as an important ideal, and by the 1950s this ideal had become a reality for many women. Since that time, however, women have increasingly engaged in paid work outside the house. In the later part of the twentieth century, paid work became to be considered as an ideal for both men and women. Table 4:3 shows that the activity rate for women aged 15 to 64 has increased considerably from 26.7 percent in 1961 to 59.3 percent in 1999. In Flanders 56.7 percent of women were active on the labour market in 2004.

**Table 4:3 Evolution of the activity rates (percentage of employed compared to total population) of men and women aged 15 to 64 in Belgium (1961-1999)**

	<b>1961</b>	<b>1999</b>
<b>Men</b>	88.9%	68.1%
<b>Women</b>	26.7%	50.4%
<b>Total</b>	55.0%	59.3%

Source: 1961: Census on 31 December 1961 (excluding -14 year olds and retired persons); 1999: Labour Force Survey 1999 FOD Economie- Afdeling Statistiek,.

In the first chapter of this study on the norms guiding eating habits, we argued that the housewife plays a central part in the organization of the family meal and the proper

meal pattern. Women's and mother's availability at home is in fact an important precondition to the proper meal and was an important precondition for the proper meal to develop into a new social form, essential to a population's (national) eating habits (Ilmonen, 1991: 170). The organization and preparation of the main meal of the day is the responsibility of the housewife. Her ordering of time is geared at the rest of the household. The housewife guarantees that the main meal is ready by the time the children and the husband come home. It is the organizational work of the housewife that allows for a proper and timely meal at home in the evening. If the woman of the house is engaged in paid labour, then the organization of the main meal of the day becomes a less self-evident matter. Women's participation in paid labour may have an impact on the way eating is socially organized. According to Weil, the rarity of housewives turned the traditional meal into a museum piece (Weil, 1993 in Matas, 2000).

So far, little is known on the impact of women's employment on the organization of the meal. Women's role in preparing and organizing the family meal has almost always been studied from the point of view of housewives, whose responsibility it is to prepare the meal by the husband's homecoming (Warde and Hetherington, 1994). Certainly, the disappearance of the "institution of the housewife" entails the disappearance of an important time buffer (Elchardus, 1996). The organization of time in breadwinner families is trouble-free due to the housewife being available throughout the whole day to do the shopping, pay a visit to the post office, and to make sure dinner was ready by the husband's and the children's return home. Nowadays, '...households do not have an adult available "on-call" at home throughout the day' (Golla and Vernon, 2006: 3). Women's participation in the labour market entails their lower availability at home, which increases the pressure on the production and the consumption of meals at home (Holm, 2001b). A woman's labour market participation lowers the odds of her preparing the meal for the children's return from school or for the husband's return from work. It sparks off a complete review of the temporal organization of the family (Lesnard, 2004: 244-245). As a collective unit, the household experiences an increased time scarcity (Cullen, 1994), which strips the homemade family meal of its self-evident nature.

However, women's activity status does not automatically turn the main meal of the day into an impossibility, but rather into a less obvious event, requiring more preceding organization and arrangement (Mc Intosh, 1999). When the mother of the house is engaged in paid labour, the organization of family meals can no longer be solely based on routine. It entails a variety of factors to be taken into account such as how many meals are eaten, where they are eaten, and with whom they are eaten (Mc Intosh, 1996: 54), but also how they are prepared. The co-ordination of the family members' schedules is much harder for working women than it is for housewives. They have less time and energy to do it. In the case of a working woman, the occurrence of the family meal indicates a volitional event, rather than something that goes without saying. The -predominantly female - work of organizing the family meal becomes much more visible once women's employment turns it into a more problematic event (De Vault, 1994). Women may search for maintaining a proper meal pattern by organizing it differently. Husbands and children may be engaged more in the organization of meals. Convenient solutions by means of convenience food and kitchen appliances may also enable an easier organization of meals.

In contrast to what was argued in the previous section on the wider availability of food, the use of convenience food and electrical appliances need not automatically be considered as promoting meal deconstruction and the disintegration of the family meal. Warde points to the importance of these means in enabling family meals. 'Eating conveniently is probably a precondition of one of the most highly valued forms of sociability' (Warde, 1999: 524). The family meal remains important but much harder to put into practice than before. In contrast to social scientists like Corbeau (1992), who consider the modern electrical appliances and convenience food as promoting alimentary individualism and the decay of the family meal, Warde (1999) claims that these ready-meals and domestic appliances are not (only) the cause of the deroutinisation of daily life, but also an effect. These convenient means are so attractive because they allow for preserving the practice of the family meal, despite the deroutinisation of daily life. People try to preserve the family meal by all means, including convenience food, take-away food, going to the restaurant, using microwave oven and freezer, but also by negotiations and appointments (Ashley, Hollows, Jones et al., 2002: 136).

The attractiveness of electrical appliances like the microwave oven and the freezer is not so much to be found in their time-saving character, as it is in their opportunity to manipulate the timing and sequence of activities. These appliances do not save us time; rather they allow us to *shift* time and to deal with the modulisation of time. Processes like shopping, cooking, eating, and cleaning up, which used to be connected in a continuous train of actions, are broken up in various modules nowadays. Modern life makes it impossible to perform all these activities, the one after the other, for most people. Electrical appliances, as technologies of discontinuity, help to get the different modules organized in an acceptable manner. We do not shop just before we eat; instead, we go to the supermarket during the weekend and stuff our freezer. We do not cook before we eat; instead, we prepare our meal on another moment, preserve it in the freezer, and heat it up again in the microwave oven when we need it. We do not wash the dishes after the meal, instead, we put everything in the dishwasher and we will empty it, when we need clean chinaware (Warde, 1999).

A study of highly-educated, high-income two parent-families with two children from the *Interstate Urban/Rural comparison of Families' Time-use* sample showed that the mother's activity status had a significant impact on the number of meals taken together as a family, at least in rural areas. However, the relationship was not as expected, since both families with full-time working and non-working mothers shared more family meals than families with part-time working mothers. For the urban population there was no difference between full-time, part-time, or non-working mothers. With regard to the number of meals taken at home, again differences rose between urban and rural areas. In urban areas more meals were taken at home when a mother was not working compared to full- or part-time working mothers. Again, in rural areas, part-time working mothers had fewer meals at home than both non-working and full-time working mothers (Goebel and Hennon, 1983). Siega-Riz (1998) discovered that the mother's paid employment did not affect children's meal pattern. Axelson found no relationship between adolescents' frequency of breakfast and lunch skipping and mother's outside employment (Axelson, 1976: 100-103 & 163). A study by Kjaernes in the Nordic Countries and Denmark diagnosed that although the employment status had an effect on the number and nature of meals, that effect arose predominantly from the impact of work schedules, rather than from women's activity status (Kjaernes, 2001a).

*The decay of the institution of the housewife and its significance for studying meal destructuration*

***We assume that the increased labour-market engagement of the household and more particularly of the mother or the wife in the household entails:***

- ***a more temporally destructured meal pattern: more eating beyond proper times***
- ***a more socially destructured meal pattern: less meals with the primary commensal circle***
- ***a more spatially destructured meal pattern: less meals taken at home***

The labour-market engagement in households is measured as the labour-market engagement of both partners. We can only distinguish between working partners and non-working partners, in case the partner is a cohabiting partner.

#### **4.5 The decline of the “traditional” family makes the proper meal pattern less self-evident**

In the first chapter on the norms guiding eating behaviour, we argued that the proper meal pattern and especially the proper nature of the main meal of the day were strongly linked to its occurrence within a “traditional” family which is a household type composed of two parents and co-resident children. The “proper” meal as an institution cannot be dissociated from the nuclear family as an institution. It is only within a married or cohabiting couple that the “proper” meal is assumed to have a real meaning (Marshall and Anderson, 2002). Compared to the 1950s and the 1960s, when two-parent families with children were the dominant household type, nowadays there is a growing diversity in household types. Despite the fact that this household type is historically an exception, it has rapidly developed to be the ideal household type and it was considered as a longstanding community relation, hence the name traditional family (Corijn, 1996: 19; Gillis, 1997). Nowadays, a wide variety of non-traditional household types has become more widespread.

**Table 4:4 Belgian population by composition (1961 versus 2004)**

	<b>Total population</b>	<b>Living alone</b>
<b>1961</b>	9.189.741 (100%)	508.617 (5.5%)
<b>2004</b>	10.274.870 (100%)	1.441.345 (14%)

Source: Census (volkstelling) NIS (situation on 31 December 1961) and National record (rijksregister) (situation on 1 January 2004)

Table 4:4 shows that the chances of living alone or living in a single-parent household have increased considerably between 1961 and 2004. The share of the population living alone has increased from 5.5 percent in 1961 to 14 percent in 2004. The share of single-parent families in the total number of households (excluding single-person households) has increased from 8.8 percent to 21.4 percent in the same period (Table 4:5). The single-parent household is not a novel household type. Its share is even smaller nowadays than it was at the end of the nineteenth century, but compared to the 1950s and the 1960s, the apex of the traditional family, its share has undeniably grown. Demographers anticipate this trend will go on for some time still (Corijn, 1996: 22).

**Table 4:5 Belgian households by composition (1961 versus 2004)**

	<b>Total households</b>	<b>Couple without children</b>	<b>Couple with unmarried children</b>	<b>Single fathers</b>	<b>Single mothers</b>
<b>1961</b>	2.488.841	885.275	1.386.532	47.053	169.581
	100%	35.6%	55.7%	1.9%	6.8%
<b>2004</b>	2.759.733	968.226	1.200.141	160.864	430.502
	100%	35.1%	43.5%	5.8%	15.6%

Source: Census (volkstelling) NIS (situation on 31 December 1961) and National record (rijksregister) (situation on 1 January 2004)

Traditional families composed of two parents and at least one co-resident child are less prevalent than in the 1960s. While the large majority of households were of that type in 1961, this is true for only 43 percent of all family circles in 2004. The rearrangement of household types is the result of a variety of trends that have evolved in the last decades of the twentieth century. First of all, the number of marriages has

decreased, while the number of divorces has increased. In 1966, there were 7.15 marriages and only 0.61 divorces per 1000 inhabitants. By 1999, the number of marriages per 1000 inhabitants had decreased to only 4.32 while the number of divorces had increased to 2.59. As a result, there is a large increase in singles and single parents, while there is a decrease in couples. Simultaneously, the birth rate has fallen considerably. In 1966, the birth rate in Flanders was 16.88 per 1000 inhabitants. In Brussels and the Walloon region this was somewhat less. By 2004, the Flemish birth rate was only 10.37 per 1000 inhabitants. The increase in life expectancy results in an increasing proportion of elderly people, often single due to being widowed. As a result, between 1961 and 2000 the average size of households in Belgium has decreased from 3.04 to 2.38. In Flanders, we find an average household size of 2.42 in 2004.

The decrease of the traditional household type with two parents and children living together and the increase of atypical household types is most likely to affect the social organization of eating (Poulain, 2002a: 54). The timing, the companionship, and the content of the proper meal all reflect the importance of the family and its internal structure (Murcott, 1983c; Beardsworth and Keil, 1997). Most studies on the significance of the meal have focussed on the “traditional” nuclear family. Although alternative household types occur more frequently, these are often neglected by social science. Very often social scientists have taken the dominant concept of the family as a point of departure, determining the further course of the research. Social groups and social phenomena fitting that dominant concept have predominantly been the object of social research (Gillis, 1997). This also applies to meal studies, which often revert to the traditional notion of the nuclear family with parents and children. The families in most meal studies were mostly of the breadwinner type, with the female homemaker staying home to look after the children. Charles and Kerr admit that they have studied a very specific type of household. They realized that this type of household no longer applied to the majority of households at the time of their study, but as the English government still considered it as the ideal household type at that time, Charles and Kerr focussed on the *proper* family (Kerr and Charles, 1986: 5-16). Other household types have been largely neglected. Stacey suggests to use the term *postmodern* family to account for the variety in household types as well as the fluent

and complex nature of modern household arrangements (Stacey, 1990 in Bell and Valentine, 1997; Valentine, 1999; De Vault, 2003).

#### 4.5.1 Non-traditional household types and their effect on the organization of eating practices

Although the studies on eating practices within traditional families have provided important insights, these insights only apply to a very specific phase of the life cycle (Bove, Sobal and Rauschenbach, 2003; Mäkelä, 2000). In her study on eating habits of cohabiting couples in Scotland, Kemmer found that the ideas regarding the proper meal differed considerably from the ideas found by Murcott and Charles and Kerr, about 15 years earlier. Men's participation in cooking was clearly higher than what Charles and Kerr had found. Warde came to similar conclusions based on a study on household arrangements in Manchester in 1990. Kemmer partly attributed this difference to the difference in family types and the phase in the lifecycle between her study and Charles and Kerr's study. Kemmer studied young, two-earner households without children. Warde also related the increased male participation in cooking to the phase of the lifecycle, but also to the greater proportion of men in professional and managerial positions and women in paid work (Warde and Hetherington, 1994; Kemmer, Anderson and Marshall, 1998b; Kemmer, 2000). Eating habits constantly change throughout the lifecycle and from one household type to another. In the following sections, we will try to sketch a picture of how eating habits evolve over the various phases in the lifecycle, by focussing on the other household types than the traditional household with two cohabiting partners and co-resident young children.

##### *Single-living persons*

Studies on the eating habits of young couples have largely emphasized the structuring effect of cohabitation or marriage on the meal pattern. The transition from single to living together or to married greatly affected the temporal, social and spatial structure of the meal pattern. The presence of another person in the household greatly fosters the taking of meals together and a more regular meal pattern (Bugge and Doving, 2000). Before living together, singles revealed a less structured meal pattern. Singles do not have to take others into account. For them, preparing and eating a meal is an ad

hoc rather than an organized event (Kemmer, Anderson and Marshall, 1998b: 207). Kemmer also found that before living together, single women had indulged more in small snacks instead of a meal, and single men had eaten more pre-prepared or take-away meals (Kemmer, Anderson and Marshall, 1998a). Conversely, the breaking up of a relationship or a divorce entailed a more destructured meal pattern. De Vault's (1994) study in the US revealed that for many women their husbands had set the norm with regard to food and eating. A proper meal was what they expected or at least what was expected within marriage. After their divorce, food was no longer a priority for these women and they quit preparing proper meals (De Vault, 1994). The shift from marriage to divorce on the level of meal preparation and consumption was described as 'a shift from "the usual fanfare" to a "very simple routine"' (De Vault, 1997:186). Once a couple had split up, the regularity vanished from the meals and hunger, not fixed mealtimes, set the moment for eating. This type of behaviour was more expected from divorced men than from divorced women (Burgoyne and Clarke, 1983). Analogously, widowhood could also promote destructured eating habits. A study by Quandt and colleagues (Quandt, Vitolins, De Walt et al., 1997 in Sidenvall, Nydahl and Fjellström, 2000: 414 & 419) diagnosed that the loss of the partner and living alone had a negative impact on the regularity and contents of the widow's meals. Single women more often skipped meals, showed a tendency to deny their own needs with a risk of malnutrition, and attached less importance to the meal than cohabiting women of the same age by simplifying the meal situation.

Being single is especially found to affect the social structure of the meal pattern. Various studies have demonstrated that living alone contributes to a considerable extent to eating alone. Individualized eating occasions were above all a reflection of a particular household situation, namely living alone (Holm, 2001b). A study with 1200 respondents from all the Nordic countries and Denmark in 1997 showed that living alone had a much greater influence on the number and type of meals than work. Eating in social isolation displayed multiple symptoms of destructure, such as shorter meal duration and combination of eating with other simultaneous activities (Kjaernes, 2001a). As such living alone not only affects the social structure of the meal pattern, but also affects the temporal structure of the meal pattern. The absence of a regular meal partner at home does not automatically imply one eats alone, but it considerably adds to its chances (Sobal, 2000). Moreover, singles are more likely to

eat out. They spend more time eating and drinking out than non-single households (Cheng, Olsen, Southerton and Warde, 2007: 50). They also spend proportionally more money on food away from home and much more on convenient meals as a substitution for non-convenient and semi-convenient meals than couples (Bonke, 1993). French time-budget studies showed that of all household types, singles accepted invitations outside the home the most and were more invited by others than the other way around (Larmet, 1998). In the Nordic countries and Denmark, Holm diagnosed that singles more often ate out than couples (Larmet, 1998; Holm, 2001b: 174).

Gofton (1995b) argues that the implications of being single for meal preparation and consumption highly depend on the single person's age. Young singles do not show the same pattern as middle-aged divorcees or pensioners. Elderly singles do not show as much tertiary sociability (with non-household members) as young singles. French time-budget studies showed that non-residential commensality is especially characteristic of singles or bachelors younger than 35 (Larmet, 2002). That might explain the negative impact of being single, especially for elderly people and more particularly elderly women. Non-residential commensality has not increased between 1986 and 1998 among single-living persons, although their time spent on eating alone has increased the most. According to Larmet, this is due to the fact that singles are more likely divorced or widowed than ten years ago. Widowed and divorced men and women are more focused on the domestic area than single bachelors (Larmet, 2002). For Denmark, on the contrary, Bonke (1993: 51) found that eating out is more likely for single adults aged 45 or more than for single adults under 45.

### *Single-parent households*

The absence of one of both parents could equally affect the organization of eating practices. The absence of the father as an authority demanding discipline at the table, is found to lead to another organization of the meal. Charles and Kerr found that when fathers were absent, the meal was often organized in a completely different manner, with another location (in front of TV instead of the dinner table), another timing (children's timing rather than father's homecoming), and another format (no 'meat and two veg') (Charles and Kerr, 1988). The idea of healthy eating by means of the

proper meal was less prevalent among single mothers once the father with his specific meal preferences had left the house (Charles and Kerr, 1986a). Single-parent families and single mothers (De Vault, 1994) also shared less family meals than couples with children (Holm, 2001a: 23). Single parents had to carry a huge workload and organization compared to other parents. In order to give themselves a break, they often preferred to eat alone (De Vault, 1994). Several studies have shown that this situation had negative consequences for children's food habits and nutritional status (Chase and Martin, 1970 & Johnson, 1983 in Mc Intosh, 1996: 72), and increased children's chances for skipping meals (Siega-Riz, Carson and Popkin, 1998). Parents' food habits also suffered from this situation. Keith and Schafer (1991 in Mc Intosh, 1996: 76) diagnosed that parents in single-parent families ate less meals, and spent less time on meal preparation compared to other parents. De Bourdeaudhuij and Van Oost diagnosed that children with a difficult family situation reported little organization regarding meal consumption (everyone eats when it suits him or her, sometimes there is no food available, and the meal does not have extra meaning) and food shopping, and few food regulations (De Bourdeaudhuij and van Oost, 1997).

Other studies, conversely, pointed to the extra efforts done by single parents to guarantee a family meal. The value of the family meal is retained, both in traditional and non-traditional families such as single-parent families or families without children. Families look for different ways to model the family meal rituals, given the specific situation they live in (Mackenzie, 1993: 39 & 44). The presence of children obviously has an important impact on family meals. Burgoyne and Clarke (1983) discovered that single fathers attached more importance to regular, nutritional meals than single men, despite their time pressure, commitments at work, and lack of previous experience in the kitchen. Single fathers often put strong emphasis on the continuation of specific aspects of family life, such as the preparation of the Sunday meal. For the single fathers, proper, nutritional meals not only guaranteed children's well-being, but also a sense of stability in the family. The family meal and especially Sunday dinner became '... a powerful ritual, communicating to self and children alike, that despite marital separation, "normal life" continues much as before' (Burgoyne and Clarke, 1983: 158). Burgoyne and Clarke conclude that ' "eating properly" is therefore symptomatic of a more general sense of personal wellbeing, in the same way the being "off one's food" might suggest self neglect, disruption and a

state of uncertainty' (Burgoyne and Clarke, 1983: 162). Ahuja and Walker come to similar conclusions for single mothers. They discovered that income and mother's employment status had a much stronger influence on the use of convenience food and visiting restaurants than being a single mother. Single mothers did not use significantly more convenience food and dual parents spend more money at full-service restaurants. Ahuja and Walker point to the difficult trade-off single mothers must make between saving time and saving money. Full-service restaurants are often too expensive for them, while fast-food outlets are less expensive and are also more attractive to children (Ahuja and Walker, 1994: 50-52). The lack of significant differences between single mothers' and dual parents' eating habits may indicate the single mothers' attempts in 'maintaining continuity in the family's eating habits and diets, acquired when the father was in the household (Ahuja and Walker, 1994: 53). Family rituals provide the means for single-parent families to guarantee stability and belonging (Olson and Haynes, 1993 in Fiese, Tomcho, Douglas et al., 2002). The continuation of regular routines, in families of divorced parents and stepfamilies, provoked a better adaptation of children, by giving them a greater sense of security and stability in family life (Fiese, Tomcho, Douglas et al., 2002: 385). Obviously, rituals such as the family meal and more in particular Sunday dinner fulfilled beneficent functions for individuals in difficult family situations, even during difficult periods (of transition) (Fiese, Hooker, Kotary et al., 1993; Fiese, Tomcho, Douglas et al., 2002).

#### *Older children in the household*

In general, the presence of children was found to foster a more regular, structured, and traditional meal pattern (Bugge and Doving, 2000). When young children are present, the meal at the dinner table was especially valued in order to guarantee an orderly meal. So far meal studies have predominantly focused on families with young children. In Charles and Kerr's study children aged older than 11 were not taken into account, as they more often ate elsewhere than the rest of the family (Charles and Kerr, 1988). Children's age is most likely to affect the eating habits of the household. Older children become more engaged in activities outside the household. This often leads to eating out, apart from the other family members (modular feeding) or the adaptation of mealtimes to fit children's activities (Edwards, 1978 in Goebel and

Hennon, 1983). Once a child reaches a certain age, it gradually releases itself from the home front and parental influence, and the peer group gains more influence. Parents' dietary regulations are more relaxed once children become adolescents (De Bourdeaudhuij and van Oost, 1997). Young adults of 15 and older, who live with their parents, take fewer meals with their parents and more meals with their friends. Meals alone as well as meals with non-family members increase, as family commensality decreases. With Galland (1993), Larmet (2002: 200) concludes that "*pour les jeunes, intégration sociale et intégration familiale tendent aujourd'hui à se dissocier*" [for the young people social integration and family integration tend to break up]. Compared to their family members, Flemish adolescents aged 13 to 17 had the lowest chance of taking breakfast every morning and a higher chance of skipping breakfast every morning as they got older (De Bourdeaudhuij and van Oost, 1997: 66). Adolescents have a less ritualistic attitude towards the meal. They set their own meal pattern, object to the formalities of the "proper meal" and prefer the informal nature of fast-food meals (Counihan, 1999; Pahl and Setzwein, 1999: 83-84; Larmet, 2002: 197-201). According to Garabuau-Moussaoui, deviating from the collective norm, the formal meal pattern that parents feel so strongly about, has a social function, namely taking up one's generational identity. Young people recognise the dominant culinary and nutritional norms, but these are rejected during a specific period in their lives, more specifically the transition from childhood to adulthood (Garabuau-Moussaoui, 2001: 12).

#### 4.5.2 The decline of the "traditional" family and its effect on meal deconstruction

*We assume that the composition of the household will affect the structure of his eating practices. This holds for the temporal structure of eating practices, but especially for its social structure. We posit that the presence of a cohabiting partner results in a more structured eating pattern than living without a partner. The presence of a partner is assumed to enhance eating at set times, eating with a household member and eating at home. Analogously, the presence of co-resident children is believed to enhance a more structured eating pattern: more eating at set times, more eating with household members and more eating at home. We also expect that single parents engage more in eating alone. Older children who still live with their parents are believed to engage less in eating with their family. In general,*

*we assume that young people engage less in a structured meal pattern, while a “traditional” household situation promotes a structured meal pattern. Conversely, we assume that living alone promotes eating alone, especially with the elderly population who lives alone.*

In the following chapters, we empirically investigate the effect of the household composition on the organization of eating practices. We also study to what extent eating practices depend on age and to what extent the effect of age varies according to the household type one lives in. We especially expect to find differences between singles according to age, with older singles eating more alone and withdrawing more in the home. For parents with children, we expect to find that the presence of older co-resident children results in less family commensality. In case significant interaction effects between age and household composition occur, a composed variable will be constructed to assess the phase in the lifecycle.

#### **4.6 The changing character of paid work**

In the first chapter, the importance of work schedules in determining the meal pattern was discussed. At the end of the nineteenth century, a decline in working time and an increase in leisure time were important demands of the labour movement. Workers also demanded a minimum number of breaks during the working day that would allow for resting and eating. Gradually, these demands were translated into law and regulations, steering the daily meal pattern. Workers were expected to eat at set times, but were not allowed to interrupt work at any time to have a break or a snack. Although these shop floor regulations clearly imposed restrictions on workers, they equally protected workers’ interests by conceding them a minimum of personal time during work time. Cook and Wyndham (1953) conducted a field study on the eating habits of factory workers in an Australian factory that manufactured and stored armaments. Workers from the administrative unit, the staff, the production unit and the store were invited to fill in a questionnaire and take part in a group discussion. Cook and Wyndham diagnosed considerable differences between the various units in the factory in their eating habits. Factory workers were allowed a shorter break than their colleagues in the administration, namely 30 minutes instead of 40. The nature of industrial work resulted in a more restricted food behaviour during the working day.

The time reserved for breaks, including lunch breaks, is extremely regulated in a factory. The nature of industrial work, for example working at the conveyor belt, does not allow factory workers to interrupt work at any time. They have to stick to a very strict schedule (Batstone, 1983). Factory workers are only allowed a rather short lunch break on a specific moment during the day.

Since the early 1950s, the labour market has evolved considerably. The share of workers in the production sector reached its peak just after World War II. In 1947, almost half of the active Belgian population (48.6 percent) was engaged in the industrial sector. Since the early 1950s, the chance of working in an industrial environment has decreased severely. The decrease in the secondary sector was accelerated in the 1970s, due to the economic crisis. In 1985, only 29.8 percent of the Belgian employees was employed in the industries. By 2003, industrial employment had fallen to less than a quarter of total employment in Belgium. As industrial employment decreased, the service industries and the government sector started to grow. Between 1970 and 1985, the percentage in the service sector has grown from 52.9 to 67.1 percent. By 2004, 73.1 percent of the active Belgian population was employed in the service sector (De Grauwe, 2003). Similar conclusions hold for Flanders (CSPO, 2006). The growth of the service industries and the massive entrance of women on the labour market stimulated each other.

The changing nature of the labour market is believed to have an impact on eating practices during the working day. In contrast to workers in an industrial environment, employees in the service sector need fewer calories to get through the day. A clerical job demands less energy than industrial work, but also allows for a less restricted relationship towards one's time, body, and also towards food. Clerical workers can generally interrupt their work at any moment without immediate practical effect. Fixed breaks are less common. The nature of clerical work gives workers the opportunity to snack more, compared to industrial workers. Poulain found a higher number of food contacts (both drink and food) with employees and executives than with blue-collar workers (Poulain, 2003b: 60).

Clerical work is still believed to affect the way eating is organized in a different manner than manual labour. Especially nowadays clerical workers are believed to

approach eating in a very unstructured, but rational manner. According to Corbeau (1996:191), paid work strongly affects the workers' eating practices, in a situation of social production, as is the case during the working day. During the working day, the contemporary principles of efficiency are assumed to predominate. This would affect both the social and the temporal organization of eating practices during the working day. Elaborate breaks during the working day would not be allowed, except for business lunches. The employee is believed to eat and work at the same time. There would be no real meals during the working day. As a result, eating is assumed to be a solitary affair. Social production would outweigh commensality (Corbeau, 1996). Corbeau calls this type of eater the *gastrolastress*. This concept reflects the refusal to ritualise food occasions in any kind of way (gastrolatry). During the working day, eating is reduced to a pure response to the demands of the stomach, rather than a conformation to cultural rules regarding eating behaviour. This way of eating is essentially due to the stress characteristic of the contemporary urban actor, who pushes and rationalises his production time. However, once the working day is over and the *gastrolastress* escapes the situation of social production, he displays a completely different food behaviour. According to Corbeau, the *gastrolastress* adjusts his food behaviour according to the situation. In the evening and during weekends and holidays, other logics are assumed to guide food behaviour. Then, the social function of the meal and culinary pleasure are believed to outweigh the principles of dietetics. The consumption of food turns into a completely different event within the frame of a shared experience creating social ties (Corbeau, 1996: 187).

The idea that the modern organization of paid work promotes destructured eating habits, especially during the working day, is also found with other authors. The absence of strict breaks and clear regulations on when to interrupt work would push chronological deregulation (Grignon, 1992). The emphasis on efficient time use and the freedom to model the working day to one's personal preference might lead to skipping the lunch break and eating while working. This implies lunch is taken at the desk as a solitary event. The time available for lunch breaks is believed to have decreased as the lunch break is reduced to counterbalance the workload. French research by Poulain showed that, although most employees went home for lunch or ate at the canteen, 15 percent of workers reported to eat at their desk or at the workshop, but not at the canteen. Poulain calls this situation *le retour de la gamelle*.

He compares this - overwhelmingly female - behaviour of bringing home-made sandwiches or ordering them elsewhere to eat at the desk with the former situation where workers brought a small messtin with home-made food or leftovers to provide them with food during work (Poulain, 1998a: 353). Lunch boxes offer the opportunity to cut down or extend lunch time according to the workload or even grab a bite beyond lunchtime. Lunch boxes offer a great level of flexibility (Poulain, 2002a). The most important reason for taking lunch at the desk was the organization of the working day and gaining time (Poulain, 2003b: 61-62).

Working women and men would differ significantly in their willingness to save on their lunch breaks to gain time for other goals. In contrast to men, their family responsibilities would prevent women from extending their working day in the morning or in the evening. Practical and organizational factors thus incite them to cut on their lunch break and decide in favour of the lunch box meal at the desk. French men would be less willing to give up their lunch breaks and would rather catch up with the extra workload by adjusting the beginning or rather the end of the working day (Poulain, 2003a; Poulain, 2003b: 61-62). Sjögren-de Beauchaine's study on the eating habits of the Parisian bourgeoisie in the early 1980s showed that women used the freedom in their work schedule to spend lunch with their families: lunch was still shared by all family members in 17 out of the 104 families. In 35 out of 104 families, the mother shared lunch at home with the children, but without the father present. Women were prepared to do a lot of efforts in adapting their work schedule in order to be able to share lunch with their families (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 109-110).

According to Rauch, sufficient time for lunch is no longer on the agenda of the employee. No one wants to waste productive time at work through lunch: *'Fonctionnaire, cadre, employé, étudiant, nul ne se sent autorisé à faire la pause. Cette forme de sociabilité a fondu dans les négociations sur la réduction du temps de travail'* [Public servant, executive, employee, student, no one still feels allowed to take a break. This type of sociability has disappeared in the pursuit of a reduction of working time] (Rauch, 2001: 39). The more time the employee allots to paid work, the less time he or she is assumed to spend on eating. The more time is allotted for efficient uses like paid work, the less time is allotted to eating, as a necessity of life. The lack of time is a new pragmatic consideration that is hindering man from

respecting a meal pattern. The re-evaluation of eating does not have an equal impact on everyone (Willmot and Nelson, 2003: 198). The time cost of eating and lunch in particular, is much higher for a manager with a busy life than for a retired person. The manager can use the same amount of time for more efficient, valuable goals (Prahl and Setzwein, 1999). The lunch break can be used to continue work, while lunch itself is delayed to later snacks or simply renounced. Working mothers are believed to apply a similar reasoning: as mothers, they prefer finishing work at a reasonable hour to pick up the children, but their responsibilities as working women incite them to take their work seriously. As a result, lunch is sacrificed to work during the lunch break.

Persons who are not engaged in the labour market face this type of problem much less. They are not confronted with a clash between work- and household-related responsibilities, and stick to a daily routine where breakfast, lunch, and dinner mostly have a set place. Spending much time on “non-efficient” ends, like meals, could be seen as a sign that one has nothing to attend to, while showing one has no time for something as trivial as food, clearly is a proof of status (Brewis and Jack, 2005: 56). The emphasis on efficient time use and the uninhibited relationship of the clerical worker towards his time also foster workers to use lunch breaks for other purposes than eating, like shopping or sporting (Corbeau, 1992). Our hectic lifestyle would reduce lunch to a short pit stop to refuel the body through snacks in between. The lunch break, on the other hand, would be used as a moment to achieve other goals rather than eating.

Long business hours and the continuous working day also make the working conditions and the organization of eating more precarious (Lesnard, 2004: 218-219). Already in 1967, Trémolières and Serville blamed the continuous working day for compromising the social and leisurely nature of the meal. The authors concluded that the modern work schedule and urban life had reduced the significance of lunch (Serville and Trémolières, 1967). The increasing number of small breaks throughout the day, due to the neglect of the lunch break, is often associated with compulsive, solitary grazing behaviour. The chances for sociability while snacking in between are smaller compared to the genuine lunch break (Corbeau, 1992: 114; Poulain, 2002a; Poulain, 2003a).

The work schedule also affects eating occasions beyond work time. One of the principal work-related factors that has an impact on meals outside the work time, is the number of hours that are worked. The new “knowledge economy” is assumed to entail a long-hours culture (Jarvis, 2002: 340). The problems entailed by long working hours might become particularly imperative in dual-earner families. A study of couples with dependent children in five cities with successful cultivation of high-value service economies in the UK and the US, showed that both mothers (except in one city) and fathers worked over 40 hours per week, despite the fact that they were on a standard full-time contract. Few working parents could resist the long working hours culture, as they were taken up by the culture of consumption and needed a double income to manage it all right. The working parents that had adopted a slower pace of life were exceptional. They had done so by adopting a more egalitarian structure of earning and parenting, which allowed for combined and reduced working hours (Jarvis, 2002).

According to Jarvis (2002: 351), the categorization of employment in terms of full-time or part-time, temporary or permanent is no longer sufficient to assess workers’ working arrangements. Instead, the total number of hours that are worked, as well as the number of hours performed outside of office hours and the predictability of working hours need to be taken into account. These working hour characteristics would be particularly imperative in the new “knowledge economy” (Jarvis, 2002: 351). Long working hours and the flexibility of work schedules might have an important influence on meals beyond work time and might interfere with family mealtimes. A greater flexibility of working hours implies ‘(..) a weakening of socio-temporal structures that, in the absence of fixed institutional temporalities, make the potential for co-ordinating practices between social actors increasingly problematic (Southerton and Tomlinson, 2002: 3). Flexible, unpredictable hours are believed to put shared meals with the family at stake. This problem is believed to be especially compelling for professional and managerial groups, who displayed the highest flexibility and deroutinisation and reported being most pressed for time. For them, a collective activity like shared meals with the family, were a matter of individual management, which intensified the immediacy of time (Southerton and Tomlinson, 2002). Research has shown that during the workweek, skipping breakfast or not sharing breakfast were very common. Asynchronous work schedules and a lack of

time were responsible (Sobal, Bove and Rauschenbach, 2002). De Bourdeaudhuij and van Oost conducted a questionnaire and focus-group interview study with youngsters aged 13 to 17, on the organization of the meal in the family. They found that when a family member could not be present at the dinner moment, this most often resulted in eating alone, before or afterwards. Only exceptionally (15 percent), dinnertime was adapted by the whole family. Family members that could not make it for dinnertime exceptionally also ate in another place (11 percent) or just skipped the meal (2 percent) (De Bourdeaudhuij and van Oost, 1997).

Traditionally, interest has been shown for the impact of shift work as a divergent work schedule with an important impact on meal patterns. The devastating effects of shift work and night work on health, among others through eating habits, have been studied extensively. For shift workers and especially night workers, proper mealtimes no longer operate as *Zeitgebers* in their meal pattern, which may explain the frequent mentioning of digestive disorders by shift workers (Costa, 1996: 9-10). Although shift work did not affect the total energy intake over the day, a larger proportion of food was ingested during the night hours by workers working night shifts (Lennernäs, Hambraeus and Akerstedt, 1995: 258). A questionnaire study with night workers and day workers on the type, timing, and frequency of meals showed that night workers ate more snacks and more cold food during the nocturnal working hours than on rest days. The type and frequency of meals were more often influenced by time availability than by appetite and this was even more the case for night workers than for day workers (Waterhouse, Buckley, Edwards et al., 2003). Despite the fact that most studies do not give evidence of a poorer diet by shift workers, they do mention a lower eating satisfaction. Shift workers looked significantly less forward to their meals and had a bloated, rather than a satisfied feeling after consuming their meals (Waterhouse, Buckley, Edwards et al., 2003). It is assumed that the lower eating satisfaction of shift workers is due to the irregular mealtimes rather than to malnutrition (Lennernäs, Hambraeus and Akerstedt, 1995: 262).

#### *The nature of work and its effect on meal deconstruction*

We expect that paid work results in a more deconstructed meal pattern, especially on working days and during working time. ***Being active on the labour market results in***

*less time for eating, more skipped meals, more eating during other simultaneous activities, more solitary meals and more meals at other places than the home place.*

The more efficient attitude towards time is believed to be especially characteristic of the workers in the modern “knowledge economy”. We therefore expect to find a more destructured meal pattern (more meals skipped, less eating time, more eating during other simultaneous activities) among highly-educated workers and white-collar workers rather than among workers performing manual labour. Moreover, the more efficient attitude towards time, resulting in shorter mealtimes and a tendency to skip meals, is believed to be enhanced by a high income.

Specific work-related characteristics are also believed to affect the way eating practices are organized. We presuppose that the duration of work affects the structure in one’s meal pattern. *The more hours one works per day, the less time one spends eating, the more eating occurs during other activities, the more meals are skipped, and the more eating occurs alone and at another place than the home place.* We also assume that the regularity and the predictability of working hours affect the structure in one’s meal pattern. *We hypothesize that non-standard and unpredictable working hours promote eating beyond proper mealtimes, spending less time on meals, skipping meals and eating alone.*

We also posit that paid work and work-related characteristics have a different impact on men and women, as far as their eating practices are concerned. Active women are assumed to gear their work responsibilities more to their family responsibilities, either by skipping weekday lunch in order to cope with an increased workload without implications for the family, either by using the available lunch break to go home to share lunch with the children. Active men, on the contrary, are believed to be less likely to skip lunch, but more likely to have long business hours affect the organization of eating practices beyond working hours.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

Eating practices may be based on norms, but they not necessarily are. Practical circumstances may prevent norms from guiding eating practices. In this chapter, we have distinguished between norms and practical circumstances in affecting eating

practices. This distinction is only made for analytical purposes. However, in practice, it is often hard to distinguish between the effect of norms and the effect of circumstances. In this study, it is not within our aim to measure the effect of norms and the effect of practical circumstances in a detailed manner. Instead, it is our aim to see which of the factors that are generally assumed to affect the organization of our eating practices, have an impact on eating practices in Flanders.

We argued that the importance attached to the ideology of the “proper” meal pattern is not uniform. Social class differences exist as far as the value of this ideology is concerned. Moreover, social class differences also exist in the implementation of this ideology. Not only the different appreciation, but also different circumstances may entail other eating practices. Despite the differential appreciation and implementation of the ideology of the “proper” meal pattern, this ideology is assumed to have an important impact on eating practices. Yet, some authors believe that the deconstruction of eating practices is due to the fact that the ideology of the “proper” meal pattern has lost its inviolable status. This hegemonic cultural code is believed to be under pressure nowadays by a variety of contradictory guidelines. In the following chapters, it is researched whether a change in eating practices is due to the absence of a hegemonic cultural code guiding eating practices. This is investigated by the contemporary importance attached to the norms guiding the proper meal and the three-meal pattern and its effect on eating practices.

However, if eating practices do not comply with the ideology of the proper meal and the proper meal pattern, this not necessarily implies that the ideology of the proper meal is not valued, but may also attest to the fact that it has become harder to put this ideology into practice due to practical circumstances. Changing circumstances may promote other attitudes towards eating practices. In this chapter, it was argued that the contemporary circumstances turn the proper meal and the three-meal pattern into a less likely manner of organising eating practices. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that it has become *easier to model eating practices in another, more deconstructed manner*. On the other hand, this is due to the fact that it has become *harder to model eating practices in the structured manner* as prescribed by the ideology of the proper meal and the proper meal pattern.

The widespread availability of food has made it *easier to model eating practices in a less restricted, and less structured manner with regard to time use, social context and use of space*. The widespread opportunities to buy or efficiently heat food (rather than cook a meal) in almost any place, at almost any time have increased the possibilities of eating at any time, with anyone or rather alone, and at any place. On the other hand, the conditions in the household and on the labour market have *turned the three-meal-pattern and the proper meal into a less self-evident affair*. The proper meal shared with the family is a self-evident affair in a household composed by a working father, a non-working mother and young co-resident children. It is in this household type, the young breadwinner family, that the proper meal is believed to assume real significance. This was argued in the first chapter of this study. In other household types, it is less self-evident for eating practices to be modelled according to this ideal. Another phase in the lifecycle may entail another organization of eating practices. The absence of a non-working mother turns the “proper” meal into a more problematic affair. The following chapters investigate how the household situation (household composition, phase in the lifecycle and labour-market engagement of the household) affects the temporal, social and spatial organization of eating practices and to what extent it promotes destructured eating habits.

Finally, the situation on the labour market is also less likely to model eating practices in terms of a proper meal and the three-meal-pattern. The strong emphasis on efficient time use among the active population, during working hours in particular, emphasizes the time spent on efficient goals, like paid work, and puts the status of a necessary activity like eating at stake. The decline of eating time, the increase in the number of skipped meals and the increase of other activities occurring during meals attest to that trend. Paid work also affects eating practices through its timing. Non-standard and unpredictable working hours are believed to result in more eating beyond proper mealtimes and more solitary eating. In the next chapters, it is assessed to what extent temporally, socially and spatially destructured eating habits with the active population in particular are due to the characteristics of paid work, rather than to the household-related characteristics, the wider availability of food and the absence of a hegemonic cultural code guiding eating behaviour.



## **Chapter 5 Unravelling the temporal organization of eating practices**

In chapter 4, we discussed a number of factors that might influence the way our eating practices are arranged. The assumptions that were raised in chapter 4 are tested in the following chapters. This chapter unravels the temporal organization of eating practices in Flanders. Earlier in this study, it was argued that eating practices are more flexibly organized with regard to time use nowadays than before. The temporal organization of eating practices reveals itself in various ways. Temporally structured eating practices assume that eating is awarded a separate status by being allotted adequate time. In this chapter, we first study why eating is allotted less time during the working week and on Sundays. In a second section, we investigate which factors promote that particular meals are skipped on weekdays and on Sundays. The autonomous status of eating also depends on the fact that eating is awarded exclusive attention during meals. In a third section, it is therefore researched why eating occurs with other, simultaneous activities. The temporal organization of eating practices finally entails that eating occurs on the proper times reserved for it. In a fourth and final section, we try to grasp the reasons behind eating beyond proper mealtimes.

For each analysis, the same structure is used as in chapter 4. Firstly, the impact of normative constraints is assessed. If people do not value fixed eating times anymore, we expect to find that their eating practices are more flexibly timed. We also investigate to what extent the social class differentiation in eating-related attitudes explains different eating practices. Next to norms, conditions are also believed to have an impact on the temporal organization of eating practices. For each aspect of the temporal organization of eating practices, we study the impact of the wider availability of food. Finally, the impact of household-related factors is studied. In case work-related factors have an impact on the temporal organization of eating, then the effect of work-related factors together with all above-mentioned factors is presented for the active population in particular.

## **5.1 Factors affecting the time spent on eating**

In chapter 3, it was clearly shown that the time allotted to eating has decreased significantly over time. In this section, it is our aim to assess why eating is allotted less time. We assume that other factors affect the duration of eating on working days than on Sundays. Work-related factors in particular, are expected to have an impact on the decline of eating time on working days, but not on Sundays. Moreover, daily eating time is significantly smaller on weekdays than on weekend days. Therefore, the time devoted to eating is investigated separately for weekdays and Sundays.

### **5.1.1 Who devotes little time to eating during the working week?**

Here we investigate why people devote only little time to eating during the working week. Working-week eating time is measured as a continuous variable. The normality of this distribution was tested and was considered satisfactory<sup>16</sup>.

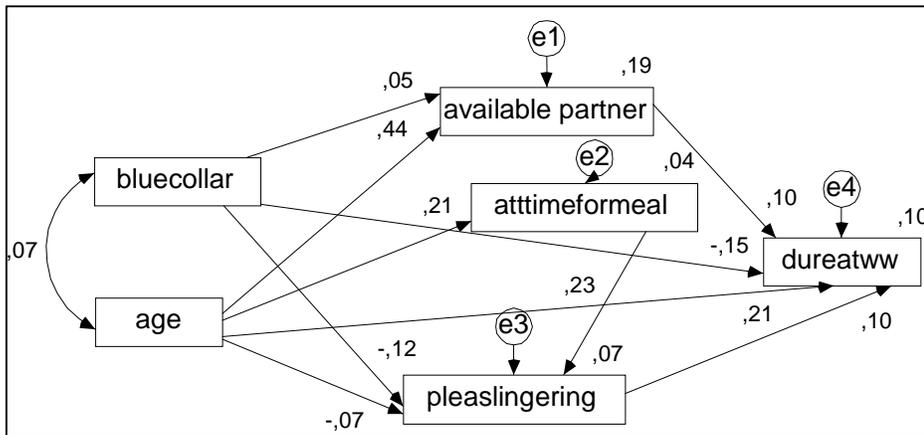
#### *The effect of attitudes on working-week eating time*

Attitudes on the duration of meals are expected to have an influence on the actual time spent on eating. The TOR'04 questionnaire contains two attitudes on the duration of eating. 82.1 percent of the Flemings agrees with the statement 'It is important to take the time to eat peacefully'. A large share of the Flemish population thus values that sufficient time is being reserved for eating. This finding attests to the fact that a hegemonic code exists, as far as the duration of eating is concerned. Nevertheless, this attitude only has a very modest, positive effect on the actual time allotted to eating during the working-week (Table 5:1). The effect of agreeing with the statement 'It is important to take the time to eat peacefully' is fully indirect, through a higher chance of valuing pleasantly lingering at the dinner table, the second attitude assessed in the questionnaire (Figure 5:1)

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<sup>16</sup> Although the ratios of the skewness statistic and the kurtosis statistic on the one hand, and their standard error on the other hand, are not between |2|, the skewness statistic itself is not higher than 0.7. A comparison of the estimated values and the registered values by means of a QQ-plot shows that there are no outliers and that the distribution of time spent on eating during the working week comes close to the normal distribution .

**Figure 5:1 Path-model explaining the time spent on eating during the working week, standardised regression weights and R-squares for observed, endogenous variables, model for total population (TOR'04)<sup>17</sup>**



**Table 5:1 Standardised total effects for the path-model explaining the time spent on eating during the working week, model for total population (TOR'04)**

Explanatory variables	Standardised total effect
Disagree with 'I don't care about pleasantly lingering at the dinner table'	0.100
Agree with 'It is important to take the time to eat peacefully'	0.023
Blue-collar	-0.154
Available, non-working partner	0.096
Age	0.248

Pleasantly lingering at the dinner table is still highly valued by the large majority of the Flemish population. 70.9 percent disagrees with the statement 'I don't care about pleasantly lingering at the dinner table'. Those who value pleasantly lingering at the dinner table allocate more time to eating during the working week than those who do not agree with this statement or have no opinion in this respect. The effect of the attitude towards pleasantly lingering at the dinner table is much larger than the effect of agreeing with the statement 'It is important to take the time to eat peacefully' (Table 5:1). Moreover, the effect of the former attitude is entirely direct (Figure 5:1).

<sup>17</sup> n=1505, R<sup>2</sup> durweat= 9.7%, Indicators of Model Fit: Chi-square= 3.442, DF=4, P=0.487, AGFI=0.996, Hoelter's .05= 4146

### *The effect of social class on working-week eating time*

The time-use data reveal a significant social class differentiation in the time devoted to eating during the working week: blue-collar workers spend less time on eating than white-collar workers and the self-employed (Table 5:1). This is in line with earlier findings by Fischler (1996c: 25), who found that children of managers spend more time at the dinner table than children in other social classes. The effect of social class on working-week eating time is not only direct, but also partly indirect, through another attitude towards pleasantly lingering at the dinner table (Figure 5:1). This finding is in line with Bourdieu's findings on social class differences in eating habits: social class differences not only appear from different practices, but also from a different *taste* (Figure 5:1). The appreciation for pleasantly lingering at the table and the longer duration of working-week eating time both attest to the formal approach to eating (*goût de luxe*), characteristic of the higher social classes, contrary to the more indispensable, essential approach towards eating (*goût de nécessité*), characteristic of the working classes (Bourdieu, 1979: 198). While the *franc-manger* of the working classes reduces eating to an informal refuelling of the body, the bourgeois way of dining is characterised by self-imposed formal rules which release eating from its natural roots (Bourdieu, 1979: 218). Yet, the effect of social class on working-week eating time is almost exclusively direct (Figure 5:1). The lower value attached to pleasantly lingering at the dinner table only plays a very modest role in explaining the negative relationship between being blue-collar and the amount of time allotted to eating during the working week.

### *The effect of the wider availability of food on working-week eating time*

We did not expect that the duration of eating would be influenced by the easier access to food. The time-use data do not report any significant effect of the availability of electrical appliances or living in an urban region on the time spent on eating. Yet, a higher income, which also allows for an easier access to food, was assumed to promote a more economic attitude towards the use of time, among the active population in particular. The effect of the household income was assessed among both the active and the general population, but was not found to significantly affect the time allotted to eating during the working week.

*The effect of the household situation on working-week eating time*

The household situation has a modest effect on the time spent on eating during the working week. Sheffe's post hoc test only reveals significant differences between couples with children and couples without children: parents spend less time on eating than non-parents, but, as expected, especially young children prevent that much time is allotted to eating during the working week. Families with the youngest child under 13 devote significantly less time to eating during the working week than parents with all children above 12 and families without children. However, in the final path-model (Figure 5:1), the presence of a young child is no longer significant in explaining the time allocated to eating during the working week. Children's age varies along with the respondents' age, hence the negative association between time devoted to eating during the working week and children's age, in the bivariate analysis.

As the household composition does not affect working-week eating time and age has no different effect on working-week eating time according to household type, only age, rather than the phase in the lifecycle, is included in the final model. The older one is, the more time one spends eating during the working week (Table 5:1). These findings are in line with earlier findings in the UK (Cheng, Olsen, Southerton and Warde, 2007: 44). Only a small part of the effect of age is indirect, through the importance attached to taking sufficient time to eat. The older one is, the more likely one is to attach importance to sufficient eating time. On the other hand, the likelihood of valuing pleasantly lingering at the dinner table decreases with age. Despite this indirect negative effect of age on working-week eating time, the total effect of age on working-week eating time is positive. Moreover, of all variables explaining working-week eating time age has the strongest effect (Table 5:1).

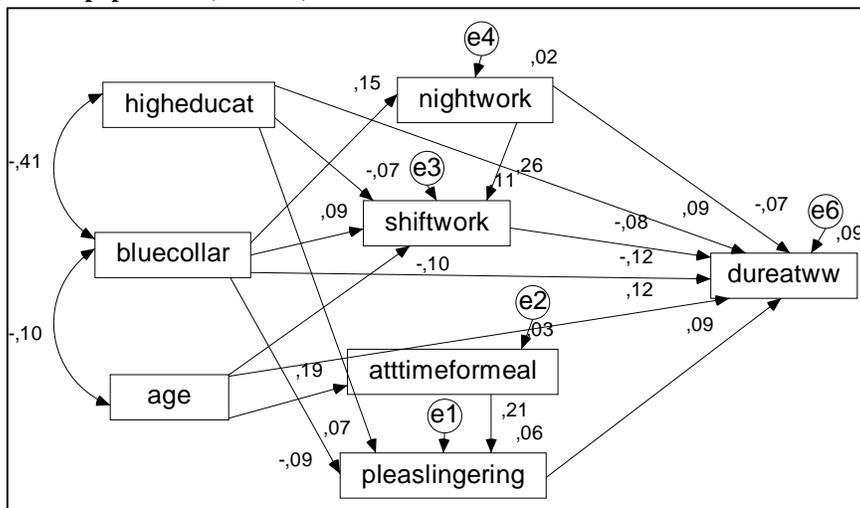
The household situation does affect the time devoted to eating during the working week, through paid work. The employment situation of the respondent is not significantly related to the time spent on eating during the working week, but is merely a correlate of age. The labour-market engagement of the partner, on the contrary, significantly affects the time spent on eating during the working week. It is not the presence of a cohabiting partner which results in more time spent on eating, but rather the availability of a non-working partner (Table 5:1). The availability of a

non-working partner at home partly explains the longer duration of working-week eating time with the elderly population, which has a higher chance of having a non-working partner at home (Figure 5:1). Having a non-working partner only affects working-week eating time among the non-active population<sup>18</sup>. It is only when the respondent is not engaged in paid work and has therefore more free time available that the non-engagement of the partner has a positive effect on the time devoted to eating.

*The effect of work-related factors on working-week eating time*

Work-related factors are believed to be important in understanding the time allocated to eating among the active population. The model for the active population differs from the model of the general population, through taking into account work-related factors and the omission of the effect of a non-working partner. For an active respondent, the presence of an available partner does not affect working-week eating time in a significant manner.

**Figure 5:2 Path-model explaining the time spent on eating during the working week, standardised regression weights and R-squares for observed, endogenous variables, model for active population (TOR‘04)<sup>19</sup>**



<sup>18</sup> We decided not to present a separate model for the non-active population, as this model results in a lower explained variance and we already present a separate model for the active population.

<sup>19</sup> n=969, R² durwweat= 9.2%, Indicators of Model Fit: Chi-square= 14.810, DF=11, P=0.191, AGFI=0.988, Hoelter's .05= 1287

**Table 5:2 Standardised total effects for the path-model explaining the time spent on eating during the working week, model for active population (TOR'04)**

Explanatory variables	Standardised total effect
Disagree with 'I don't care about pleasantly lingering at the dinner table'	0.092
Agree with 'It is important to take the time to eat peacefully'	0.019
Blue-collar	-0.149
Age	0.134
Always or regular nightwork	-0.097
Work schedule: shift work	-0.085
Highly educated	0.107

None of the work-related factors appears to have a significantly different effect on working-week eating time for active women than for active men. Therefore, a model was constructed for the entire active population. As with the model for the total population, social class and age have the highest total effect (Table 5:2). As expected, age has a direct positive effect on time spent on eating during the working week, but an indirect positive effect through a lower chance of doing shift work and the higher importance attached to taking time for the meal (Figure 5:2).

Working-week eating time also varies by professional category: manual workers spend less time eating during the working week than the self-employed and white-collar workers (Table 5:2). The negative effect of doing manual labour on working-week eating time is partly explained by the indirect negative effect through a higher chance of doing night work, which negatively influences the time spent on eating during the working week (Figure 5:2). Conversely, highly-qualified, clerical work entails that more time is allotted to eating during the working week. Being highly educated has a direct positive effect on time spent on eating during the working week and an indirect positive effect through a lower chance of doing night work and shift work (Figure 5:2).

The time-use data do not corroborate the thesis of the efficient approach towards time, characteristic of highly-educated work in the "knowledge economy". Highly-educated workers spend more time on eating during the working week than other workers. We

did not find a significant relationship between the household income and the time spent on eating during the working week either. We expected that a higher income and a high education would promote a more efficient, economic attitude towards the use of time, which would in turn result in less time devoted to the necessities of life, like eating. However, the lack of such a relationship may be due to the fact that the dependent variable takes into account all working-week eating time, and not only eating time during working hours or so-called “social production time”, as argued by Corbeau. In one of the next sections (5.2.1), it is investigated whether highly-educated work in the “knowledge economy” and a high income reduce the time allotted to eating during working hours, more particularly the likelihood of skipping weekday lunch. The lack of a positive effect between income and working-week eating time may also be due to the fact that the household income rather than the personal income is measured here.

The effect of work-related factors on working-week eating time is predominantly a matter of the arrangement of working hours. The nature of the work schedule proves to be significantly related to time devoted to eating during the working week, with significantly less time spent on eating by those working shifts, compared to other work schedules (Table 5:2). The timing of paid work within the day also significantly affects the time allocated to eating: regular night work decreases working-week eating time (Table 5:2). However, the path-model shows that the effect of doing night work is not due to the timing of work in the night, but rather to the fact that it is shift work (Figure 5:2).

Contrary to our expectations, the number of working hours does not affect the time devoted to eating during the working week. Due to the problem of compositional data in a model estimating time<sup>20</sup>, the amount of working hours is measured by means of

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<sup>20</sup> The effect of the number of weekly working hours is usually assessed by means of the amount of paid work reported in the time-use diary during the registration week. In case the dependent variable is also a duration, the problem of compositional data arises. This is the case here. We cannot explain the duration of working-week eating time as registered in the time-use diary by means of the duration of paid work during the working week as registered in the time-use diary. All the respondent’s activities during a set period of time, in this case the working week, sum to a constant, in this case 120 hours. This restriction violates the basic assumptions of a number of standard statistical methods. The time spent on various activities cannot vary independently. For that reason the weight of working hours was included through the dummy full-time/ part-time or through the self-reported, average weekly hours of work.

the working-hour measures in the questionnaire, rather than in the time diary. The self-reported number of working hours per week does not significantly affect the duration of working-week eating time. Only the number of working hours according to the employment contract has a negative effect on the time devoted to eating during the working week. This effect is very weak and exclusively indirect, through a lower chance of agreeing with the statement 'It is important to take the time to eat peacefully'. Due to the modest, indirect effect of the number of contractual working hours, and due to the fact that there is no indication of contractual working hours for the self-employed, we decided to omit this variable from the model and to present a model for the whole active population (including the self-employed) (Figure 5:2).

In spite of the large number of factors included in the model for the active population, only 9.2 percent of the variance is explained (Figure 5:2). In the model for the general population, 9.7 percent of the variance is explained (Figure 5:1). In contrast to what we found for the population in general, not age, but social class has the strongest effect on working-week eating time. The effect of social class, and of educational level, does not sustain the economic attitude towards time among the highly-educated clerical workers. Instead, it points to a more formal attitude towards eating time with the higher social classes in general: highly-educated, white-collar workers spend more time on eating during the working week. Although the low explained variance attests to the fact that the duration of eating during the working week is hard to explain, clear social differences according to age and social class appear to exist. In the next section, we investigate who devotes little time to eating on Sundays.

### 5.1.2 Who devotes little time to eating on Sundays?

On Saturdays and Sundays, Flemings devote more time on eating compared to weekdays. In this section, we focus on Sunday eating time, since Sundays have a special, leisurely character for almost all Flemings, which is not necessarily true for Saturdays. Although Saturdays less often correspond to working days nowadays than in the 1960s, for some people Saturday remains a working day. Sunday, on the contrary, is hardly ever a working day (Glorieux, Mestdag & Minnen, 2006) and has assumed a leisurely character for a long time. Moreover, Sunday dinner is considered

as the most important meal of the week. For those reasons we only investigate Sunday eating time<sup>21</sup> and do not go into Saturday eating time.

### *The effect of attitudes on Sunday eating time*

As with working-week eating time, we investigated to what extent attitudes towards meal duration affect the actual duration of Sunday eating time. The importance attached to eating time in general affects Sunday eating time in a positive manner. Agreeing with the statement ‘It is important to take the time to eat peacefully’ entails that more time is allocated to eating on Sundays. However, this effect disappears when age is taken into account. The older one is, the more likely one agrees with this statement. As on weekdays (Figure 5:1), one’s attitude towards taking sufficient time for eating does not directly affect the actual time reserved for eating on Sundays. On weekdays, this attitude (agreeing with ‘It is important to take the time to eat peacefully’) has a small, indirect positive effect through another attitude, namely disagreeing with the statement ‘I do not care about pleasantly lingering at the dinner table’. Sunday eating time, on the contrary, is not affected by the value attached to pleasantly lingering at the table. As such, neither attitude towards eating duration affects Sunday eating time.

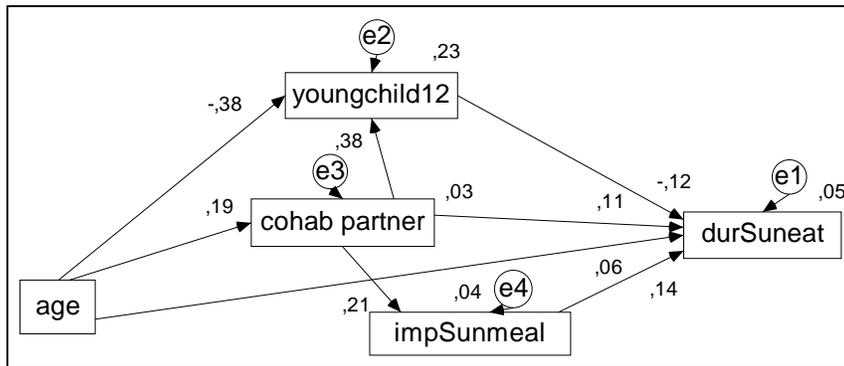
We also took into account the attitude towards the Sunday meal in particular. The importance attached to the Sunday meal<sup>22</sup> has a strong, positive effect on time devoted to eating on a Sunday (Table 5:3). The more one values the Sunday meal as a sociable occasion, the more time one spends on eating on a Sunday. Of all the explanatory variables included in the model, the importance attached to a sociable Sunday meal has the strongest effect on the actual time devoted to eating on Sundays.

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<sup>21</sup> Flemings spend on average 1h33’ on eating on Sundays. The time allotted to eating on Sundays is not normally distributed, but highly skewed to the right. 5 percent of the population registers an eating duration between 3h36’ and 8h59’. The normality of the distribution is also put at stake by the high number (6.8 percent) of zero-registrations. In order to approach a normal distribution as closely as possible, zero-registrations are removed from the distribution (only participants are preserved) and all extreme registrations (outliers) are recoded. More information on the recoding procedure can be found in appendix G. Although normality is not perfectly achieved, the adapted distribution is considered satisfactory (Skewness:0.522, SD Skewness: 0.061, Kurtosis:-0.530, SD Kurtosis: 0.123), so as to permit further analysis. (Skewness:0.522, SD Skewness: 0.061, Kurtosis:-0.530, SD Kurtosis: 0.123), so as to permit further analysis.

<sup>22</sup> More information on the construction of this variable can be found in section 4.1.

**Figure 5:3 Path-model explaining the time spent on eating on a Sunday, standardised regression weights and R-squares for observed, endogenous variables, model for total population (TOR'04)<sup>23</sup>**



**Table 5:3 Standardised total effects for the path-model explaining the time spent on eating on a Sunday, model for total population (TOR'04)**

Explanatory variables	Standardised total effect
Age	0.125
Cohabiting partner	0.093
Co-resident child younger than 13	-0.119
Importance sociable Sunday meal	0.139

*The effect of social class on Sunday eating time*

There are no social class differences in the time allotted to eating on Sundays. Contrary to what we found on weekdays, blue-collars devote as much time to eating on Sundays as white-collars and the self-employed. Obviously, the more relaxed and formal nature of the Sunday meal exceeds social class differences. This finding is revealing on social expectations and the meaning given to the Sunday meal.

*The effect of the wider availability of food on Sunday eating time*

The easier access to food is assumed to affect the timing of eating rather than the duration of eating. The time-use data confirm the lack of a significant relationship between the availability of electrical appliances, like a microwave oven or a freezer, or living in an urban region on the one hand, and the time devoted to eating on

<sup>23</sup> n=1522, R<sup>2</sup> durSuneat= 5.3%, Indicators of Model Fit: Chi-square= 3.160, DF=2, P=0.206, AGFI=0.994, Hoelter's .05= 2884

Sundays on the other hand. The level of the household income did not affect the duration of Sunday eating time either.

*The effect of the household situation on Sunday eating time*

Contrary to what we found for working-week eating time, Sunday eating time is affected by the composition of the household, but not by the labour-market engagement of the household. Living together with a partner significantly increases the time devoted to eating on a Sunday (Table 5:3). Having a cohabiting partner both directly and indirectly influences Sunday eating time (Figure 5:3). The direct effect of having a cohabiting partner is positive. In contrast to what was found for the working week, it is not the partner's availability (non-engagement on the labour market) that makes the difference, but cohabiting with the partner. The indirect effect of having a cohabiting partner is positive, through a higher chance of valuing the Sunday meal.

The total positive effect of having a cohabiting partner on Sunday eating time is partly counteracted by another indirect effect, namely the presence of young co-resident children (Figure 5:3). Children younger than 12 significantly decrease the time devoted to eating on Sundays (Table 5:3). Young children may seriously jeopardize the more relaxed and formal nature of the Sunday meal, which may eventually lead to the meal being finished quickly. In contrast to young children, older children are believed to be more active participants in family life and in the family meal (Serville and Trémolières, 1967; Fiese, Hooker, Kotary and Schwagler, 1993).

With age, the chance of having a young child in the household decreases, while the chance of having a partner increases. As a result, elderly Flemings spend more time on Sunday eating (Table 5:3). This effect is half direct and half indirect (Figure 5:3). The presence of a cohabiting partner and the absence of a young child both positively affect Sunday eating time. On Sundays as on weekdays, the effect of age on eating time does not vary according to the household composition: elderly people spend more time on eating than younger people, irrespective of their household situation. Therefore, only age, and not the phase in the lifecycle, is taken into account.

### *The effect of work-related factors on Sunday eating time*

For Sundays, we did not test a separate model for the active population. We did not expect work-related characteristics to affect the time devoted to eating on a Sunday. The TOR'04 time-use data sustain the absence of an effect on the time spent on eating on Sundays.

We may conclude that the time allotted to eating on Sundays is even more difficult to explain than working-week eating time. Only 5 percent of the variance is explained (Figure 5:3). Nevertheless, Sunday eating time is affected by other factors than working-week eating time. Sunday eating time is affected by the composition of the household and the attitude towards the Sunday meal. On weekdays, eating time does not depend on the household composition and only for a small part on attitudes. Instead, social class has a more important effect. However, both working-week and Sunday eating time increase significantly by age. On Sundays, people have a higher level of control over circumstances than on weekdays. This most likely results in a stronger impact of eating-related attitudes on eating practices on Sundays, compared to working-week eating practices. During the working week, the time devoted to eating also depends on work-related factors: regular night work and working shifts hinder the active population from allotting time to eating during the working week. In the following section, we focus on the time allocated to specific meals. More particularly, it is investigated why some people do not spend any time eating at the times reserved for eating, and thus simply skip a meal.

### **5.2 Factors promoting meal skipping**

In chapter 3, it was clearly shown that a considerable share of the population does not eat during mealtimes. On an average weekday, 45.5 percent of the Flemings does not register an eating occasion during the time meant for breakfast, while 28.1 percent skips lunch, and 26.4 percent skips dinner. On Saturdays and Sundays, the percentage of breakfast skippers is lower (43.4 percent on Saturdays and 40.3 percent on Sundays), while the percentage of lunch skippers (31.2 percent on Saturdays and 32.3 percent on Sundays) and dinner skippers (32 percent on Saturdays and 34.7 percent on Sundays) is higher.

Here we investigate which factors explain skipping weekday lunch, weekday dinner and Sunday dinner. Skipping breakfast is not tackled here. This short meal is not registered in a sufficient manner in the TOR'04 time-use diaries. More elaborate meals like lunch and dinner, on the contrary, are assumed to be registered in a sufficient manner. The non-registration of eating during the lunch period or the dinner period is therefore considered as the skipping of these meals. We consecutively tackle the skipping of weekday lunch, weekday dinner and Sunday dinner.

### 5.2.1 Who skips lunch on weekdays?

On weekdays the percentage of lunch skippers varies between 26.5 percent (on Wednesdays) and 30.2 percent (on Fridays). To investigate the likelihood of skipping lunch on weekdays, we prefer to use the information available on as many weekdays as possible. In the TOR'04 time-use survey, all respondents have filled in their time use during five weekdays. In this section, we investigate who skips lunch at least twice<sup>24</sup> during the working week, compared to skipping weekday lunch once at most. This dichotomy distinguishes between the large majority of the population with a regular lunch pattern (63.1 percent of the respondents) and a smaller group characterised by a more destructured lunch pattern (36.9 percent of the respondents). We did not succeed in constructing a meaningful explanatory model for the population in general. For that reason, we focus on the active population and investigate to what extent skipping weekday lunch is influenced by work-related characteristics. There is no significant difference between the active population and the non-active population in the likelihood of skipping weekday lunch twice or more during the working week. 37.7 percent of the active population skips weekday dinner at least twice per working week.

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<sup>24</sup> First, we studied which factors promote skipping weekday lunch at least once (58.3 percent of the respondents), compared to never skipping weekday lunch (41.7 percent of the respondents). Secondly, we assessed which factors promote skipping weekday lunch at least twice (36.9 percent of the respondents), compared to skipping weekday lunch once at most (63.1 percent of the respondents). Both dependent variables give rise to very similar explanatory models, but the latter has a higher explained variance.

From the literature review, we inferred that active women give up on their lunch break more easily than active men. The time-use data corroborate this: active women are significantly more likely to skip weekday lunch at least twice than active men. 41 percent of active women skips more than one weekday lunch, while this holds for only 34.9 percent of active men. These findings are in line with Poulain's findings for France: working men are less likely to give up on their lunch break on working days than working women. However, the analogy with French findings ends here. As far as the reasons behind skipping lunch are concerned, our findings are not in line with Poulain's study in France. The effect of a number of work-related factors on the likelihood of skipping weekday lunch appears to be significantly different for active men and active women. Therefore, separate models are presented for active men and active women.

- Working women's tendency to skip weekday lunch

Poulain puts working women's higher chance of skipping lunch down to their family responsibilities. Active women with a family would be more likely to cope with a higher workload by sacrificing the lunch break to work, rather than letting work affect the period beyond working hours, which is dedicated to their family responsibilities. Our analyses do not sustain this thesis. The composition of the family, the presence of co-resident children, and children's age do not affect the working women's likelihood of skipping weekday lunch.

The attitudes towards eating at set times or eating when hungry are not significantly related to the practice of regularly skipping weekday lunch either. Although working women have a lower chance of agreeing with the statement 'I eat when I am hungry' than working men (14.3 percent of active women agree versus 21.3 percent of active men), this attitude does not significantly affect working women's likelihood of skipping weekday lunch. Possibly other norms, that are not measured here, affect women's likelihood of skipping weekday lunch. It is possible that dietary concerns, rather than the attitudes measured here, encourage women to skip weekday lunch.

The only factors with an impact on skipping weekday lunch among working women are educational level and the nature of the work schedule. As expected, shift work

promotes skipping weekday lunch. For shift workers, proper mealtimes do not operate as *Zeitgebers* in their daily meal pattern. Contrary to our expectations, we found that a higher education not only results in more working-week eating time among the active population, but also in a lower chance of skipping lunch twice or more among active women. Yet, the effect of educational level and shift work on skipping lunch is modest. Only 5.2 percent of the variance is explained. Therefore this model is not shown here and we focus on the explanatory model for active men, with an explained variance of 15.5 percent.

- Working men's tendency to skip weekday lunch

For active men, the practice of skipping at least two weekday lunches can more easily be explained. Skipping weekday lunch is much more affected by work-related factors among active men than among active women. Household-related factors do not affect the likelihood to skip at least *two* weekday lunches. Nevertheless, in the model that explains skipping at least *one* weekday lunch, the presence of a non-working partner is significant. The presence of a non-working partner promotes taking all five weekday lunches, while the absence of a non-working partner increases the odds of skipping at least one lunch during the working week. Once we distinguish between skipping weekday lunch *at least twice* and skipping lunch once at most, the presence of a non-working partner is no longer significant. Men's attitude towards eating at one's personal discretion, as far as timing is concerned, also affects the likelihood of skipping weekday lunch. Those who agree with the statement 'I eat when I am hungry' are significantly more likely to skip weekday lunch at least twice during the working week (Table 5:4).

**Table 5:4 Model explaining the probability of skipping two or more weekday lunches, Exp(B)-effects, model for active men (TOR'04)**

<b>Intercept</b>	2.105*
<b>Work schedule</b>	**
Shiftwork	Ref.
Other work schedule	0.306
<b>Night or evening work</b>	***
Never or exceptional night and evening work	Ref.
Always or often night or evening work	3.412
<b>Attitude 'I eat when I am hungry'</b>	**
Disagree/ no opinion	Ref.
Agree	1.905
N	533
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	15.5% (11.6%)*

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

Nevertheless, the likelihood of skipping weekday lunch twice or more is especially affected by work-related factors. Among active men as well as active women, working shifts significantly enhances skipping weekday lunch compared to other work schedules, like working fixed hours and days, working flexible hours and periods of work alternated by periods of non-activity. The same holds for doing night work or evening work. As both regular evening work and regular night work have a separate effect on the skipping on weekday lunch, a combined variable was constructed taking into account both types of work on non-standard times. Regular night work or evening work significantly increase the likelihood of skipping two or more weekday lunches compared to never engaging in night and evening work (Table 5:4). These findings are in line with our expectations. We expected irregularly timed work schedules to result in more destructured eating patterns. Working shifts and regular night work or evening work often go together. The working times characteristic of such work schedules often do not allow to take into account regular mealtimes, like weekday lunch. At those times, night workers are in bed rather than at the dinner table, while shift workers may be at work finishing the morning shift.

Next to the timing of work and the type of work schedule, the nature of paid work is also assumed to affect the likelihood of skipping weekday lunch: workers who perform clerical work are believed to have a higher tendency to skip lunch than manual workers. In contrast to most clerical work, manual work does not allow for work to be interrupted at any moment of the day, and more likely restricts eating to

the breaks reserved for eating. However, clerical work (blue-collar versus white-collar) and, more particularly, in the “knowledge sector” (highly-educated jobs) does not increase the tendency to skip weekday lunch. Analogously, a high number of working hours does not promote skipping weekday lunch either. We had, however, expected that coping with a high workload would increase the odds of skipping weekday lunch.

The above shows that the likelihood of skipping weekday lunch is hard to explain. We did not reach a sensible model for the general population. Skipping weekday lunch is most affected by the timing of work, which results in the inability to take a break between 11:50 and 13:50. The timing of work, more particularly working nights, evenings or in shifts, does not allow workers to eat at noon. Working in shifts entails that meals cannot operate as *Zeitgebers*. This holds for men as well as women, although the effect is much stronger among men. The above analyses do not sustain the thesis of skipping lunch due to a high workload, for men nor for women. Men and women have lunch during the working week, irrespective of their workload and their responsibilities in the household. Although women were more likely to skip weekday lunches, this was not due to their household responsibilities or the reconciling of work and household responsibilities. In the next section, we assess to what extent work-related factors and other factors affect the skipping of weekday dinner.

### 5.2.2 Who skips dinner on weekdays?

The percentage of dinner skippers on weekdays varies between 23.9 percent (on Tuesdays) and 30.2 percent (on Fridays). As with weekday lunch, we prefer to study the weekly dinner pattern, rather than dinner behaviour on a specific weekday. Here we investigate why people skip dinner at least twice<sup>25</sup> during the working week. The large majority (65.5 percent) of the population shows a regular weekday dinner pattern, registering at least four of the five weekday dinners, while a smaller share of the population (34.5 percent) has skipped weekday dinner at least twice during the

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<sup>25</sup> First, we investigated which factors promote skipping at least *one* weekday dinner. In the second scenario, we investigated which factors promote skipping weekday dinner at least *twice*. Both scenarios concur to a large extent, as far as the nature of explanatory variables is concerned. However, the explained variance for the model explaining skipping weekday dinner at least twice is considerably higher than the model explaining skipping dinner at least once. Therefore, this model is presented here.

working week. It was impossible to generate a meaningful model for the general population explaining the skipping of weekday dinner by means of the available, explanatory factors. For that reason, we only focus on the active population.

There is no significant difference between the active population and the non-active population in the likelihood of skipping weekday dinner: 35.3 percent of the active population has skipped weekday dinner at least twice during the working week. We assumed that work-related factors would strongly affect the skipping of weekday dinner. As with weekday lunch, there are significant interaction effects for sex as far as the impact of work-related factors on skipping weekday dinner is concerned. Therefore, separate models are presented for active men and active women.

- Working women's tendency to skip weekday dinner

Active women's likelihood of skipping weekday dinner is not affected by attitudes, neither is it affected by the household situation. The same conclusion holds for skipping weekday lunch (see 5.2.1). For active women, the likelihood of skipping weekday dinner is only due to work-related factors, more particularly to the amount of working hours and the regularity of the working time. Spending full days at work, rather than working part-time, enhances the chance of skipping the evening meal during the working week. However, in contrast to what we expected, the exact number of working hours does not affect the chance of skipping weekday dinner. This holds for active men as well as for active women. For active women in particular, the categorization of the workload in terms of full-time or part-time provides a better explanation for skipping weekday dinner than the total number of hours that are worked (Table 5:5). The regularity of the work schedule also promotes the regularity of the meal pattern. Another work schedule than working fixed hours and days enhances the likelihood of skipping weekday dinner (Table 5:5). This finding is in line with our expectations. However, we are surprised not to find the same effect among active men.

**Table 5:5 Model explaining the probability of skipping two or more weekday dinners, Exp(B)-effects, model for active women (TOR'04)**

<b>Intercept</b>	(0.805)
<b>Number of working hours</b>	**
Part-time	Ref.
Full-time	1.890**
<b>Work schedule</b>	**
Fixed hours and days	Ref.
No fixed hours and days	2.054
<b>Household income</b>	0.855*
N	417
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	8.1% (5.9%)***

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

Active women also have a lower chance of skipping weekday dinner twice or more, when the family income is higher (Table 5:5). This finding runs counter to our expectations: we expected a higher income to result in a more rational, economic attitude towards the use of time and hence a higher likelihood of skipping meals, especially during working hours. The effect of the household income is not due to the composition of the household: the number of household members and the presence of a working partner did not harm the effect of the household income. We assume that the negative effect of the household income on the likelihood of skipping weekday dinner points to another view on time, once the working day is finished. Although we did not find any indication that a high income results in a economic view on time during the working hours (i.e. a higher chance of skipping weekday lunch), a high income probably promotes a more relaxed view on time beyond working hours and as such, it hinders the likelihood of skipping weekday dinner.

The thesis of a higher likelihood of skipping meals among the highly-educated employees is not sustained by the time-use data either. The likelihood of skipping dinner twice or more is not higher among highly-educated women than among women with a lower degree of education. Moreover, women doing clerical work (white-collar) less often skip weekday dinner than women who are self-employed or do manual labour. However, the white-collar effect disappeared once it was controlled for the combination of the work schedule, the number of working hours and the household income. Clerical work is more likely to occur on fixed hours and in a part-time arrangement and to entail a higher income than manual work, hence the negative association between clerical work and skipping weekday dinner. By taking into

account the number of working hours, the type of work schedule and the level of the household income, 8.1 percent of the total variance is explained (Table 5:5).

- Working men’s tendency to skip weekday dinner

Other factors affect the practice of skipping weekday dinner among active men than among active women. 34.4 percent of active men skips weekday dinner at least twice during the working week. Contrary to what we found for active women, among active men, the skipping of weekday dinner is affected by the household composition. Active men have a higher chance of skipping dinner when they live alone (Table 5:6). All other household-related factors are not significant. Active men’s skipping of weekday dinner is also affected by the attitude towards the timing of eating. This is in line with what we found for weekday lunch and again sustains the difference between active men and active women as far as the effect of the attitudes on their eating practices is concerned. Active men who agree with the statement ‘I eat when I am hungry’ are more likely to skip two or more weekday dinners (Table 5:6). Conversely, active men who agree with the statement ‘I think it is important to eat at set times’ are less likely to skip two or more weekday dinners (Table 5:6).

**Table 5:6 Model explaining the probability of skipping two or more weekday dinners, Exp(B)-effects, model for active men (TOR’04)**

<b>Intercept</b>	0.386***
<b>Household type</b>	**
Not living alone	Ref.
Living alone	2.238
<b>Evening work</b>	***
Never or exceptional evening work	Ref.
Always or often evening work	2.480
<b>Attitude ‘I eat when I am hungry’</b>	**
Disagree/ no opinion	Ref.
Agree	1.891
<b>Attitude ‘I think it is important to eat at set times’</b>	**
Disagree/ no opinion	Ref.
Agree	0.565
N	536
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	11.8 % (8.6%)***

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

Next to attitudes and the household situation, the likelihood of skipping weekday dinner also depends on work-related factors. The only work-related factor that affects

the skipping of weekday dinner among active men is the timing of work. Paid work on non-standard times, like regular night or evening work, promotes skipping weekday dinner (Table 5:6). However, regular night work often assumes regular evening work, and it is regular evening work (i.e. between 19:00 and 22:00), rather than night work, which promotes skipping weekday dinner (i.e. eating between 17:00 and 20:30). Therefore, only the effect of doing evening work is included in the final model (Table 5:6). Other factors related to the timing of work, like the predictability of the end of the working day and the type of work schedule do not affect the skipping of weekday dinner among active men. The number of working hours, the nature of paid work and the income level have no influence either. Workers are not more likely to skip weekday dinner when they have a heavy workload or a high income, or when they are highly educated and perform clerical work. Obviously, the efficient view on time characteristic of the highly-educated and high-income workers in the “knowledge economy” does not affect the skipping of weekday dinner.

The likelihood of skipping weekday dinner is difficult to explain by means of the available data. We could not present a sensible model for the total population. For the active population, different models are presented for men and women. Alongside the likelihood of skipping weekday lunch, the likelihood of skipping weekday dinner is better explained among active men. Only among active women, a high amount of working hours (working full-time) increases the tendency to skip dinner. The regularity of the work schedule promotes the regularity in the meal pattern: working in another schedule than fixed hours and days increases active women’s likelihood of skipping weekday dinner. Among active men, it is the timing of paid work during the day (i.e. evening work) that affects the likelihood of skipping weekday dinner. Contrary to what we expected, the household situation does not affect the odds of skipping dinner among active women. On the contrary, only active men are more likely to skip weekday dinner when they live on their own. In contrast to active men, women’s likelihood to skip weekday dinner is not affected by their attitudes towards the timing of eating. We conclude that the likelihood to skip weekday dinner is especially affected by work-related factors.

### 5.2.3 Who skips dinner on Sundays?

Sunday dinner is considered as the main meal on Sundays, but it is also the main meal of the week. Due to this status, this meal is assumed to be skipped least of all. As shown in chapter 3, this conclusion holds for 1966 and 1999, but it does not hold for 2004. 32.3 percent of the Flemish population skips the main meal on Sundays, while only 26.4 percent skips dinner on weekdays. We could not reach a sensible model that explains the likelihood of skipping Sunday dinner by means of the factors available in the TOR'04 dataset.

In this section (5.2) and the previous section (5.1), it was investigated which factors affect the time allocated to eating in general and to specific meals, in particular. The autonomous character of eating not only appears from the time reserved for eating, but also from the fact that eating is allowed exclusive attention, and is not disturbed by other, simultaneous activities. In the next section, it is investigated which factors entail that eating is being disrupted by other simultaneous activities.

## **5.3 Factors promoting disrupted eating**

When eating occurs with other, simultaneous activities, it cannot operate as a time-structuring, autonomous activity (Douglas, 1997: 41). Chapter 3 showed that although most parallel activities during meals do not threaten the autonomy of eating and although secondary eating activities are exceptional, a considerable share of the Flemish population engages in disrupted eating at least once in a full week. Here we first try to unravel why eating occurs simultaneously with other attention-demanding activities. Secondly, we study specific types of disrupted eating, namely eating while watching TV and eating while working.

### 5.3.1 Who engages in disrupted eating?

The average number of disrupted eating occasions per week amounts to 3.4. 72.62 percent of the Flemish population engages in disrupted eating at least once per week.

Due to the lack of a normal distribution<sup>26</sup>, we use a dummy as a dependent variable. We distinguish between a large share of Flemings (72.62 percent) who engage in disrupted eating at least once<sup>27</sup> in a full week<sup>28</sup> and a small share of Flemings who do not engage in disrupted eating.

*The effect of attitudes on the likelihood of engaging in disrupted eating*

The tendency to eat while simultaneously engaging in another attention-demanding activity goes hand in hand with a positive attitude towards this type of eating practices, more particularly agreeing with the statement ‘You might as well eat while doing something else’ and disagreeing with the statement ‘TV ruins the meal’. In Flanders, watching TV is not really considered as disturbing the meal. Only 41 percent of the Flemings believes that TV ruins the meal. Women are much more likely than men to hold a negative opinion towards TV-meals. While 48.3 percent of women agrees with the statement ‘TV ruins the meal’, this holds for only 34.4 percent of men. Moreover, the negative attitude towards TV-meals reduces the tendency to engage in eating while doing something else among women, but not among men.

The opposite holds for the more general attitude towards disrupted eating. Contrary to what we found for TV-meals, there is considerable unanimity on the non-compatibility of eating with doing something else. 71.8 percent of the Flemings disagrees with the statement ‘You might as well eat while doing something else’. Again, men have a significantly lower chance (69.1 percent) of agreeing with this statement than women (74.4 percent). However, this belief only affects men’s eating practices (Table 5:7). If a man disagrees with the statement ‘You might as well eat

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<sup>26</sup> The distribution is skewed to the right: there is a large percentage of non-participants (27.38 percent) and there is a long tail to the right.

<sup>27</sup> We constructed three dummies to assess the likelihood of engaging in disrupted eating. The first dummy discerned between engaging in disrupted eating at least once per week and not engaging in disrupted eating. The second dummy discerned between engaging in disrupted eating at least twice per week and engaging in disrupted eating once at most. The third dummy discerned between engaging in disrupted eating at least five times per week and engaging in disrupted eating at most four times per week. All three scenarios led to very similar conclusions. However, the model explaining for not engaging in disrupted eating compared to engaging in disrupted eating only once displays the highest explained variance. For that reason, we decided to present this model here.

<sup>28</sup> We do not distinguish between disrupted eating during the working week and on weekends. Previous, separate analyses for engaging in disrupted eating at least once during the working week and the weekend came to very similar final models. For that reason, the practice of disrupted eating is discussed here for a full week.

while continuing what you are doing’, then he is less likely to engage in disrupted eating. Women, on the contrary, are hardly ever affected by any *traditional* attitude related to eating behaviour. Possibly, other, non-registered attitudes neutralize the effect of more traditional attitudes towards eating behaviour on eating practices (Table 5:7). On the other hand, the smaller effect of attitudes on eating practices among women than men may be due to the fact that women are more subject to circumstances than men. Women may be less able to take their eating-related attitudes into account, due to their responsibilities for the household and for child care.

**Table 5:7 Model explaining the probability of engaging in disrupted eating at least once in a full week, Exp(B)-effects, model for general population, women and men (TOR’04)**

	General population	Women	Men
<b>Intercept</b>	1.662*	(1.352)	1.824**
<b>Labour-market engagement</b>	**	ns	***
Not working	Ref.		Ref.
Working	1.513		2.484
<b>Social class</b>	**	ns	***
No white-collar	Ref.		Ref.
White-collar worker	1.436		1.872
<b>Urbanization level of the place of residence</b>	**	ns	**
No urban region	Ref.		Ref.
Urban region	1.712		2.140
<b>Household income</b>	1.106**	<b>1.229***</b>	Ns
<b>Attitude ‘You might as well eat while continuing what you are doing’</b>	**	ns	***
Agree/ no opinion	Ref.		Ref.
Disagree	0.641		0.440
<b>Attitude ‘TV ruins the meal’</b>	**	**	Ns
Disagree/ no opinion	Ref.	Ref.	
Agree	0.681	0.562	
n	1416	765	778
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	8.6% (5.9%)***	5.7% (4.0%)***	14.4% (10.0%)***

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

*The effect of social class on the likelihood of engaging in disrupted eating*

Our analyses show that white-collar workers are more likely to engage in disrupted eating than blue-collar workers or the self-employed. However, the effect of social class only holds for the non-active population. This means that the difference between white-collar workers and blue-collar workers is not work-related, i.e. not due to the difference between clerical

work and manual labour. White-collars' higher tendency for disrupted eating occasions runs counter to the more formal attitude towards the meal among white-collars, but may indicate another use of time among white-collars. Possibly, the nature of leisure activities among white-collars allows better for disrupted eating than the leisure activities of the self-employed or blue-collars. The time-use data support the latter hypothesis: among the non-working Flemings, white-collars are more likely to eat while doing indoor leisure activities, like reading books, magazines or the paper, or computer-related leisure (e.g. chatting, internet surfing, computer games,...) than blue-collars.

*The effect of the wider access to food on the likelihood of engaging in disrupted eating*

Nowadays a wide range of foods which can be eaten while doing something else has become available. So-called finger foods allow for eating while walking, driving the car or watching TV. Urban regions are assumed to promote such types of disrupted eating. The busy lifestyle of urban dwellers and the infrastructure available in the city respectively demand and allow for multi-tasking at the same time. The time-use data reveal that respondents who live in the central municipalities of important conurbations have a higher chance of engaging in disrupted eating. However, this effect only holds for men and not for women (Table 5:7). Again, the difference between urban dwellers and others is due to specific types of disrupted eating. The time-use data showed that men in urban regions are more likely to engage in personal care and in indoor leisure activities while eating than men who do not live in an urban region.

The likelihood of engaging in disrupted eating also increases with the household income. The higher the household income, the more likely one is to engage in disrupted eating. However, this effect only holds for women (Table 5:7). A possible explanation for the direct positive relationship between a high family income and engaging in disrupted eating is the specific attitude towards time. A high income may lead to time being more valued as a resource, which in turn might result in spending less time on "trivial" activities like eating and sleeping. Unfortunately, this hypothesis cannot be tested with the available data. However, the time-use data reveal that women with a high income are more likely to engage in a variety of disrupted eating

occasions compared to women with a lower income. Women with a high income are especially more inclined to eat while doing paid work and household work. They also more often eat during personal care activities and indoor or outdoor leisure activities. These findings support the thesis of a different attitude towards time among women with a high income: they prefer to devote less time to trivial activities like eating, and give priority to necessary activities like paid work or household work or pleasurable activities like leisure activities.

*The effect of the household situation on the likelihood of engaging in disrupted eating*

Living alone was expected to entail more disrupted eating, as a manner for compensating for the loneliness during meals. However, the time-use data show that the chance of engaging in disrupted eating is not significantly affected by the household composition. Possibly, the lack of such an effect is due to the fact that all types of disrupted eating are measured here, and not only those that may be considered as compensating for the lack of a meal partner, like reading or watching television. In section 5.3.2, we go into eating while watching TV in particular.

Paid work also influences the likelihood of engaging in disrupted eating. This finding is in line with our expectations. We expected that disrupted eating is a strategy for coping with a busy lifestyle. The constraining nature of paid work may incite the active population to engage more in multi-tasking, among others disrupted eating occasions, than the non-active population. However, contrary to our expectations, the effect of the labour-market engagement of the respondent only holds for men (Table 5:7). The time-use data reveal that active men are much more likely than non-working men to engage in eating during paid work, but they also more often eat while doing household work or leisure indoors. Active men also more often have something to eat during social drinking activities, like a reception or the aperitif.

*The effect of work-related factors on the likelihood of engaging in disrupted eating*

The idea that the modern organization of paid work gives rise to more disrupted eating occasions is regularly found in the literature. Especially clerical workers are believed to approach eating in a very unstructured, but rational manner. The absence

of strict breaks and clear regulations as to when to interrupt work and the tendency to rationalise production time would push the modern eater to eat and work at the same time (Corbeau, 1996:191; Grignon, 1992, Poulain, 1998a). However, the data reveal that neither the amount of working hours, nor the timing of work affects the likelihood of eating while doing something else. As such, there was no reason to construct a separate model for the active population. Nevertheless, it is highly likely that work-related factors especially affect the tendency to eat during paid work, rather than during any other attention-demanding activity. This will be tackled in section 5.3.3.

We may conclude that disrupted eating is hard to explain. In the model for the general population, 8.6 percent of the variance is explained. However, the likelihood of engaging in disrupted eating is more easily explained among men than among women (Table 5:7). This practice is promoted by completely different factors among men and women. The different contents of disrupted eating among men and women partly explain the different explanatory models. Women with a higher income are more likely to engage in multi-tasking, more particularly eating while doing paid work or household work, than women with a lower household income. Men, on the contrary, more often eat during personal care or indoor leisure activities, when they live in an urban region. Active men more often register eating during paid work and household work, but equally register more social drinking occasions (with a small bite). This explains their higher level of disrupted eating than non-working men. Among non-working Flemings, white-collars register more disrupted eating occasions than blue-collars, due to another type of leisure activities that allow better for disrupted eating.

In this section, disrupted eating as a whole was explained, assessing which factors incite people to push eating to the “second” order and combine it with another disruptive activity. As shown in chapter 3, disrupted eating contains a variety of behaviours. Some of these are hot topics nowadays, like eating while working or eating while watching television. Because of their central role in the debate on deteriorating eating habits, these two practices of disrupted eating are discussed further in the next two sections.

### 5.3.2 Who eats in front of TV?

Eating in front of TV is often named as one of the main symptoms of our current decline in eating habits. This holds for the scientific (Serville & Trémolières, 1967; Dietz & Gortmaker, 1985) as well as the public (Berlin, 2001; Bowen, 2003) debate. It is assumed that eating while watching TV entails a variety of declining eating habits: eating junk food rather than a proper meal, sprawled in a chair rather than seated at the dinner table, using hands and fingers rather than knife and fork, and last but not least, totally absorbed by the television program rather than engaged in a family conversation. Watching television is the most common simultaneous activity while eating. 28.89 percent of the Flemings engages in a TV-meal at least once during a full week. However, with over 70 percent of the population not weekly engaging in such a practice, TV-meals remain an exceptional phenomenon in Flanders. In this section, we assess which factors promote that TV-meals occur at least once in a week<sup>29</sup>.

#### *The effect of attitudes on the likelihood of engaging in eating while watching TV*

Attitudes seem to be very important in understanding the practice of a TV-meal. The opinion towards watching television while eating has a strong effect on this practice (Table 5:8). Most probably this is due to the fact that the norm is very directly related to the practice assessed here. 41 percent of the Flemish population agrees with the statement ‘TV ruins the meal’. Those who agree with this statement are less likely to engage in such a practice. The attitude towards disrupted eating in general also affects the likelihood of engaging in watching television while eating, although to a lesser extent than the attitude towards TV-meals (Table 5:8). The more one disagrees with the statement ‘You might as well eat while doing something else’, the less likely one registers a TV-meal at least once in a full week.

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<sup>29</sup> We did not investigate whether separate models apply to the likelihood of watching TV during the working week and on weekends. The prevalence of TV-meals is too low to be assessed during a shorter period than a full week. Moreover, eating while watching TV is just as likely to occur on weekdays as on weekend days (see 3.1.4.3). For those reasons, eating while watching TV is assessed during a full week.

**Table 5:8 Model explaining the probability of eating while watching TV at least once in a full week , Exp(B)-effects, model for general population (TOR'04)**

<b>Intercept</b>	(1.211)
<b>Lifecycle phase</b>	***
Living alone, with parents or younger than 40 in couple	Ref.
In couple with children, in couple at least 40 years old	0.595
<b>Social class</b>	**
No blue-collar	Ref.
Blue-collar	0.691
<b>Attitude 'TV ruins meal'</b>	***
Disagree/ no opinion	Ref.
Agree	0.352
<b>Attitude 'You might as well eat while doing something else'</b>	*
Agree/ no opinion	Ref.
Disagree	0.744
n	1502
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	10.8 % (7.5%)***

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

*The effect of social class on the likelihood of engaging in eating while watching TV*

Blue-collars are less likely to register TV-meals than white-collars (Table 5:8). This is in line with earlier findings on disrupted eating in general, but runs counter to what was found in the literature. Charles and Kerr (1988) and Herpin (1988) diagnosed that TV-meals occurred more with the lower social classes than with the higher social classes. However, in line with our expectations and earlier findings by Fischler (1996c), blue-collars have a more favourable attitude towards eating while watching TV. Only 38.6 percent of blue-collars agrees with the statement 'TV ruins the meal', while 46.5 percent of the self-employed and the white-collar believe that TV ruins the meal. Nevertheless, despite their positive attitude towards TV-meals, blue-collars are less likely than white-collar and the self-employed to engage in such a practice.

*The effect of the wider availability of food on the likelihood of engaging in eating while watching TV*

Although the wider availability of food is assumed to promote disrupted eating in general, this does not hold for TV-meals in particular. Eating while watching television is predominantly a domestic activity. We did not expect such a practice to be enhanced by living in an urban region. Moreover, eating while watching TV needs

not necessarily be considered as a type of multi-tasking, but possibly as a specific type of indoor leisure. As such we do not assume that a higher income promotes such a practice. The time-use data confirm the lack of a relationship between living in an urban region and the household income on the one hand, and the likelihood of watching TV while eating on the other hand.

*The effect of the household situation on the likelihood of engaging in eating while watching TV*

Watching television during the meal is often assumed to hinder the sociable character of the meal: already in 1967 Serville and Trémolières emphasized the devastating role of television on the family meal. For them, television was *'l'ennemi n°1 de cet échange familial'* [the enemy number one of this family encounter] (Serville and Trémolières, 1967: 58). Despite the generally assumed negative impact of television, especially on the meal's sociable nature, recent studies have also indicated the positive impact of television: people often try to go about with the loneliness by turning on the radio or television or by feeding a pet at the same time (Sidenvall, Nydahl and Fjellström, 2000: 415-416; Fjellström, Sidenvall and Nydahl, 2001). A study by Caughey has shown that people derive meal partners from mass media, through interaction with the TV characters in artificial relationships (Caughey, 1984 in Sobal, 2000). Kaufmann (2005: 128) concludes that the role of television in the meal setting cannot be generalised and depends on the situation.

Our research sustains the thesis that the TV-meal not automatically puts at stake the sociable character of the meal. Living alone promotes eating while watching television, while TV-meals are avoided when significant others, like co-resident children or a cohabiting partner, are present (Table 5:8). This can be interpreted in various manners. On the one hand, the presence of family members may be considered as not necessitating or not allowing for the TV, as a family conversation is more appreciated. In this case, TV is a mere substitute for real meal partners (Sidenvall, Nydahl and Fjellström, 2000: 415-416; Fjellström, Sidenvall and Nydahl, 2001). On the other hand, the presence of children at the dinner table may be the reason for creating a meal setting that is as proper and ideal as possible. Children should be taught the right example and the eating occasion should therefore be a

sociable, organized and smoothly passing occasion. The fact that having co-resident children in the household results in a higher chance of agreeing with the statement ‘TV ruins the meal’, certainly provides extra evidence for the latter interpretation.

Earlier studies have shown that television functions as a substitute for meal partners, especially among elderly singles (Sidenvall, Nydahl and Fjellström, 2000: 415-416; Fjellström, Sidenvall and Nydahl, 2001). Yet, we did not find a significant difference in the practice of TV-meals between elderly single-living persons and younger single-living persons. In fact, watching TV while eating is more characteristic of the younger population in general. Young people who still live with their parents are more likely to engage in eating while watching TV than parents with co-resident children. Moreover, persons younger than 40 who live in a childless couple are more likely to eat while watching TV than persons over 40 who live in a childless couple. These findings are in line with Marshall, Kemmer and Anderson’s findings from their study with young couples for the effect of living together or marriage on eating habits. Despite the fact that the dinner table generally was considered as the proper meal setting, most couples preferred to have dinner in the sofa, in front of TV. Most of these young couples did not consider TV as an obstacle to a conversation. TV often only served as background noise. Those that did consider TV as an obstacle to a conversation, tried to expel television from the meal setting (Kemmer, Anderson and Marshall, 1998a; Marshall and Anderson, 2002). As such, the effect of age on TV-meals only holds for respondents living in a childless couple. For parents (single parents or parents in couple) or those who live alone or with the parents, age does not affect the likelihood of engaging in TV-meals. Due to the interaction effect between age and the composition of the household, a combined variable was constructed distinguishing between those who live alone, with parents or young respondents who live in a childless couple on the one hand, and persons who live with a co-resident child or middle-aged and elderly respondents who live in a childless couple, on the other hand.

The difference in the likelihood of engaging in a TV-meal by lifecycle phase goes hand in hand with different attitudes. Only 27.9 percent of the Flemings who live alone, with the parents or in a young childless couple, agrees with the statement ‘TV ruins the meal’, while this holds for 48.8 percent of the Flemings who live with co-

resident children or respondents above 40 who live in a childless couple. Analogously, only 61 percent of the Flemings who live alone, with the parents or in a young childless couple disagrees with the statement 'You might as well eat while continuing what you are doing', while 77.4 percent of the Flemings who live with co-resident children or respondents above 40 who live in a childless couple disagrees with this statement.

### *The effect of work-related factors on the likelihood of engaging in eating while watching TV*

As mentioned earlier, TV-meals are predominantly domestic occasions that are most likely to be considered as a specific type of indoor leisure. As such we do not assume that work-related factors affect such a practice. Therefore, this practice is not investigated separately for the active population.

#### 5.3.3 Who eats while working?

Besides watching television, paid work is also believed to be one of the main simultaneous activities to threaten the autonomy of the meal nowadays. Due to its emphasis on efficient time use and the absence of strict breaks and clear regulations as to when to interrupt work, the modern eater would increasingly be pushed to eat and work at the same time (Corbeau, 1996:191; Grignon, 1992, Poulain, 1998a). Contrary to what is often proclaimed in public opinion (VDAB, 2003), eating while working is not such a widespread practice in Flanders. Only 9.65 percent of respondents engage in such a practice at least once during the working week. With the active population, this figure amounts to 14.9 percent (Table 5:9), which clearly points to the exceptional nature of such a practice in Flanders. This dichotomy is too skewed to study the factors that lead to such a practice, by means of logistic regression. Therefore, some crosstabs are constructed to see in what subgroups of the active population the practice of simultaneously eating and working occurs. Significant relationships exist between work-related characteristics and the attitude towards eating while doing something else on the one hand and the practice of eating while doing paid work on the other hand.

**Table 5:9 Percentage of the active population engaged in eating during paid work by background characteristics (TOR'04)**

	<b>% engaged in eating during work</b>	<b>Cramer's V</b>
<b>General (n=995)</b>	14.5%	
<b>Agree/ no opinion 'You might as well eat while doing something else' (n=307)</b>	18.9%	0.074*
<b>Disagree 'You might as well eat while doing something else' (n=674)</b>	13.2%	
<b>No predictable end of working day (n=300)</b>	19.0%	0.079*
<b>Predictable end of working day (n=675)</b>	12.9%	
<b>Never or occasional night work (n=892)</b>	13.9%	0.090**
<b>Always or regular night work (n=97)</b>	24.7%	
<b>Never or occasional evening work (n=770)</b>	12.9%	0.083*
<b>Always or regular evening work (n=219)</b>	19.0%	
<b>Low education (n=283)</b>	10.2%	0.089*
<b>Middle education (n=378)</b>	15.3%	
<b>High education (n=333)</b>	18.3%	

The likelihood of eating while working at least once a week is lower when one disagrees with the statement 'You might as well eat while doing something else'. However, the relationship between this attitude and the likelihood of engaging in eating while working is weak (Cramer's V= 0.074) (Table 5:9).

We found no significant difference between active men and active women in the likelihood of engaging in eating while working. We expected to find more women engaging in simultaneously eating and working, as their family responsibilities allow them to meet with an increasing workload by having the lunch break spent working. There is no significant difference either between active fathers and active mothers in their likelihood of engaging in eating while working, even when there are young children living in the household.

Work-related factors affect the likelihood of eating while working in a weak but significant manner (Table 5:9). The practice of eating while working seems to be especially enhanced by non-standard and unpredictable working hours. Not having a fixed end of the working day is found to increase the chance of combining work and

eating. Regular night work and evening work also increase the likelihood of eating while working (Table 5:9). Besides the timing of work, the type of work also affects the likelihood of eating while working. As expected, eating while working occurs more among workers with highly-qualified, highly-educated jobs (Table 5:9). Small proprietors show the highest chance of engaging in such a practice, followed by higher grade professionals. Such jobs require a high level of responsibility and often also a high number of working hours. Moreover, these highly skilled, clerical jobs also often allow for eating to be continued during work, in contrast to manual labour. Next are lower grade technicians and supervisors of manual workers. Manual workers and farmers are least likely to engage in eating while working. This type of work often does not allow for eating to be combined with work (Table 5:10).

**Table 5:10 Percentage of the active population engaged in eating during paid work at least once per week by professional category (TOR'04)**

<b>Professional category</b>	<b>% engaged in eating during work</b>	<b>Cramer's V</b>
<b>Higher-grade professionals, administrators and officials, managers, academics</b>	21.7%	0.169**
<b>Lower-grade professionals, administrators and officials, supervisors of non-manual employees</b>	14.4%	
<b>Routine non-manual employees, higher grade</b>	13.0%	
<b>Routine non-manual employees, lower grade</b>	15.9%	
<b>Small proprietors, artisans etc with &lt;10 employees</b>	40.0%	
<b>Small proprietors, artisans etc without employees</b>	26.8%	
<b>Farmers and small-holders; self-employed workers in primary production</b>	6.3%	
<b>Lower-grade technicians; supervisors of manual workers</b>	17.6%	
<b>Skilled manual workers</b>	7.8%	
<b>Semi- and unskilled manual workers</b>	10.1%	
<b>Agricultural and other workers in primary production</b>	0.0%	

In the three first sections of this chapter we have investigated the factors that affect the autonomous status of eating by allocating less time to eating or combining it with other simultaneous activities. However, the temporal organization of eating does not only appear from the time reserved for eating, but also from the timing of eating. In the next section, we research which factors affect the timing of eating.

#### **5.4 Factors affecting the timing of eating**

As shown in chapter 3, most eating occurs on proper mealtimes. On Sundays, 67.7 percent of those who have registered an eating occasion have not eaten beyond proper mealtimes. On Saturdays this is somewhat less. On weekdays, and more particularly on Fridays, the percentage of eating occurring on atypical times is highest. In this section, we investigate which factors promote eating on atypical times during the working week and on weekends. We did not succeed in constructing a meaningful model for the weekend. This is not surprising and may be due to different factors. Firstly, the model for the weekend is less stable than the model for the working week, which is based on five weekdays rather than on one single Sunday. Secondly, behaviour is much less predictable on Sundays than on weekdays, which show a higher level of structure. Due to the lack of a meaningful model for Sundays, we only present the model for the working week<sup>30</sup>. Due to the non-normal<sup>31</sup> distribution of the share of working week eating time performed beyond mealtimes, a dummy is used as a dependent variable. This dummy distinguishes a small share group of Flemings (30.9 percent) who eat most on atypical times -that is during 22 percent or more of working-week eating time- from the majority of the Flemings, who rarely or never eats on atypical times.

##### *The effect of attitudes on eating beyond proper mealtimes*

Half of the Flemings seem to value set mealtimes: 49.4 percent of the population agrees with the statement 'I think it is important to eat at set times'. Those who disagree with this statement, have a significantly higher likelihood of engaging in eating at atypical times than those who agree or have no opinion. Although half of the Flemish population still values eating at set times, eating in between meals is generally not considered as morally problematic: only 26.5 percent of the Flemings

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<sup>30</sup> To assess the level of eating beyond proper mealtimes during the working week, we took into account all respondents who had registered an eating occasion on at least one working day. 87 percent of the respondents who had registered at least one eating occasion during the working week, had registered an eating occasion on each of the five working days. For that reason we prefer to work with the percentage of eating time occurring on atypical times during the whole working week, rather than during one working day.

agrees with the statement 'Eating in between meals is not done'. Those who disagree with this statement have a significantly higher chance of engaging in eating at atypical times than those who agree or have no opinion. Nevertheless, the attitude towards eating in between meals has a more modest effect on the practice of eating at atypical times than the attitude towards eating at set times.

Despite the fact that most people do not have a moral problem with eating in between meals, most Flemings do not believe that the timing of eating shall merely be adapted to bodily impulses. Only 18.1 percent of the Flemish population agrees with the statement 'I eat when I am hungry'. Those who agree that one should eat whenever hungry are more likely to eat at atypical times than those who disagree with or have no opinion on this statement. Nevertheless, this attitude has a very modest explained variance and disappears once controlled for the effect of one's attitude towards eating at set times. The attitudes towards eating at set times and eating in between meals correlate in a fairly strong and significant manner (Pearson correlation coefficient: 0.314\*\*). Due to this strong correlation, we decided to include only the attitude with the strongest effect on the practice of eating on atypical times, namely the attitude towards eating at set times (Table 5:11).

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<sup>31</sup> The share of working week eating time performed beyond mealtimes is skewed to the right: the larger the share of eating beyond mealtimes, the less prevalent this practice is in Flanders.

**Table 5:11 Model explaining the probability of spending at least 22 percent of working-week eating time beyond proper mealtimes, Exp(B)-effects, model for general population (TOR'04)**

<b>Intercept</b>	0.459***
<b>Lifecycle phase</b>	***
Non-committed lifecycle phase: living alone younger than 65, with parents or younger than 55 in couple	Ref.
Committed lifecycle phase: living alone 65 or older, with children, in childless couple at least 55 years old	0.579
<b>Social class</b>	**
No blue-collar	Ref.
Blue-collar	1.440
<b>Attitude 'It is important to eat at set times'</b>	***
Agree/ no opinion	Ref.
Disagree	1.483***
n	1488
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	4.5% (3.2%)

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

*The effect of social class on eating beyond proper mealtimes*

Due to their more informal attitude towards eating practices, blue-collar workers are assumed to be more likely to eat beyond proper mealtimes than white-collar workers. The TOR'04 time-use data corroborate this: blue-collar workers are more likely to engage in eating at atypical times than white-collar workers or the self-employed (Table 5:11). The more formal approach towards the meal, characteristic of the bourgeoisie (Bourdieu, 1979: 216-217), turns proper mealtimes into important *Zeitgebers*.

*The effect of the wider availability of food on eating beyond proper mealtimes*

The omnipresence of food is assumed to entail eating at any moment and therefore a higher chance of eating beyond proper mealtimes. The TOR'04 time-use data do not support this assumption. A high household income does not promote eating at any time. Contrary to what is often believed, the ownership of a microwave oven or a freezer does not promote eating at atypical times either. Apparently, this infrastructure allows better for eating at atypical times without however promoting such a practice. Such infrastructure can also be used for other ends than self-servicing, at one's own discretion. The only factor assessing the easier access to food which promotes eating beyond mealtimes in a significant manner is the urbanization level of the place of

residence. Respondents who live in the central municipalities of important conurbations are more likely to spend at least 22 percent of working-week eating time beyond proper mealtimes. However, the effect of living in an urban region was not due to the easier access to food in itself, but rather to the composition of the urban population. The higher likelihood of engaging in eating at atypical moments on a frequent basis is due to the type of families living in urban regions (urban dwellers are less likely to live in “traditional” families) rather than to the easier access to food.

*The effect of the household situation on eating beyond proper times*

The phase in the lifecycle has an important effect on the likelihood of eating beyond proper mealtimes. Both the composition of the household and age, affect the likelihood of spending at least 22 percent of working-week eating time beyond mealtimes. Moreover, a significant interaction effect exists between both factors. Age significantly affects the likelihood of engaging in eating at atypical times among respondents who live alone or in a childless couple. Elderly persons (65 or older) who live alone are less likely to eat on atypical times than young and middle-aged persons who live alone. Elderly persons (55 or older) in a childless couple are also less likely to eat beyond proper mealtimes than young persons in a childless couple. Age does not affect the likelihood of eating beyond proper mealtimes among respondents living in another household situation (living with parents, single parent or in couple with children).

Due to the significant interaction effect between age and household type, we constructed a composed variable that took into account both variables. We distinguished between seven lifecycle phases: respondents who live with their parents (1), young and middle-aged persons living alone (2), persons living alone aged 65 or older (3), single parents (4), persons living in a childless couple younger than 55 (5), persons living in a childless couple 55 or older (6) and persons living in couple with children (7). This combined variable entails a higher explained variance than the combination of household composition and age. However, not all of the seven lifecycle phases significantly differ as far as the likelihood of engaging in eating at atypical times is concerned. Only, two types of lifecycle phases significantly differ. Those who live with their parents and the young and middle-aged who live alone or in

a childless couple are much more likely to eat beyond proper mealtimes than elderly respondents who live alone or in a childless couple and respondents with co-resident children (Table 5:11). Apparently, the presence of children in the household results in more temporally structured eating habits: eating is less likely to occur beyond mealtimes. Children ask for regularity and thus for regular mealtimes. Contrary to what we expected, children's age did not affect eating beyond proper mealtimes. The presence of children, rather than their age, promotes eating at typical times.

Besides the presence of children in the household, a more advanced age also promotes more temporally structured eating times. This finding possibly points at a cohort effect: the older generations were raised with the value of eating at proper mealtimes and continue to eat in that way in later life. Unfortunately, the data available here do not allow to decide whether the effect of age is a cohort effect, rather than a pure effect of a person's age. Contrary to old age, being young and/or not committed to other household members like a cohabiting partner or co-resident children results in more eating beyond proper mealtimes. This lifecycle phase is characterised by a low level of commitment. The prevalence of eating beyond proper mealtimes in this non-committed phase of the lifecycle can be completely put down to the fact that time-structuring institutions, like a cohabiting partner and co-resident children, are still absent in this lifecycle phase. Persons who are in a non-committed lifecycle phase have less family commitments and more freedom to organize eating times according to their own preference (Table 5:11). These findings are in line with earlier findings by Kemmer, Anderson and Marshall (1998b: 207): for singles, who do not have to take others into account, eating a meal is an ad hoc, rather than an organized, event, which results in a less structured meal pattern. Setting up a family, on the contrary, assumes fitting in regular, shared meals as part of the daily routine (Sobal, Bove and Rauschenbach, 2002). Conversely, the absence of a partner or a family results in a more disorganized meal pattern (Kerr and Charles, 1986; Kemmer, Anderson and Marshall, 1998b: 200). With Gronow and Jääskeläinen, we may conclude that living together with others seriously promotes following socially shared meal patterns (Gronow and Jääskeläinen, 2001: 117) and therefore also eating on proper mealtimes.

Contrary to what we expected, the labour-market engagement of the household does not affect the timing of eating. The respondent's engagement on the labour market

does not promote the likelihood of eating beyond proper mealtimes during the working week. The labour-market engagement of the partner does not affect the timing of eating either.

By taking into account the phase in the lifecycle, social class and the attitude towards eating at set times only 4.5 percent of the variance of eating on atypical times can be explained. However, we also expect work-related factors, and more particularly the timing of paid work, to affect the timing of eating.

*The effect of work-related factors on eating beyond proper mealtimes*

The timing of work is assumed to have a significant effect on the timing of eating: more particularly, work beyond standard times is assumed to promote eating beyond proper mealtimes. The TOR'04 time-use data corroborate this thesis: only indicators assessing the timing of work are found to be significantly related to eating on atypical times. Working fixed hours and days and doing day work significantly decrease the likelihood of eating beyond proper mealtimes. People who do not work on standard schedules (shift workers, non-fixed work schedules) have a much higher chance of frequently engaging in eating on atypical moments (Lennernäs, Hambræus and Akerstedt, 1995: 262). Conversely, doing night work or evening work on a regular basis increases the likelihood of spending 22 percent or more of working-week eating time at atypical times. However, the effect of regular night work is due to the fact that night workers also mostly work during evening hours. Analogously, the effect of a regular work schedule (working fixed hours and days) disappears once controlled for the effect of regularly or always doing evening work. The effect of doing day work, on the contrary, is not affected by the effect of doing evening work (Table 5:12). The timing of eating only depends on the actual timing of work during the day, rather than on the unpredictable nature of work times. The predictability of the end of the working day does not affect the likelihood of eating at atypical times.

**Table 5:12 Model explaining the probability of spending at least 22 percent of working-week eating time beyond proper mealtimes, Exp(B)-effects, model for active population (TOR'04)**

	<b>Active population</b>
<b>Intercept</b>	(0.736)
<b>Lifecycle phase</b>	**
Non-committed lifecycle phase: living alone younger than 65, with parents or younger than 55 in couple	Ref.
Committed lifecycle phase: living alone 65 or older, with children, in childless couple at least 55 years old	0.625
<b>Social class</b>	**
No blue-collar	Ref.
Blue-collar	1.646
<b>Day work</b>	**
Never or occasional day work	Ref.
Always or regular day work	0.503
<b>Evening work</b>	***
Never or occasional evening work	Ref.
Always or regular evening work	2.718
N	
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	10.2%(7.3%)*

Besides the timing of work, the nature and the amount of paid work are also assumed to affect the timing of eating. Highly-educated work in the “knowledge sector” is believed to result in a higher likelihood of eating beyond proper mealtimes. The time-use data do not sustain this assumption. The educational level of the worker does not affect the likelihood of eating beyond proper mealtimes. Moreover, blue-collar workers are more likely to eat beyond proper mealtimes than white-collar workers and the self-employed (Table 5:13). We may conclude that although clerical labour allows better for interrupting work for eating beyond the fixed lunch breaks, this type of work does not promote eating at atypical times. The amount of work has no significant effect either, although we expected that the prevalence of eating beyond proper times would increase as the number of weekly working hours increased.

Once controlled for the combination of work-related factors, social class and the phase in the lifecycle, the attitude towards eating at set times no longer affects the likelihood of eating at atypical times among the active population. Clearly, practical factors like the lifecycle phase and the characteristics of work hinder people from putting their ideals into practice. When we take into account all practical factors, the ideals one holds no longer affect practices. The final model for the active population has an explained variance of 10.2 percent. This is considerably higher than what we

found for the population in general. For the active population, the timing of eating chiefly depends on practical factors, like the commitments in the household and the timing of paid work.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we tried to get an insight into the temporal organization of eating practices. It has become clear that the temporal organization of eating practices is hard to be explained. The explained variance of the models only exceptionally exceeded 10 percent. As already mentioned in the second chapter, time-use data are much more subject to accidental variation than questionnaire data. This partly accounts for the low explained variance. Despite the low explained variance, we can draw some important conclusions about the factors that influence the temporal organization of eating practices.

First of all, beliefs appear to have only a weak effect on the temporal organization of eating practices. The effect of most eating-related opinions on eating practices is very modest, compared to the effect of practical factors concerning the household or paid work. On the one hand this may be due to the fact that the statements in the TOR'04 questionnaire do not always assess the attitude towards the practice assessed in a very specific manner. When the attitude is strongly linked to the practice assessed, then the effect of the attitude is stronger. The attitude towards the importance of the Sunday meal strongly affects the time allotted to eating on Sundays, and the attitude towards TV-meals strongly affects the practice of eating while watching TV. Nevertheless, we expected more attitudes to influence the temporal organization of eating. The lack of such an effect may be considered as a proof of the gastro-anomy thesis as proclaimed by Fischler. Moreover, we also found that there is a lack of unanimity regarding some eating-related attitudes. While half of the Flemish population has no problem with TV-meals, the other half agrees that TV ruins the meal. Analogously, only half of the Flemish population considers it important to eat at set times, and only a quarter has a problem with eating in between meals. These attitudes clearly reveal that the ideology of the proper meal and the three-meal-pattern is not a hegemonic ideology in present-day Flanders. Other opinions exist.

Despite the low explained variances, the time-use data show considerable social differences in the temporal organization of eating practices, according to social class. The social class differences mostly confirm the less formal attitude towards food with the lower social classes. Blue-collar workers spend less time on eating during the working week, and the time devoted to eating during the working week predominantly depends on social class. Blue-collar workers also spend a larger share of eating time beyond proper mealtimes. On the other hand, blue-collar workers are less likely to engage in disrupted eating and TV-meals, despite their positive attitude towards TV-meals. Our findings underline the important difference between practices and attitudes. Although blue-collar workers are more likely to have a positive attitude towards TV-meals, in practice they are less likely to eat while watching TV. The higher social classes, on the contrary, are more likely to engage in disrupted eating and eating while watching TV, despite their more formal approach to eating apparent from their attitudes.

In spite of the generally assumed impact of the easier access to food, the time-use data show that the wider availability of food does not affect the temporal organization of eating habits. The only factor assessing the availability of food with an impact on the temporal organization of eating is the urbanization level of the place of residence. Urban dwellers are more likely to engage in disrupted eating than persons who do not live in a central municipality of an important conurbation. Although we were only able to assess the impact of the easier access to food by means of a few indicators, those used here are often proclaimed as promoting destructured eating habits, but were not found to be significant in our analyses. In contrast to what is often suggested, the availability of a freezer or a microwave oven in the household does not promote eating at atypical times. In the next chapter, it is assessed whether this type of infrastructure promotes solitary eating.

Compared to the above-mentioned factors, the household situation appears to have a considerable impact on the temporal organization of eating practices. Not only the composition of the household, but more generally the phase in the lifecycle, has an important impact on the temporal aspects of meal organization. The presence of a cohabiting partner or a co-resident child results in a more structured meal pattern: eating occurs less beyond proper mealtimes and less in front of TV. On the other hand being in a non-committed lifecycle phase results in a less temporally structured meal

pattern and more eating according to personal preferences. However, the presence of children does not always promote a more formal approach to the meal. On Sundays, eating time is shorter in families with young children, than in families with only older co-resident children.

The lifecycle phase is also strongly connected to the labour-market engagement of the household. Contrary to the composition of the household, the labour-market engagement of the household does not have a strong effect on the temporal organization of eating habits. Only engaging in disrupted eating in general, and eating while working in particular, are more likely to occur among the active population. The labour-market engagement of the partner also barely affects the temporal organization of eating: only among the non-working population the presence of a non-working partner increases the time allotted to eating during the working week.

In contrast to the labour-market engagement, work-related characteristics have an important influence on the temporal organization of work. Especially the timing of work seems to affect the temporal organization of eating. Working beyond standard times, like doing night work or evening work, or working shifts, results in less time allocated to eating during the working week, more lunches skipped and more eating beyond mealtimes. In contrast to what we expected, the amount of working hours hardly affects the temporal organization of eating practices: there was only a significant difference between full-time and part-time working women in their likelihood of skipping weekday dinner. Analogously, the nature of work hardly affects the temporal organization of eating. None of our analyses corroborate the thesis that highly-educated, clerical work in the “knowledge sector” promotes the temporal deconstruction of eating habits.



## **Chapter 6 Unravelling the social context of eating practices**

As argued earlier, eating remains primarily a domestic occasion. Due to the importance of household members as meal partners, the social context of eating strongly depends on the household composition. In the first section of this chapter, we study commensality patterns per household type. This analysis puts a different complexion on the conclusions drawn in chapter 3, which assessed commensality patterns in an average Flemish family.

In the next sections of this chapter, we try to get an insight into different types of commensality. In the second section, we investigate who spends a considerable part of eating time in social isolation. As the composition of the household determines to a large extent with whom one can eat, each type of commensality is only investigated for those respondents for whom it is an option. In the third section, we focus on primary commensality. Firstly we research why cohabiting partners only spend a small share of eating time together. Secondly it is investigated why parents only spend a small share of eating time with co-resident children.

For each analysis, the same structure is applied as in chapter 4. First, the impact of eating-related attitudes is assessed. Secondly, social class differences are researched. Thirdly, the impact of the wider availability of food is investigated. Finally, the impact of household-related factors is studied. The effect of work-related factors is presented for the active population in particular, together with all above-mentioned factors.

### **6.1 The influence of the family situation on the social context of eating**

The family situation one lives in, is of utmost importance in determining the opportunities for meal sociability. It is clear, for example, that primary interaction is much less probable for persons who live on their own than for persons living with a partner and children. For that reason, commensality patterns are first looked at attentively per household type. Five household situations are distinguished. The first group contains respondents who still live in their family of origin with their parent(s) and possibly also with siblings, but without a partner or children of their own. The

second group are single-living persons, who have left the family of origin (no co-resident parents), but who have no partner or children of their own either. It is however possible that these respondents live together with (less “meaningful”) others, such as siblings or friends. The third group includes single parents who live with at least one child. The fourth group lives in couple without a child in the household. The last group lives in couple with children in the same household, irrespective of children’s age. In practice, the age of co-resident children varies between 0 and 44 years old, with 72.7 percent younger than 18. Table 6:1 shows the weekly eating time spent in various social contexts per household type. It is clear from this table that different household compositions entail different commensality patterns. This is discussed in the following sections.

**Table 6:1 Average time spent on eating and relative share (column percentages<sup>o</sup>) in total eating time in various social contexts and with various interaction partners on a full week, according to family situation (TOR'04)**

	Sig Δ fam.sit	Living with parents		Singles living alone		Single parents		With partner		With partner and child	
Average weekly eating time	***	9:13		9:22		8:59		10:32		9:46	
<i>In the following social context</i>											
N		231	230	256	250	81	81	450	446	692	687
Alone	***	1:03	12.81%	4:47	52.58%	1:52	21.77%	0:47	8.92%	0:44	8.38%
Someone else present	***	3:03	35.58%	1:38	17.03%	3:04	37.18%	4:05	40.80%	3:19	35.81%
Together	***	5:03	51.61%	2:48	30.39%	3:58	41.05%	5:31	50.28%	5:32	55.81%
<i>With the following interaction partners</i>											
N		231	230	256	249	81	81	450	448	692	688
No interaction	***	1:04	13.25%	4:24	51.23%	1:51	20.87%	0:45	8.18%	0:43	8.18%
Primary interaction	***	5:46	63.07%	1:57	21.49%	5:24	59.62%	8:39	81.91%	7:41	79.16%
Partner	***	1:30	15.60%	1:31	16.33%	1:29	14.70%	8:36	81.28%	6:46	68.75%
Children in HH	***	0:00	0.09%	0:05	1.28%	4:25	51.26%	0:10	2.22%	5:36	59.48%
Partner and children together	***	0:00	0.03%	0:01	0.2%	0:44	8.20%	0:08	1.81%	4:44	49.61%
Parents in HH	***	4:23	48.55%	0:05	1.19%	0:14	1.60%	0:02	0.52%	0:04	0.80%
Siblings in HH	***	1:57	21.36%	0:08	1.55%	0:00	0.0%	0:01	0.20%	0:02	0.35%
Other members HH	*	0:16	2.55%	0:09	1.68%	0:06	1.0%	0:04	0.69%	0:07	1.18%
Secondary interaction	***	2:32	25.55%	2:10	21.82%	1:31	15.86%	2:12	19.57%	1:28	13.56%
Non-resident family	***	0:49	8.64%	1:07	11.48%	0:53	9.36%	1:22	12.25%	0:49	7.75%
Friends, acquaintances	***	1:47	17.56%	1:09	11.35%	0:42	7.09%	0:54	7.91%	0:41	6.24%
Neighbours	ns	0:02	0.35%	0:05	0.79%	0:01	0.27%	0:01	0.27%	0:03	0.51%
Work-related interaction	***	1:05	11.80%	0:39	8.79%	0:56	11.58%	0:38	6.51%	0:59	10.48%
Colleagues	***	1:05	11.78%	0:36	8.05%	0:54	11.27%	0:35	5.91%	0:56	10.07%
Clients, persons to whom services are extended	ns	0:00	0.17%	0:05	0.97%	0:02	0.46%	0:05	0.91%	0:03	0.67%
Tertiary interaction	ns	0:28	4.25%	0:32	5.50%	0:14	2.43%	0:30	4.26%	0:20	3.48%
Persons extending services	*	0:20	3.14%	0:25	4.36%	0:11	2.03%	0:23	3.23%	0:14	2.30%
Unknown	ns	0:09	1.41%	0:10	1.76%	0:03	0.56%	0:06	0.87%	0:05	1.10%
Others	ns	0:02	0.39%	0:04	0.64%	0:00	0.12%	0:03	0.58%	0:04	0.76%

<sup>o</sup> The column percentages for the social context count up to 100 percent. The column percentages for the various interaction partners count up to more than 100 percent as more than one type of interaction partner could be registered per activity. The sum of durations does not add to the average for the same reason. The white zones are a specification of the interaction types specified in the above-mentioned grey zone.

Statistically significant differences between family situations for relative shares: \*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, ns: p≥0.05

*Singles, living alone: the leading position in eating alone, partly compensated by secondary commensality*

Not surprisingly, singles take the leading position in eating alone, which takes more than half of their weekly eating time. There are significant differences in the prevalence of eating alone between singles, according to their age. As expected, singles younger than 35 spend a significantly smaller share of their weekly eating time alone than singles aged 60 or older (30.7 percent versus 68.2 percent). Half of the young (18-34 years old) singles' eating time is commensal. For the middle-aged (35-59 years old) singles, this is one third, and for the elderly (60-75 years old) singles, this is only 16.6 percent. Next to the largest share of solitary eating and the smallest share of commensal eating of all household types, singles are less often in a position where somebody else is present, without the eating situation being defined as sharing a meal. Obviously, single-living persons have a much lower chance that someone else is present during the meal, let alone that real meal partners are present.

For all household types, but for those living alone, primary interaction, i.e. interaction with household members (see 3.2.1), is the dominant type of meal interaction. For single-living persons, primary interaction is mainly interaction with their partner, who does not live with them<sup>32</sup>. Again significant differences exist between singles according to their age. Especially young singles seem to have much primary interaction during meals. 31 percent of their weekly eating time is spent in primary interaction. Among the middle-aged and elderly singles respectively, this is only 19.2 percent and 18.3 percent of weekly eating time. Persons who live alone try to compensate for the absence of “meaningful” meal partners by engaging more in secondary interaction. Only for singles, primary and secondary interaction are equally important. 21.8 percent of weekly eating time is spent in secondary interaction. Non-resident family and friends both account for half of this time. These findings are in line with French findings on singles' higher level of secondary sociability, compared to families with children (Larmet, 1998). Again, there is a significant difference between elderly singles on the one hand, and young and middle-aged singles on the

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<sup>32</sup> 24 percent of those who live alone claims to have a steady partner. Interaction with their partner is considered as primary interaction in their time-use diaries, although *strictu sensu*, their partners are not household members.

other hand. Sharing meals with non-resident family and with friends and acquaintances is much more characteristic of the young and middle-aged singles. Only 13.5 percent of elderly singles' weekly eating time occurs in secondary interaction. For middle-aged and young singles, this is about 28 percent. We may conclude that for elderly singles, the absence of (significant) household members results in more solitary eating rather than in more secondary meal interaction. These findings corroborate the negative impact on commensality of living alone, especially for elderly people. Single-living persons withdraw more into themselves and into the domestic atmosphere as they grow older (Larmer, 2002).

Single-living persons also spend very little time in work-related interaction during meals. The reason for this is the fact that only 40 percent of singles are employed. The average age of singles is 52. Again, significant differences exist between singles according to age. Young singles spend 17.8 percent of weekly eating time with colleagues and fellow students, while this is only 1.9 percent for elderly singles.

*Living with the parents: withdrawing from the parental home, friends become important meal partners*

Respondents who still live with their parents spend about half of their weekly eating time with their parents. However, they also like to share a meal with their steady partner<sup>33</sup>: about 1h30' or 15.6 percent of weekly eating time is spent with their steady partner. Young adults who still live with their parents do not value family commensality to the same extent as persons in another lifecycle phase. From a study on young people's life course perspectives, it appeared that 62 percent of young people aged between 19 and 36 agreed with the fact that eating with the family is an important tradition<sup>34</sup>. However, there were significant differences between respondents who had left the parental home and respondents who still lived with their parents. Of those still living in the parental home, 56.6 percent agreed with the

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<sup>33</sup> 40 percent of those still living with their family of origin has a steady partner. Although a steady partner is *strictu sensu* not a family member, interaction with the steady partner during eating occasions is registered here as primary commensality.

<sup>34</sup> Non-published figures provided by our colleagues at the TOR-research group, from a study with 4,650 19-to 36-year olds on their life course perspectives, carried out by research group TOR at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in 2004 (see also: Elchardus, Rombauts and Smits, 2006 & Elchardus and Smits, 2006).

importance of family meals as a family tradition, while 63.9 percent of those who no longer lived with their parents agreed with this statement. Similar conclusions were drawn after controlling for age. Clearly, for young people who still live with their parents, primary commensality is of lesser importance than for young respondents who have already started their own family of procreation.

Young people, who still live in the parental home, prefer to engage in secondary meal interaction. They spend even more time on secondary interaction than singles, both in absolute and relative terms. A quarter of weekly eating time is spent with secondary interaction partners. For them, secondary interaction is predominantly a matter of eating with friends. These findings are in line with earlier findings from a questionnaire study in the Nordic countries and Denmark: those aged 15 to 24 had eaten with friends significantly more often than all older age groups (Kjaernes, 2001a: 19). Secondary interaction is much more important than solitary eating, for those who still live with their parents. Only 13 percent of weekly eating time is spent alone. Young adults who live with their parents spend 11.8 percent of weekly eating time in work-related interaction. 40 percent of the respondents in this household type is employed on the labour market and another 48 percent is still a student. This seriously enhances the chances for commensality with colleagues and fellow students.

*In couple without children: the importance of partners' commensal project*

Eating alone is least common among couples. Persons who live in couple spend only about three quarters of an hour and 8 to 9 percent of their weekly eating time in social isolation. Respondents living in couple without children spend most eating time in primary interaction, and primary interaction stands almost exclusively for eating with the partner. On average they spend 8h39' per week with their partner at the dinner table.

As far as secondary commensality is concerned, couples without children take a middle position: singles and young adults who live with their parents devote a smaller share of weekly eating time to secondary commensality, while (single and dual) parents engage less in secondary commensality. For respondents in couple, secondary

commensality corresponds for the most part to sharing meals with non-resident family.

Respondents living in couple without children spend least eating time of all family types in work-related interaction. The reason for this is the fact that couples without children are for the most part elderly respondents who are not working (anymore). As for singles, the average age of respondents living in a childless couple is 52, while this is significantly lower for single and dual parents and young persons who live with their parents.

### *The heavy burden of single parenthood*

Single parents take the second position in solitary eating, after singles. 22 percent of their weekly eating time is spent alone. Single parents also take the second last position when it comes to primary interaction. About 5h24' or 60 percent of weekly eating time is spent in primary interaction. A quarter (14.7 out of 60 percent of weekly eating time) of primary interaction relates to meal interaction with the steady partner<sup>35</sup>. However, for single parents, primary interaction corresponds mainly to eating with children. Compared to parents in dual-parent families, single parents spend a significantly smaller part of their eating time with their children. Parents in dual-parent families spend 8 percent points more at the dinner table with their children than single parents, the equivalent of 1h11' per week. These findings are in line with earlier findings on single-parent families (De Vault, 1994; Holm, 2001a: 23). The large workload and organization, which single parents have to manage, compared to other parents, lead them to prefer to eat alone in order to give themselves a break (De Vault, 1994). Compared to other household types, single parents only rarely engage in secondary meal interaction and non-resident family and friends and acquaintances are of equal importance.

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<sup>35</sup> 32 percent of single parents has a steady partner. Although strictu sensu for single parents a steady partner is not a household member, meal interaction with the steady partner is considered as primary interaction here.

### *Parents in “traditional” families: holding on to family commensality*

Of all household types, respondents who live with a partner and children spend least eating time alone and most eating time in primary interaction (see also Mestdag and Vandeweyer, 2005). 68.75 percent of all interaction during meals occurs with the partner and 59.48 percent with at least one child. Moreover, half of their weekly eating time is spent with both partner and children. Of all family types, respondents living in couple with children reveal the lowest level of secondary commensality. They only spend 13.56 percent of weekly eating in secondary interaction. Non-resident family and friends and acquaintances are equally important meal partners.

So far, commensality patterns were considered according to the household composition. However, we also expect other factors to affect a person’s commensality pattern. We already argued that age also affects commensality. It is not only the composition of the household, but rather the phase in the lifecycle which has an impact on commensality. In the following sections, we assess the factors affecting different types of social contexts during meals.

## **6.2 Who often eats alone?**

As argued in the first chapter, the meal is considered as a social occasion, which should be shared with others. In chapter 3, it was shown that eating alone is not a widespread practice in Flanders in 2004. During the working week, only 18.7 percent of eating time is spent alone. Solitary eating is even less common on weekend days. On Saturdays and Sundays respectively, the share of solitary eating amounts to 13.8 percent and 12.0 percent. Due to the exceptional nature of solitary eating on weekends, we exclusively focus on solitary eating during the working week. Our focus on the working week also allows for investigating the importance of work-related factors in affecting solitary eating. Due to the non-normal<sup>36</sup> distribution of the share of eating alone in working-week eating time, we use a dummy as a dependent variable to investigate the level of solitary eating during the working week. This dummy distinguishes between a small proportion (30 percent) of the Flemish

population who report the largest share of solitary eating in their diaries during the working week (21 percent or more of their working week eating time alone) and the majority of the Flemish population, showing no or little solitary eating.

*The effect of attitudes on the likelihood of eating alone*

From the literature we inferred that eating ideally is a shared event. This belief is however not shared by all Flemings nowadays. Indeed, 53.7 percent of the Flemish agrees with the statement ‘I do not mind eating alone’. 32 percent disagrees, while 14.3 percent has no opinion. Those who agree with this statement are significantly more likely to engage in solitary eating on a regular basis, compared to those who disagree or have no opinion (Table 6:2).

**Table 6:2 Model explaining the probability of eating alone on a regular basis (>=21% of eating time) during the working week, Exp(B)-effects, model for general population (TOR’04)**

<b>Intercept</b>	4.840***
<b>Household type</b>	***
Living alone without steady partner	Ref.
Living alone with steady partner, single parent, childless couple with active partner	0.113***
Living with parents, in couple with youngest child aged 4 or older	0.055***
In couple with youngest child younger than 4, childless couple with non-active partner	0.017***
<b>Attitude ‘I don’t mind eating alone’</b>	**
Disagree/ no opinion	Ref.
Agree	1.439
N	1659
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	29.7% (21.0%)*

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

*The effect of the easier availability of food on the likelihood of eating alone*

We assumed that the easier access to food entails that food is more often eaten in an accidental manner, which would promote eating in social isolation. The time-use data reveal that urban dwellers are more likely to eat alone on a regular basis, than respondents who do not live in an urban region. However, the positive relationship between living in an urban region and solitary eating is not due to the easier access to food in an urban region, but to the composition of the urban population Urban

<sup>36</sup> The share of solitary eating in the total working week eating time is skewed to the right. For most people, the share of solitary eating time is relatively small.

dwellers are less likely to live in couple or in couple with children. They are more likely to live alone or to be single parents. That explains why they more often eat alone.

A high family income entails a lower likelihood of eating alone on a regular basis. This negative effect is however due to the fact that persons who live alone are less likely to have a high family income. Analogously, we diagnose that regularly eating alone during the working week is less likely to occur when a freezer or a microwave is available in the household. This finding runs counter to our expectations. The easier access to a meal by means of a freezer or a microwave oven does not result in food being eaten in social isolation. The negative relationship between the availability of such household infrastructure is again due to the fact that such infrastructure is less often available in small households, like single-person households, than in larger household types. The availability of such infrastructure as such does not promote eating alone in single-person households, nor in larger households. In fact, our findings reveal that none of the factors that assess the easier availability of food result in a higher likelihood of solitary eating on a regular basis.

*The effect of the household situation on the likelihood of eating alone*

As expected, solitary eating on a regular basis is especially affected by the household composition. Those who live alone are significantly more likely to eat alone than the respondents in all other household types. Only by taking into account whether or not the respondent lives alone, 20.6 percent of the variance of eating alone is explained. Eating alone thus strongly depends on living alone.

Having a steady partner also strongly decreases the likelihood of spending much eating time alone. Of course, a steady partner is often a cohabiting partner. Nevertheless, even a non-cohabiting, steady partner declines the share of eating in social isolation. This means that both the relationship and the cohabitation with a steady partner promote commensality, although the effect of cohabitation is stronger than the effect of the steady relationship. This finding is in line with our expectations. Cohabiting partners are assumed to consider cohabitation as a commensal project

(Sobal, Bove and Rauschenbach, 2002), while commensality is culturally not expected of non-cohabiting partners.

A significant interaction effect exists between the household type and the presence of a steady, non-cohabiting partner. The presence of a steady, non-cohabiting partner only decreases the level of solitary eating among those who live alone, but not among single parents or those who live with their parents. For single parents, the co-resident children neutralise the effect of the steady partner on the prevalence of eating alone. For those who still live with their parents, parents and possibly also siblings neutralise the effect of the steady partner on the odds of eating alone. Persons who live alone, on the contrary, depend much more on a steady partner for sharing meals: the absence of a steady partner results in a higher chance of eating alone on a regular basis. Therefore, we distinguish between persons who live alone with a steady partner and persons who live alone without a steady partner.

In line with earlier findings (6.1), elderly singles are more likely to eat alone than younger or middle-aged singles. There appears to be a significant difference between singles under 65 and singles aged 65 or older. However, the effect of age disappears, once controlled for the presence of a steady partner. In other words, it is the absence of a steady partner, rather than old age itself, that promotes eating alone on a regular basis among elderly singles. Indeed, among single-living persons, those younger than 65 more often have a steady partner than those older than 65.

For respondents who live in couple without children, there is a significant difference in eating alone depending on the respondent's age. Respondents aged 55 or older, who live in a childless couple, are less likely than younger respondents in a childless couple, to eat alone on a regular basis. However, among persons in a childless couple, the negative effect of age on often eating alone is due to the labour-market participation of the partner. In childless couples, the cohabiting partner is the most important commensal partner. The cohabiting partner's engagement on the labour market reduces the opportunities to eat together and promotes eating alone on a regular basis during the working week. For persons who live as a couple with children the partner's employment situation does not affect the likelihood of eating alone

during the working week. This brings us to the importance of co-resident children in affecting commensality patterns.

Co-resident children significantly decrease the chances of spending a large share of eating time alone. However, there is no significant difference in eating alone between respondents living in a childless couple and parents with children: children thus only affect the level of solitary eating when there is no cohabiting partner. Once a cohabiting partner is available in the household, the presence of children does not affect the level of solitary eating. For persons who do not have a cohabiting partner, the presence of co-resident children declines the chance of eating alone on a regular basis. Therefore, single parents are distinguished from other parents.

Children's age is also assumed to affect the level of solitary eating. We expected that the presence of older children would result in a lower level of family commensality and thus in a higher chance of eating alone. Our analyses show that young adults, who live with their parents, more often engage in eating alone, than parents with children. Moreover, for parents who live in couple, the likelihood of eating alone on a regular basis increases as the youngest child grows older, albeit not in a linear manner. Children aged younger than 4, decrease the likelihood of eating alone on a regular basis. Parents with the youngest child aged 4 or older are significantly more likely to engage in solitary eating on a regular basis than parents with very young children. Most likely the strong dependence of these young (under school age) children on their parents explains for the improbability of eating alone on a regular basis among young parents.

We constructed a composed variable for the household type of the respondent. This variable takes into account the household composition, but also the age of children for parents who live in couple, the presence of a steady, non-cohabiting partner for persons who live alone, and the labour-market engagement of the partner for respondents who live in couple without children. 29.9 percent of the variance is explained by means of this composed variable. This model clearly shows that single-living persons without a steady partner have a significantly higher chance of engaging in eating alone than respondents in any other household situation (Table 6:3).

**Table 6:3 Effect of the household type on the probability of eating alone on a regular basis (>=21% of eating time) during the working week, Exp(B)-effects, model for general population (TOR'04)**

<b>Intercept</b>	6.741***
Living alone, no steady partner	Ref.
Living alone, steady partner	0.127***
Single parent	0.115***
Childless couple with active partner	0.088***
Childless couple with non-active partner	0.017***
Living with parents	0.065***
In couple with youngest child 4 or older	0.043***
In couple with youngest child younger than 4	0.014***
N	1682
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	29.9 % (21.2%)***

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

However, the value of the Exp(B)-effects, as presented in table 6:3, leads us to suspect that not all of these household situations significantly differ from one another. We investigated the significance level of the differences between the various categories by means of Scheffe's post hoc test. The 8 categories are reduced to a 4-category variable assessing the household type. The reduction of categories hardly affects the explained variance (29.4 percent instead of 29.9 percent) but allows for assessing the effect of the various factors in a more thorough manner. The first category includes respondents who live alone and have no steady partner. They are most likely to engage in eating alone on a regular basis. Persons who live alone but have a steady partner, persons in a childless couple with a working partner and single parents do not significantly differ from one another in eating alone. They are less likely to eat alone on a regular basis than single-living persons without a steady partner. A working, cohabiting partner, a steady, non-cohabiting partner or the presence of a child make eating alone less probable for the respondents living in one of these three household situations. However, these respondents more often eat alone than respondents who still live with their parents or parents in couple with the youngest child aged four or more. The household types with the lowest chance of eating alone on a regular basis are childless couples with a non-working partner and couples with a child younger than 4 (Table 6:4).

**Table 6:4 Effect of the household type (reduced categories) on the probability of eating alone on a regular basis (>=21% of eating time) during the working week, Exp(B)-effects, model for general population (TOR'04)**

<b>Intercept</b>	6.471***
Living alone, no steady partner	Ref.
Living alone, steady partner, single parent, childless couple with active partner	0.101***
Living with parents In couple with youngest child 4 or older	0.049***
In couple with youngest child younger than 4, childless couple with non-active partner	0.015***
n	1682
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	29.4 % (20.8%)***

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

The relationship between the household type and eating alone on a regular basis during the working week is also partly indirect: respondents who live on their own and have no steady partner more often agree with the statement 'I don't mind eating alone' than respondents in another household type (Table 6:5). There is no significant mutual difference between the other household types in this respect.

**Table 6:5 Percentage agreeing with 'I don't mind eating alone' according to household type (TOR'04)**

General population (n=1685)	53.7%
Living alone without steady partner (n=192)	78.9%
Living alone with steady partner, single parent, in childless couple with active partner (n=322)	51.6%
Living with parents, in couple with youngest child 4 or older (n=763)	51.9%
In couple with youngest child younger than 4, childless couple with non-active partner (n=409)	47.0%

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

The positive relationship between the opinion towards eating alone and the practice of eating alone may however hold in both directions: not minding to eat alone may increase the chance of eating alone and maybe even of living alone in general, but not minding to eat alone may also be a matter of avoiding cognitive dissonance. The fact that singles are more likely not to mind eating alone may be a sign of how single-living persons adapt their attitudes to their living situation. Whatever the direction of this relation, the attitude on eating alone only has a very modest, additional effect on eating alone compared to the effect of the household type (Table 6:2).

### *The effect of work-related factors on the likelihood of eating alone*

Working many hours or working beyond standard times or on unpredictable times was assumed to result in a higher likelihood of eating alone. However, neither the amount of weekly working hours nor the timing of work affects the likelihood of eating alone during the working week. For that reason, we present no separate model for the active population.

The above has made it clear that eating alone can be understood rather well (Table 6:2), predominantly as the result of living alone. In the following section we go into the factors that affect primary commensality, i.e. eating with household members. Of course, primary commensality is not an option for persons who live alone. For that reason, primary commensality is only investigated for those who live with “meaningful” others (i.e. partner, parents or children).

### **6.3 Factors affecting the level of primary commensality**

Although eating is generally considered as a social event (Chaline, 1992, Mäkelä, 1991: 90), the normative expectation of sharing a meal with a household member holds especially for the main meal of the day, namely dinner. In the first chapter of this study, we argued that the main meal of the day is considered as the most sociable meal of the day and it is during this meal that primary commensality is most expected. The main meal of the day (dinner) and especially the main meal of the week (Sunday dinner) are believed to be excellent occasions for primary commensality. The available time-use data revealed that primary commensality is very common during dinner. This holds for Sundays as well as for weekdays. Those who live with a parent, a child or a partner, spend 89 percent of Sunday dinner time with a household member. Primary commensality is equally common for weekday dinner. The highly exceptional character of not sharing weekday or Sunday dinner with at least one primary interaction partner does not allow for assessing this practice by means of a logistic regression. For that reason, we focus on primary commensality in general, rather than during dinnertime in particular.

In chapter 3, it was shown that primary commensality to a large extent corresponds to sharing meals with the cohabiting partner and sharing meals with children. In this section, we first explore which factors promote poor partner commensality. Then, we investigate who shares only a small share of eating time with children. Partner commensality and child commensality are studied separately on weekdays and Sundays. On weekdays, other factors, more particularly work-related factors, are expected to affect the level of primary commensality. Moreover, the normative expectation of primary commensality holds especially for Sundays.

### 6.3.1 Who has a low level of partner commensality?

The analyses on partner commensality are performed exclusively for those respondents who live with a cohabiting partner, as commensality is culturally speaking only expected of cohabiting partners (Sobal, Bove and Rauschenbach, 2002). This was clearly argued in the first chapter of this study. The importance of living together as a precondition for eating together is also corroborated by the time-use data (see also section 6.1). Cohabiting and non-cohabiting partners differ significantly as to the prevalence of partner commensality. Cohabiting partners spend 73 percent of weekly eating time together, while this only amounts to 43 percent for non-cohabiting partners.

There are serious differences between weekend days and weekdays in the likelihood of partners sharing meals. 77.8 percent of cohabiting partners has spent all Sunday eating time together, while this holds for only 41.4 percent on Tuesdays. As sharing meals with the cohabiting partner is such a widespread practice on Sundays, we only focus on the factors that influence sharing meals with the cohabiting partner on weekdays. The level of partner commensality during the working week is calculated as the share of eating time spent with the partner during the working week divided by the total time spent on eating during the working week. As the share of partner commensality in the total working week eating time is not normally distributed, a dummy is used as a dependent variable. This dummy distinguishes between the large majority (69.4 percent) of the population who share most of working-week eating time with the partner and a smaller share of the population (30.6 percent) for whom

partner commensality is more exceptional (i.e. sharing less than 53 percent of working week eating time with the cohabiting partner).

*The effect of attitudes on working-week partner commensality*

The questionnaire included in the Flemish 2004 time-use survey did not address the attitude towards partner commensality. The only attitude that assesses the social nature of eating is the attitude towards eating alone. Agreeing with the statement ‘I don’t mind eating alone’ is significantly and positively related to a small share of eating with the partner during the working week (Table 6:6).

**Table 6:6 Percentage of the population with cohabiting partner with a low level (<53% of eating time) of partner commensality during the working week according to attitude towards eating alone<sup>37</sup>(TOR’04)**

Attitude ‘I don’t mind eating alone’	Level of partner commensality	
	LOW <53% of working-week eating time with partner	HIGH ≥53% of working-week eating time with partner
Disagree/no opinion	27.8%	72.2%
Agree	34.0%	66.0%

*The effect of social class on working-week partner commensality*

From the literature we inferred that social groups differ considerably as to the social function ascribed to meals: among the higher social classes family meals appear to occur more often (Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, Story et al., 2003: 320) and the family being together during the meal is valorised more, than among working class families (Fischler, 1996c: 18-19). However, the Flemish time-use data do not sustain this thesis. Contrary to what we expected, white-collars are more likely to engage in poor partner commensality during the working week. However, social class only has a modest effect on the level of partner commensality (Table 6:7).

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<sup>37</sup> n=1111, Eta<sup>2</sup>=0.4%\*

**Table 6:7 Percentage of the population with cohabiting partner with a low level (<53% of eating time) of partner commensality during the working week according to social class<sup>38</sup> (TOR'04)**

Social class	Level of partner commensality	
	LOW <53% of working-week eating time with partner	HIGH ≥53% of working-week eating time with partner
White-collar	34.1%	65.9%
Blue-collar or self-employed	27.6%	72.4%

*The effect of the wider availability of food on working-week partner commensality*

The easier access to food is believed to enhance eating in an accidental way regarding timing and consequently more in social isolation, rather than as a commensal activity. It was already shown that the easier access to food does not affect the timing of eating (see section 5.4). The easier access to food was not found to encourage eating in social isolation either (see section 6.2). The time-use data do however sustain the thesis that the easier access to food reduces the level of partner commensality. Urban dwellers are more likely to spend only a small share of working-week eating time with their cohabiting partner than those who do not live in a central municipality of an important conurbation (Table 6:8). The positive effect of living in an urban region continues to exist, after controlling for age, labour-market engagement of the household and presence of children. This result supports the thesis that the effect of living in an urban region is especially related to the infrastructure available in the urban region, rather than to the composition of the urban population. Besides the urbanization level of the place of residence none of the other factors assessing the easier access to food has a significant effect on the level of partner commensality.

**Table 6:8 Percentage of the population with cohabiting partner with a low level (<53% of eating time) of partner commensality during the working week according to urbanization level of the place of residence<sup>39</sup> (TOR'04)**

Urbanization level of the place of residence	Level of partner commensality	
	LOW <53% of working-week eating time with partner	HIGH ≥53% of working-week eating time with partner
Living in a central municipality of an important conurbation	39.0%	61.0%
Living in other type of municipality	29.1%	70.9%

<sup>38</sup> n=1094, Eta<sup>2</sup>=0.5% \*

<sup>39</sup> n=1127, Eta<sup>2</sup>=0.6% \*\*

### *The effect of household-related factors on working-week partner commensality*

The social context of meals is strongly affected by household-related factors. The time-use data reveal that both the composition of the household, as well as the labour-market engagement of the household affect the level of partner commensality during the working week. Co-resident children reduce the share of working-week eating time shared with the partner. Children may ask for a lot of attention and may promote that the meal is shared only with them, rather than waiting for the partner. However, children's age is not relevant in this respect.

Paid work also affects partner commensality. If the respondent and his or her partner are engaged in paid work, then they share fewer meals during the working week. However, strong, significant interactions exist between the employment situation of the respondent and his or her partner on the one hand, and the presence of a co-resident child on the other hand. The effect of paid work is much stronger in a household without co-resident children. In a household with co-resident children, the labour market engagement of the respondent or his (or her) partner has a weaker influence on partner commensality. Therefore, separate analyses are presented for respondents with a co-resident child and respondents without a co-resident child.

#### - Partner commensality in childless couples

In couples without a co-resident child, the level of partner commensality is strongly affected by the labour-market engagement of the household. Active respondents reveal a lower level of partner commensality during the working week than non-working respondents. The effect of the partner's employment situation is even stronger. Moreover, a significant interaction effect exists between the employment situations of both partners. The level of partner commensality differs significantly between non-working couples on the one hand, and couples with at least one of both partners working on the other hand.

The level of partner commensality among couples without a co-resident child is also strongly affected by age. The level of partner commensality during the working week increases with age, albeit not in a linear manner. Only the elderly age groups (55 or

older) are more likely to have regular partner commensality. However, a very significant interaction effect exists between the respondent's age (aged under 55 or not) and the labour-market engagement of the household (two non-working partners or other situation). A combined variable is constructed to take account of the interaction effect between both factors. The labour-market engagement of the household does not affect partner commensality among respondents under 55. Respondents who are 55 or older, on the contrary, register a higher level of partner commensality, when both partners do not work, than when one or both partners are in paid work. Respondents aged 55 or older living in a couple with at least one partner in paid work do not differ significantly from the younger age group. Therefore, we distinguish between two household types: households with two non-active partners and the respondent aged 55 or older on the one hand (1), and respondents aged under 55 or respondents with at least one of both partners active on the labour market on the other hand (2). This dummy has a higher explained variance than the model which takes into account both interacting factors separately (Table 6:9).

**Table 6:9 Model assessing the probability of little (<53% of eating time) partner commensality during the working week, Exp(B)-effects, model for population with a cohabiting partner and without co-resident children (TOR'04)**

<b>Intercept</b>	0.035***
<b>Combined effect of age and household labour-market engagement</b>	***
Aged 55 or older in household with both partners not working	Ref.
Aged younger than 55 or in household with at least one partner working	10.886
n	442
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	19.6% (11.5%)***

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

The level of partner commensality of respondents without co-resident children is not affected by the urbanization level of the place of residence, social class and the attitude towards eating alone. Only the combined effect of age and household labour-market engagement affects the level of partner commensality during the working week. Nevertheless, by taking into account the respondent's age in combination with the labour-market engagement of the household, 19.4 percent of the variance is explained, as shown in table 6:9. Obviously, when there are no co-resident children in

the household, the labour-market engagement strongly affects the likelihood of partners sharing meals during the working week.

- Partner commensality in couples with a co-resident child

The model for respondents living in a couple with co-resident children strongly differs for men and women, hence separate models are presented for mothers and fathers. Mothers share less meals with their partner, when their partner is working (Table 6:10). However, mothers' personal employment situation does not affect the level of partner commensality. Fathers' level of partner commensality is not affected by his own employment situation nor by the labour-market engagement of his wife. The possibility for two parents to co-ordinate shared mealtimes is assumed to be smaller when both parents are working. However, the level of partner commensality of working parents is not significantly affected by the fact that both, rather than only one partner is engaged on the labour market. Apparently, the presence of children in the household strongly neutralises the effect of the labour-market engagement of either partner. In households with co-resident children, only father's labour-market engagement decreases mothers' share of eating time spent with her partner.

Although the effect of age is much weaker than what we found for respondents living in a childless couple, the level of partner commensality also increases with age<sup>40</sup>, in a linear manner (Table 6:10). Among mothers, the level of partner commensality depends on the attitude towards eating alone and the urbanization level of the place of residence. Social class, on the contrary, has no effect (Table 6:10). For fathers, none of the variables that were assumed to affect partner commensality have any effect. As a result, we only present the model for mothers.

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<sup>40</sup> For women who live in couple with co-resident children, there is no significant interaction effect between age and the labour-market engagement of the partner, as we found for respondents living in a childless couple. Therefore, both variables are introduced separately in this model.

**Table 6:10 Model explaining the probability of little (<53% of eating time) partner commensality during the working week, Exp(B)-effects, model for women with a cohabiting partner and with co-resident children (TOR'04)**

<b>Intercept</b>	(2.099)
<b>Labour-market engagement of the partner</b>	*
Not-working partner	Ref.
Working partner	2.535
<b>Attitude 'I don't mind eating alone'</b>	*
Disagree/ no opinion	Ref.
Agree	1.608
<b>Age</b>	0.949***
<b>Urbanization level of the place of residence</b>	*
No urban region	Ref.
Urban region	1.874
N	355
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	12.2% (9.1%)*

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

*The effect of work-related factors on working-week partner commensality*

A high amount of working hours, unpredictable and non-standard working hours are believed to hinder that cohabiting partners share meals. The Flemish time-use data sustain this assumption. A high number of working hours involves a low level of partner commensality during the working week. The predictability of the end of the working day has no affect on the level of partner commensality during the working week. The lack of such a relationship may be due to the fact that working-week partner commensality in general is taken into account here, rather than partner commensality during weekday dinner in particular. The probability to share meals with the partner also depends on the type of work schedule. Workers, who work on fixed hours and days, are more likely to spend weekday lunch at work in the company of colleagues or alone. This decreases the share of partner commensality in working-week eating time. The same holds for respondents who regularly perform day work. Always or regularly working during standard office hours promotes eating at another place than the home, most likely the workplace. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 7. Eating at another place than the home place in turn reduces the likelihood of sharing lunch with the partner, and eventually decreases the level of working-week partner commensality. Conversely, regular night work results in a higher share of eating time performed at home in the company of the partner. Nevertheless, all these

work-related factors have a modest effect on the level of working-week partner commensality.

The abovementioned has made it clear that the level of partner commensality is affected by different factors among parents than among childless couples. We, therefore, also expect work-related factors to affect partner commensality in a different manner, according to the household situation of the respondent. The TOR'04-data confirm this assumption: work-related factors have a different impact on partner commensality depending on the presence of co-resident children.

- Partner commensality among childless, working couples

None of the work-related factors have a significant effect on the level of working-week partner commensality among childless couples. Although the labour-market engagement of both partners strongly affects the level of partner commensality in a childless couple, the work-related characteristics of the respondent do not affect the level of partner commensality. The work-related characteristics of the respondent's partner do not affect the level of partner commensality either. The fact that the level of partner commensality in a childless couple is not affected by the work-related characteristics of either partner may point at partners' efforts to gear mealtimes to both partners' working conditions. The absence of co-resident children gives partners more freedom in co-ordinating mealtimes. This probably results in a fairly high level of partner commensality, irrespective of the working conditions of the partners.

- Partner commensality among working couples with a co-resident child

In couples with co-resident children, the work-related characteristics of the respondent do affect the level of partner commensality in a significant way. The effect of work-related factors on partner commensality was however expected to be different for working mothers than for working fathers. Women's level of partner commensality strongly depends on their family responsibilities: a working mother's chance to share a meal with her partner is significantly lower than a working father's chance to share a meal with his partner. Separate models are presented for working fathers and working mothers.

For working fathers, the level of partner commensality is only influenced by the number of working hours per week. As expected, a high number of working hours prevents that many weekday meals are shared with the partner (Table 6:11). Working mothers' level of partner commensality is not affected by the number of weekly working hours. However, working mothers' number of weekly working hours is significantly lower than that of working fathers: half of the working fathers work more than 38 hours per week, while this holds for only 20 percent of the working mothers. Working mothers' number of weekly working hours is thus much less likely to hinder partner commensality, as working hours most often remain within the boundaries of the usual, contractually determined 38 hours per week (Table 6:11).

**Table 6:11 Model explaining the probability of little (<53% of eating time) partner commensality during the working week, Exp(B)-effects, model for working men with a cohabiting partner and with co-resident children (TOR'04)**

<b>Intercept</b>	0.164***
<b>Number of working hours</b>	1.034**
N	289
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	6.1% (4.5%)*

For working mothers, the level of partner commensality is only affected by the timing of work. Mothers, who mostly work during office hours (i.e. always or regularly perform day work), are less likely to share lunch with their husbands (Table 6:12). Agreeing with the statement 'I don't mind eating alone' reduces the level of working-week partner commensality for working mothers (Table 6:12), and for mothers in general (Table 6:10). Conversely, the level of working-week partner commensality increases with age, among working mothers and mothers in general. Living in an urban region no longer affects the level of partner commensality with working women, although it hinders partner commensality among mothers in general (Table 6:10). As mentioned earlier, the labour-market engagement of the partner does not affect working mothers either, although it also hinders partner commensality with mothers.

**Table 6:12 Model explaining the probability of little (<53% of eating time) partner commensality during the working week, Exp(B)-effects, model for active women with a cohabiting partner and with co-resident children (TOR'04)**

<b>Intercept</b>	(1.970)
<b>Day work</b>	*
Never or occasional day work	<b>Ref.</b>
Always or regular day work	4.532
<b>Attitude 'I don't mind eating alone'</b>	*
Disagree with/ no opinion	Ref.
Agree	1.734
<b>Age</b>	0.940***
N	269
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	13.3% (10.0%)*

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

In this section, we tried to get an insight into partner commensality. Partner commensality strongly depends on the presence of children in the household. Childless couples share more meals than couples with children, and in childless couples the level of partner commensality chiefly depends on the labour-market engagement of both partners and their age. Men and women do not significantly differ from each other in this respect, and the characteristics of paid work do not affect the level of partner commensality. In couples with co-resident children, other factors affect the fact that parents share meals. Mothers spend a smaller share of eating time with their partner than fathers. Mothers are less likely to eat with their partner if that partner is engaged on the labour market, if they live in an urban region and do not mind to eat alone. Conversely, mothers' level of partner commensality increases with age. For working mothers in particular, the level of partner commensality depends on age and the attitude towards eating alone, but also on the timing of paid work. For fathers in general, we could not achieve a meaningful model. For working fathers in particular, the level of partner commensality decreases as the number of working hours increases.

The above revealed that the level of partner commensality strongly depends on the presence of other household members, namely children. In the next section, we investigate to what extent child commensality is affected by the presence of other household members, as well as by attitudes, the easier access to food, social class and work-related factors.

### 6.3.2 Who has a low level of child commensality?

Child commensality is investigated exclusively for those respondents who live with co-resident children, irrespective of children's age. Eating with children assumes that at least one co-resident child is present during the eating occasion. From the time-use data that we use, there is no possible way to verify how many children are actually present for a particular eating occasion. The following analyses thus only assess which factors affect the level of child commensality, irrespective of the number of children. They do not assess which factors affect the odds of bringing all children together for a meal. Child commensality is assessed here from the perspective of the parent. The children present during the meal are always descendents of the respondent, not siblings or in another relationship.

Parents spend on average 53.6 percent of their working-week eating time with at least one child. On Saturdays and Sundays, this percentage amounts to 70 percent. On Saturdays and Sundays, 54 percent of the parents even spend all eating time with at least one child. On an average Tuesday, this percentage only amounts to 21.4 percent. It is much harder for parents to engage in child commensality during the working week than during the weekend. Child commensality is studied successively for weekdays and Sundays. On weekdays, other factors, more particularly work-related factors, are assumed to affect the level of child commensality. Moreover, the normative expectation of sharing meals with children holds especially for Sundays.

#### **6.3.2.1 Factors affecting the level of child commensality during the working week**

Due to the non-normal<sup>41</sup> distribution of the share of working-week eating time spent with children, a dummy is used as a dependent variable. Again, we distinguish between a large group of the population (69.5 percent) with a considerable level of child commensality (i.e. spent at least 40 percent of working-week eating time with the children) and a small group (30.5 percent) with only little child commensality.

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<sup>41</sup> The percentage of working-week eating time spent with children has a leaning toward a normal distribution, except for the two modes at the extremes. During the working week, 7.9 percent of respondents register no meals with children, while 7.5 percent share all their working-week meals with children.

*The effect of attitudes towards working-week child commensality*

The questionnaire included in the Flemish 2004 time-use survey did not assess the attitude towards child commensality. The only opinion that assesses the social nature of eating is the attitude towards eating alone. Respondents with co-resident children are less likely to agree with the statement ‘I don’t mind eating alone’ than respondents without co-resident children. Only 47.3 percent of the parents in TOR’04-sample agrees with this statement, compared to 59 percent of the respondents without co-resident children. The parents who agree with this statement reveal a lower level of child commensality during the working week than parents who disagree (Table 6:13).

**Table 6:13 Model explaining the probability of little (<40% of eating time) child commensality during the working week, Exp(B)-effects, model for population with a co-resident children, single parents and parents in dual-parent families (TOR’04)**

	All parents	Single parents	Dual parents
<b>Intercept</b>	0.285**	0.242**	0.429**
<b>Sex</b>	**	ns	**
Woman	Ref.		Ref.
Man	1.581		1.634
<b>Labour-market engagement</b>	*	*	ns
Not working	Ref.	Ref.	
Working	1.782	3.136	
<b>Age of youngest child</b>	***	ns	***
Youngest child younger than 18	Ref.		Ref.
Youngest child aged 18 or older	3.487		3.483
<b>Number of co-resident children</b>	0.630*	ns	0.646***
<b>Attitude ‘I don’t mind eating alone’</b>	*	ns	*
Disagree/ no opinion	Ref.		Ref.
Agree	1.431		1.463
N	760	81	679
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	16.3% (11.5%)*	8.2%(5.9%)*	16.4%(11.6%)*

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

*The effect of social class on working-week child commensality*

In contrast to working-class families, the higher social classes are believed to put a higher emphasis on family meals (Fischler, 1996c; Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, Story et al., 2003: 320). As such, we expected to find a higher level of child commensality with the higher social classes. Yet, the time-use data do not reveal any social class differentiation in the level of child commensality during the working week.

*The effect of the wider availability of food on working-week child commensality*

We expected that the wider availability of food would promote eating occurring more in an accidental way regarding timing and therefore less in the company of the primary commensal circle. However, none of the factors assessing the easier access to food significantly affect the level of child commensality during the working week.

*The effect of the household situation on working-week child commensality*

From the literature we inferred that the level of child commensality is especially affected by the composition of the household. The level of child commensality is assumed to vary by children's age. Young children would claim a considerable share of their parent's eating time, due to the care they need, while adolescents would increasingly withdraw from the household and share less meals with their parents. The Flemish time-use data confirm the negative relationship between the age of the youngest, co-resident child and the level of child commensality: the higher the age of the youngest child in the household, the lower the level of child commensality.

However, the effect of the age of the youngest child is not linear. Our analyses show that there is no significant difference in the level of child commensality between respondents with highly dependent children (aged younger than 4 or 7) and parents with older, less dependent children (aged 4 or older, or 7 or older). It is not so much the strong dependence of young children that promotes the share of eating time spent with children. Rather, it is the independence of older, co-resident children. The likelihood of a low level of child commensality is significantly higher for respondents with the youngest, co-resident child aged 18 or older than for parents with at least one non-adult, co-resident child (Table 6:13). Adult children, despite the fact that they still live under the same roof as their parents, often share the table with other persons than their parents with whom the same household is shared (see also table 6:1). Young adults who live with their parents lead their own lives. They are at college and often live away from their parents' home during the working week. The parental home is often described as a hotel (*hotel mama*) (Elchardus, Rombauts and Smits, 2006), where their laundry is done, their bed is made and where they drop in and out.

The effect of the age of the youngest child is stronger than the effect of the respondent's age. In fact, the respondent's age is a mere correlate of the age of the youngest, co-resident child without a separate effect on the level of child commensality. It is not the person's age itself, but rather the age of the co-resident child that explains for the positive relationship between the respondent's age and the chance of spending little time on eating with co-resident children.

Next to the age of the youngest child, the household composition also affects the level of child commensality, through the number of children present in the household. The more children there are in the household, the less likely parents do not eat with children during the working week (Table 6:13). This relationship may mean two things. On the one hand, it is possible that meals with many children last longer and therefore take a larger share in the working-week meal pattern, because they ask for more organization, more sociability, and socialization than meals with few children. By the time every one is seated at the table, dished up and has told his or her story of the day, a lot of time has gone by. The TOR'04 dataset does not allow for investigating whether this hypothesis is true. Respondents only registered whether at least one child was present and not how many children were present. On the other hand, many co-resident children increase the chance that at least one child is present during mealtimes, which decreases the likelihood of only sharing a small share of working-week eating time with children. Of course, there is a strong connection between the number of children living in the household and the age of the youngest co-resident child. The number of co-resident children is significantly higher, when at least one co-resident child is not yet an adult. Respondents with the youngest, co-resident child under 18 have, on average, over two co-resident children. Respondents with the youngest, co-resident child above 18 have, on average, only 1.5 co-resident children. As such, the effect of the age of the youngest co-resident child is also partly indirect, through the number of children in the household.

The level of child commensality during the working week is not affected by the presence of a cohabiting partner. Single parents do not significantly differ from parents who live in a couple in their level of child commensality. Due to their high workload, single parents were expected to engage more in eating alone (see also Table 6:2), in peace and to spend less time eating with their children than parents in dual-

parent families. However, we do find a significant difference in the *absolute* time spent with children, between single parents and parents in dual-parent families. While parents in dual-parent families spend 3h22' with their children during the working-week, this is only 3h00' for the single parents. However, given the lower time spent on eating during the working week, single parents spend an equally large share of eating time with their children as parents in dual-parent families. Yet, the level of child commensality is affected by other factors among single parents than among parents in dual parent families (Table 6:13). The number of co-resident children and the age of co-resident children have no significant effect on single parents' level of child commensality. Neither does the attitude towards eating alone. Instead, single parents' likelihood to share meals with the children is only affected by their engagement on the labour market. Single parents who work, spend a significantly smaller share of eating time with their children during the working week than non-working single parents (Table 6:13). The combination of paid work and household work often leaves single parents little time to eat, let alone to share meals with their children. For parents in dual-parent families, the labour-market engagement of the parents does not affect the level of child commensality (Table 6:13). Parents spend an equal share of their working-week eating time with their children, irrespective of their labour-market engagement. Although the time-use data confirm that the total amount of eating time spent with children is significantly lower for the active parents (3h16') than for the non-working parents (3h45') in dual parent families, the share of child commensality in working-week eating time does not differ significantly.

We also expected that women's role as mothers would strongly promote their level of child commensality. As expected, mothers are significantly less likely to spend less than 40 percent of working-week eating time with their children than fathers. While only one quarter of women has a poor level of child commensality during the working week, this holds for 36.2 percent of the men. As a nurturer, the mother is considered responsible for the well-being of her family (Lupton, 1996). Taking care of others, particularly through feeding her children, is considered as essentially female nature (Bordo, 1998: 22), and as a sign of women's love (Counihan, 1999: 46; Ekström and Fürst, 2001). Men, on the contrary, assume no responsibilities in the domain of feeding work (Ashley, Hollows, Jones et al., 2002: 132). However, the effect of sex is only significant among parents in dual-parent families, where the burden of childcare

can be distributed between both parents and where fathers can attribute the main responsibility to mothers (Table 6:13). There is no significant difference between single mothers and single fathers in the share of eating time spent with the children. Single parents carry the responsibility for childcare and child feeding alone: they spend an equal share on eating with the children, irrespective of their sex. Moreover, single parents are more likely to have only adult children living with them and the gender-effect only holds for parents with non-adult children in the household. Mothers only spend a larger share of working-week eating time with their children than fathers, when the youngest child in the household is less than 18 years old. If all co-resident children are adults, as is often the case among single parents, there is no longer a significant difference between mothers and fathers in their level of child commensality.

By taking into account sex, the number of co-resident children, the age of the youngest co-resident child and the attitude towards eating alone, 16.4 percent of the variance of child commensality during the working week can be explained among parents in dual-parent families. Among single parents, the level of child commensality during the working week is only affected by the labour-market engagement of the single parent. With this factor alone 8.2 percent of the variance is explained (Table 6:13).

#### *The effect of work-related factors on working-week child commensality*

We also expected work-related factors to affect the share of working-week eating time spent with the children. We expected that a large amount of working hours as well as unpredictable and non-standard working hours would hinder parents from engaging in child commensality during the working week. Contrary to our expectations, none of the work-related factors affect the level of working-week child commensality during the working week in a significant manner. This holds for working mothers as well as for working fathers, and for working single parents as well as for working parents in dual-parent families. As there are no work-related factors that affect the share of child commensality, no separate model is presented for the active population.

### 6.3.2.2 Factors affecting the level of child commensality on Sundays

On Sundays, parents spend, on average, 69.9 percent of their eating time with at least one co-resident child. As the distribution of the importance of child commensality in total Sunday eating time is highly skewed to the right, we use a dummy, as a dependent variable. This dummy discerns between a large majority of the Flemish population (70 percent of the population), who spends a considerable share of Sunday eating time with children, and a small group (30 percent), with only a small share (less than 56 percent) of Sunday eating time shared with a co-resident child. In this section, we question which factors promote that less than 56 percent of Sunday eating time is shared with a co-resident child.

#### *The effect of attitudes towards child commensality on Sundays*

In contrast to what we found for the working week, the attitude towards eating alone does not affect the level of child commensality on Sundays. The questionnaire included in the Flemish 2004 time-use survey also assesses the sociable nature of Sunday dinner. Respondents with co-resident children are significantly more likely to agree with the statement ‘Sunday dinner is a family occasion *par excellence*’ than respondents without co-resident children. 68.7 percent of the parents agrees with this statement, while this holds for 52.5 percent of the respondents without co-resident children. As explained in section 4.1, we constructed a scale that takes into account five attitudes towards the importance of the Sunday meal and its sociable, family-centred nature. The more one agrees with the importance of Sunday dinner as a sociable meal, the less likely one is to spend less than 56 percent of Sunday eating time with the children (Table 6:14).

**Table 6:14 Model explaining the probability of little (<56% of eating time) child commensality on Sundays, Exp(B)-effects, model for population with co-resident child(ren), single parents and parents in dual-parent families (TOR'04)**

	All parents	Single parents	Dual parents
<b>Intercept</b>	0.286***	0.284*	0.277***
<b>Sex</b>	*	ns	**
Woman	Ref.		Ref.
Man	1.481		1.634
<b>Importance sociable Sunday meal</b>	0.624***	0.550*	0.667***
<b>Age of youngest child</b>	1.059***	1.064*	1.056***
<b>Number of co-resident children</b>	0.764*	ns	0.743*
N	718	73	646
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	15.1% (10.7%)***	21.4%(16.0%)**	13.4%(9.3%)***

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

*The effect of social class on child commensality on Sundays*

As on weekdays, on Sundays there are no social class differences in the likelihood of engaging in child commensality. Contrary to what we expected, the higher social classes do not reveal a higher level of child commensality on Sundays than the lower social classes.

*The effect of the wider availability of food on child commensality on Sundays*

We expected that the wider availability of food would promote that eating occurs more according to one's personal preferences without taking into account socially shared mealtimes. This, in turn, is assumed to promote eating in social isolation rather than with the primary commensal circle. Again, the Flemish time-use data do not sustain this thesis. None of the factors assessing the easier availability to food affect the likelihood of spending only a small share of Sunday eating time with the co-resident children.

*The effect of the household situation on child commensality on Sundays*

Contrary to the child commensality on weekdays, the labour-market engagement of the household was not expected to have an influence on the level of child commensality on Sundays. The Flemish time-use data confirm that the employment

status of neither partner has a significant effect on the level of child commensality on Sundays.

The share of Sunday eating time spent with children is especially influenced by the household composition, namely the number of children in the household and their age. On Sundays as well as on weekdays, children's age negatively affects the level of child commensality: the higher the age of the youngest child in the household, the lower the level of child commensality. Contrary to what we found for working-week child commensality, the effect of age on engaging in little child commensality on Sundays is linear (Table 6:14). Although parents with only adult co-resident children register less meals with children than parents with at least one child younger than 18, the explained variance of children's age is larger when included as a continuous variable ( $R^2=8.5$  percent) than as a dummy distinguishing non-adult from adult children ( $R^2=6.5$  percent). One possible reason for this difference between Sundays and the working week is the fact that adult children are more likely to live at another place than the parental home during the working week, while they are more likely to live at home on weekends. The large-scale absence of adult children during the working week results in a non-linear relationship between child commensality and children's age during the working week. Contrary to what we found during the working week, the level of child commensality on Sundays is also affected by the age of the youngest co-resident child among single parents (Table 6:14).

The number of children present in the household also increases the level of child commensality. The more children there are in the household, the less likely parents only spend a small share of Sunday eating time with the children (Table 6:14). However, as mentioned in the previous section exploring working-week child commensality, we are not sure whether this is due to the fact that meals with many children take more time and therefore also take a larger share in a person's meal pattern, or whether this is simply due to the higher odds of a child being present for a shared meal on households with several children. The number of children in the household only affects the level of child commensality among parents in dual-parent families (Table 6:14).

The level of child commensality on Sundays is also affected by the presence of a cohabiting partner. Contrary to what we found for the working-week, single parents spend a significantly smaller share of their Sunday eating time with co-resident children than parents in dual-parent families. The latter spend, on average, 71.8 percent of Sunday eating time with co-resident children, while this amounts to only 53.4 percent of Sunday eating time among single parents. The difference between single parents and parents in dual-parent families decreases somewhat when controlled for the number of co-resident children and the age of the youngest, co-resident child. Single parents, on average, have less co-resident children and are also more likely to have only adult children in the household than parents in dual-parent families. Yet, we are surprised to find that the level of child commensality in single-parent households is lower than that in dual-parent households, on Sundays but not during the working week. We had expected that the heavy burden of single parenthood would reveal itself especially by a lower level of child commensality during the busy working week. The opposite appears to be true. In the final model assessing the factors that affect the level of child commensality on Sundays, the effect of being a single parent disappears once controlled for the combination of the number of children, the age of the youngest child and the attitude towards the Sunday meal as a sociable occasion. The logistic regression suggests that the effect of being a single parent is fully indirect through a higher likelihood of few co-resident children, a higher likelihood of only adult co-resident children and a lower importance attached to Sunday dinner as a sociable meal, compared to parents in dual-parent families. However, due to the different impact of various factors on child commensality on Sundays, among single parents and dual parents, the analyses are presented separately for both types of parents (Table 6:14).

We also expected that women's role as mothers would strongly promote their level of child commensality. The time-use data reveal a significant difference between mothers and fathers, but only among parents in dual-parent families. Single mothers and single fathers do not significantly differ, as far as their level of child commensality on Sundays concerns (Table 6:14). These findings are in line with what we found on weekdays and attest to the tendency to consider child feeding as a mother's responsibility in dual-parent households. Again, mothers only reveal a higher level of child commensality on Sundays than fathers, when the youngest child

in the household is younger than 18. If all co-resident children are adults, there is no significant difference between mothers and fathers in their level of child commensality. Once controlled for the age of the youngest child, the sex of the parent is significant and fathers are significantly more likely to have only a small level of child commensality on Sundays than mothers (Table 6:14).

By taking into account the importance attached to the Sunday meal, the age and number of co-resident children and the sex of the respondent 13.4 percent of the variance is explained among parents in dual-parent families (Table 6:14). The model explaining Sunday child commensality among parents in dual-parent families is parallel to the model explaining working-week child commensality, except for attitudes. The attitude towards the sociable Sunday meal and the age of the youngest, co-resident child have the strongest effect on the level of child commensality on Sundays. These factors also affect child commensality among single parents and give rise to an explained variance of 21.4 percent (Table 6:14).

The number of co-resident children has a stronger effect on the level of child commensality on weekdays than on Sundays. This finding appears to sustain our second hypothesis on the effect of the number of co-resident children. Our first hypothesis suggested that meals with many children last longer and, therefore, take a larger share in the working-week meal pattern, because they ask for more organization and more sociability than meals with few children. The smaller effect of the number of children on the level of child commensality on Sundays does not seem to support this hypothesis. Rather, it supports the second hypothesis that many co-resident children increase the chance that at least one child is present during each of the working-week mealtimes. On Sundays, this effect is likely to be smaller (as sustained by the time-use data), since there are fewer mealtimes on that single day. Should the larger share of child commensality be due to the longer duration of meals with many children, then we would expect to find the same large effect on Sundays as during the working week. This finding suggests that many weekday meals are only shared with some but not all co-resident children.

### *The effect of work-related factors on child commensality on Sundays*

We did not expect any of the work-related factors to affect the level of child commensality on Sundays. Rather, work-related factors are only expected to affect the level of child commensality during the working week. The time-use data sustain that work-related factors do not affect the level of child commensality on Sundays.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we investigated which factors affect the social context of the Flemish meal pattern. The social context of eating can more easily be explained than the temporal organization of eating practices. However, not all factors suggested in the literature proved to have a significant effect on the sociable nature of eating practices. Again we found that attitudes (as we measured them) have only a modest effect on the social nature of eating. Moreover, Flemings do not really seem to value the sociable nature of meals. Only one third of the Flemish population disagrees with the statement 'I don't mind to eat alone'. Those who do not mind to eat alone are more likely to eat alone on a regular basis and to have only a low level of child commensality during the working week. The value attached to a sociable, Sunday meal has a stronger influence on the level of child commensality on Sundays. The time-use data suggest that eating practices on Sundays are more easily affected by beliefs than eating practices during the working week. This is probably due to less structural factors interfering with meal organization on Sundays compared to weekdays.

However, the effect of attitudes on the social context of eating is negligible compared to the effect of the household situation. We expected that the social nature of eating would be strongly influenced by the household situation. As shown in chapter 3, eating and especially dinner, remains a domestic occasion where household members play a central role. The mere absence of a meaningful household member results in a high likelihood of eating alone on a regular basis, especially for those without a steady partner. This means that elderly persons, who often live alone and who are less likely to have a steady, non-cohabiting partner, are most likely to spend most eating time alone. The time-use data thus suggest that solitary eating is not characteristic of the young, but rather of the elderly, single-living population.

The level of partner commensality also strongly depends on household-related factors. More particularly, the presence of co-resident children significantly decreases the level of partner commensality during the working week. On the other hand, the level of child commensality is not affected by the partner situation during the working week, although single parents have a lower level of child commensality on Sundays. The level of child commensality chiefly depends on children's age and the number of children. Parents share more meals with their children, if they are younger than 18. A large number of co-resident children equally results in a larger share of child commensality on weekdays and on Sundays. The weaker effect of the number of co-resident children on Sundays compared to weekdays suggests that it is less likely that no child is present during the meal, when there are several children living in the household. The time-use data thus suggest that many weekday meals are only shared with some, but not necessarily all, co-resident children.

Contrary to what we expected, the engagement on the labour market only has a weak effect on the level of primary commensality. Only in households without co-resident children, the level of partner commensality is affected by the employment situation of the respondent and his (or her) partner. The level of child commensality is also negatively affected by the work engagement of the parent, but only among single parents. Work-related characteristics scarcely have an effect on the social nature of meals: working fathers register fewer meals with their partner when they work many hours, while working mothers share fewer meals with their partner, when they work during regular office hours. Work-related factors do not affect the level of solitary eating neither do they affect the level of child commensality.

In contrast to what we expected, we do not find significant social class differences in the social context of eating practices. The literature, however, suggests that the sociable nature of the meal would be more valued by the higher social classes. Although we did not find significant differences in the importance attached to the different commensality partners in the daily eating practices, we do find significant class differences in the importance attached to the meal as a talkative event. Significant relationships exist between social class and the importance of talking during meals. On average 12 percent of total weekly eating time (1h11'/9h48') occurs with talking registered as a secondary activity (see Table 3:16). White-collars register

parallel talking during 13.3 percent of their weekly eating time, while the self-employed only do this during 7 percent of their weekly eating time. Blue-collars take a middle position. This finding corroborates the importance of sociability during the meal through talking for the higher educated and the higher social classes (Charles and Kerr, 1988: 187; De Vault, 1994: 49; Fischler, 1996c).

The easier access to food does not really affect the social organization of eating practices either. Only the level of partner commensality is negatively affected by living in an urban region. We had however expected that the easier access to food would result in an increase in solitary eating. The time-use data do not corroborate this hypothesis.



## **Chapter 7 Unravelling the spatial organization of eating practices**

Various sociological studies on the significance of the meal have indicated that daily eating practices are primarily considered as domestic occasions (Mäkelä, Kjaernes, Ekström et al., 1999: 75) . Compared to 1966, nowadays eating occurs more in other locations than the home place. Especially eating out has grown more popular during the last three decades. We realize that for some eating occasions the restaurant, rather than the home, is considered as the ideal location to have a meal. Business lunches and meals with acquaintances or non-resident family may ideally take place in a restaurant rather than at home. However, despite its growing popularity in the last decades, eating out remains a rather uncommon practice. Due to its rather exceptional nature, eating out cannot be assessed well by means of time-use data. For those reasons, we do not go into the practice of eating out in this study. Instead, we focus on daily eating practices and explore the factors that affect the importance of the home place as a meal location. Not all daily meals are equally likely to be spent at home. The home location of eating especially concerns the main meal of the day (Murcott, 1983c: 80). Therefore, we also investigate which factors affect the location of particular meals.

Before we go into the factors that affect the likelihood of eating at home, we tackle the location of eating in more detail. Various studies have shown that the proper meal was equally connected to a specific location in the home, which is the dinner table (Warde and Martens, 1999: 117). Eating also occurs at other locations besides the dinner table, like in the sofa, at the desk or while standing. Why people take their meals at these locations rather than at the dinner table is researched in the first section of this chapter.

### **7.1 Who does not eat at the dinner table?**

The delocalisation of eating practices implies, among other things, that other locations than the dinner table operate as meal locations. Eating in the sofa, in front of TV, at the desk and so on, all violate the meal's spatial boundaries. As shown in chapter 3, most meals are generally still eaten at the dinner table. Depending on the type of day

and the type of meal, 82 to 96 percent of respondents claim to usually take their meal at the dinner table. The occurrence of eating at another place than the home place is too extreme to be studied by means of a logistic regression. For that reason the specific location of eating is investigated by means of cross tabulations. The cross tabulations are discussed, but not presented, here.

#### *The effect of attitudes on the specific location of meals*

The TOR'04 questionnaire not only assessed the specific location of meals but also assessed people's beliefs with regard to the specific location of the meal. Contrary to our expectations, the practice of eating at the dinner table is even more widespread than the attitude that eating should occur at the dinner table. 63.1 percent of the Flemish population agrees with the statement, while at least 82 percent of the Flemings usually eat at the dinner table. 'The table is the place to eat'. Yet, there appears to be a significant relationship between the practice of eating at the dinner table and valuing this practice. This holds for the three daily meals on weekdays and weekend days. 70.1 percent of the respondents, who do not value eating at the dinner table, actually have weekday breakfast at the dinner table. Conversely, 93.4 percent of those who value eating at the dinner table have weekday breakfast at the dinner table. Those who do not value eating at the dinner table, are also more likely to eat weekday lunch at the desk or while standing or travelling. Those who value eating at the dinner table almost exclusively have the evening meal at the dinner table (99 percent on weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays), while this holds less (85 percent) for those who do not value the meal at the table.

#### *The effect of social class on the specific location of meals*

The specific location of meals is also subject to social class differentiations. These are however not in line with our expectations. First of all, social class differences exist regarding the attitude towards the location of the meal. In contrast to what we expected, blue-collar workers more often agree with the statement 'The table is the place to eat' than white-collar workers do. Moreover, there are no significant differences between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers in the actual location of the main meal of the day. Blue-collar workers and white collar workers are equally likely to take weekend dinners and weekday

dinner at the dinner table. We expected that the higher social classes would eat their meals more often at the table, in line with their formal approach to the meal. The lower social classes were expected to eat the weekday dinner more often in the sofa, in front of TV (Dryer and Dryer, 1973; Charles and Kerr, 1988; Herpin, 1988), in accordance with the disorder characteristic of the working classes' *franc manger* (Bourdieu, 1979: 217-218) and due to poorer material conditions. Apparently, the material conditions of the various social classes are not as outspoken in Flanders in 2004, as found in the UK in the 1980s by Charles and Kerr (1988: 189). Given the small size of the current nuclear family in Flanders and Belgium (see also section 4.4), people have the financial means to provide a dinner table that is large enough for the whole family. Nowadays in Flanders, scarce accommodation does not result in working-class families being forced to eat in the sofa.

In contrast to what was found for weekday dinner, significant class differentiations exist for weekday breakfast and weekday lunch. White-collar workers take weekday breakfast significantly more at their desk than blue-collar workers do. Blue-collar workers less often eat weekday breakfast at another place than the dinner table. Analogously, blue-collar workers (85.2 percent) are more likely to take weekday lunch at the dinner table than white-collar workers are (79.9 percent) and the self-employed (77.6 percent). Obviously, it is the nature of paid work performed by the various social classes that affects the specific location of the meal. White-collar workers have a much higher chance (11.5 percent) of eating weekday lunch at their desk, compared to the blue-collar workers (2.7 percent) and the self-employed (2.8 percent). The self-employed, on the other hand, have a much higher chance of eating while standing or travelling (15.9 percent) compared to white-collar workers (4.7 percent) and blue-collar workers (4.7 percent).

Analyses on the effect of the educational level corroborate the conclusions above. It is highly-educated, clerical work, rather than lowly-educated, manual labour that promotes eating at another place than the dinner table, more particularly the desk. The highly educated take breakfast and lunch more at the desk on weekdays, while the lower educated have a higher chance of taking weekday breakfast and lunch at the dinner table. These findings sustain the different nature of doing service work (Fischler, 2001: 183).

### *The effect of age on the specific location of meals*

The specific location of eating is also subject to significant social differentiation on the basis of age. Age affects the actual location of meals as well as the attitudes towards eating at the dinner table. The likelihood of agreeing with the statement 'The table is the place to eat' increases with age. Young (18 to 24) people value the meal at the dinner table significantly less than respondents in any other age category: only 25 percent of those aged 18 to 24 agrees with this statement, while 92 percent of those aged 65 to 75 agrees with this statement.

The lower value attached to eating at the dinner table is also apparent from the location where the meal is usually eaten. While the elderly population takes all the meals almost exclusively at the dinner table, young people take their meals on various locations, depending on the day of the week and the type of the meal. Especially on Sundays, there appears to be a significant relationship between age and the chance of eating in the sofa. While 15.4 percent of the youngest age group (18 to 24 years old) eats breakfast in the sofa on Sunday morning, this holds for 0.4 to 4 percent of all elderly age groups. Conversely, the youngest age group has a much lower chance of eating breakfast at the dinner table. 81.1 percent of the youngest age group normally takes Sunday breakfast at the dinner table, while all elderly age groups almost exclusively take Sunday breakfast at the dinner table. On weekdays, the chance of taking breakfast at the dinner table is even smaller, amounting to about 75 percent for the two youngest age groups (18 to 39 years old). They are more likely to eat weekday breakfast while standing or while travelling.

### *The effect of the household situation on the specific location of meals*

The household situation also affects the location of the meal: the location of the weekday lunch and dinner are significantly different for people who live alone. Compared to people who live together with their parents, partner or children, single-living persons have a higher chance of eating weekday lunch at the dinner table (88.4 percent versus 81.4 percent) and conversely, a lower chance of eating weekday lunch at the desk (2.6 percent versus 7.5 percent). Another logic holds for weekday dinner. Single-living persons more often take weekday dinner in the sofa (8.4 percent for

those living alone versus 4.2 percent) and less at the dinner table (88.7 percent for those living alone versus 94.6 percent). This finding reveals that people, who live alone, prefer to share meals with other people, when they get the chance: weekday lunch at work is shared with colleagues at the dinner table rather than solitarily eaten at their desk. A commensal weekday lunch compensates for the solitary weekday dinner, where the TV-set (in the sofa) meets with the lack of a meal partner.

Co-resident children also significantly affect the location of the meal. In general, the presence of children fosters eating at the dinner table and prevents eating in the sofa. These findings are in line with earlier findings in this study which showed that the presence of co-resident children in the household decreases the odds of eating occurring while watching TV (see 5.3.2). Parents especially respect the “proper” location of the meal for weekend meals and weekday dinner. There is no significant difference between parents and persons without co-resident children for weekday breakfast. The hectic nature of the breakfast moment does not allow for a formal, family breakfast (Dickinson, Murcott, Eldridge et al., 2001). It is only when parents have more time to organize a proper meal (weekday dinner and weekend meals) that they show a higher tendency to eat at the dinner table compared to persons without co-resident children. These findings are in line with earlier findings. They point to the importance of the dinner table as a structured framework, a guarantee that the meal passes off smoothly (Dryer and Dryer, 1973; Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988).

Weekday lunch shows another logic than weekday dinner among parents. People with co-resident children less often claim to take weekday lunch at the dinner table than people without co-resident children (79.1 percent versus 85.0 percent). Conversely, parents have a higher chance of having weekday lunch at their desk than people without co-resident children (9.5 percent versus 4.5 percent). This finding points at the overtaking manoeuvre parents perform during working hours: they want to preserve family life and family meals on weekday evenings and try to prevent work drawing out in the evening by colonising the lunch break for work.

Contrary to our expectations, eating weekday lunch at the desk is not a female characteristic in Flanders. We expected that women’s family responsibilities prevent them from extending their working day in the morning or in the evening. Practical and

organizational factors would incite working mothers to cut on their lunch break and decide in favour of the lunch box meal at the desk. Men and fathers, on the contrary, would be less willing to give up their lunch breaks and would rather catch up with the extra workload by adjusting the beginning or the end of the working day (Poulain 2003: 61-62). The TOR'04 questionnaire does not reveal any significant difference between working women and working mothers in the prevalence of eating weekday lunch at the desk, while it does reveal a significant difference between working men (10 percent at the desk for weekday lunch) and working fathers (14.1 percent at the desk for weekday lunch).

Nevertheless, a significant difference exists between working fathers and working mothers, although the difference is not as expected. Working fathers (14.1 percent at the desk for weekday lunch) have a significantly higher chance of spending weekday lunch at their desk compared to working mothers (9.4 percent at their desk for weekday lunch). The same conclusions hold for full-time working parents. The difference between full-time working fathers (14.8 percent eat at their desk) and full-time working mothers (11.5 percent eat at their desk) is smaller than for working parents in general, though. The higher prevalence of eating at the desk among men also holds for the active population in general. We may conclude that working men more often eat at their desk than working women, irrespective of parenthood. However, in section 5.3.3, we did not find a significant difference between working fathers and working mothers in the prevalence of eating while working. This means that taking weekday lunch at the desk (more prevalent among working fathers) not automatically assumes that the employee engages in multi-tasking, i.e. eating while working (equally prevalent among working parents). However, remaining at the workplace for lunch supposedly is a time-saving strategy. Working men and working fathers, thus, try to catch up even more with an increased workload by eating weekday lunch at their desk. Working women and working mothers, on the contrary, eat more at the table. This may also mean that women go home more often to eat with their children than fathers who are more likely to stay at the workplace for weekday lunch. We go into this in more detail in section 7.2.3.1.

*The effect of work-related factors on the specific location of meals*

As expected, the employment situation of the respondent also affects the location of meals, but only for weekday lunch and weekday breakfast. Paid work does not affect the location of weekday dinner and weekend meals. 80.5 percent of the active population takes weekday breakfast at the dinner table, while this holds for 92.3 percent of those who are not working. The active population is significantly more likely to take weekday breakfast while standing or travelling, which points to part (11 percent) of the active population having a fast bite while travelling to work rather than a “proper” breakfast at the dinner table before leaving for work. We assume this fast bite while travelling is not registered in the time-use diaries, and that a considerable part of breakfast skippers, in fact, has a fast bite while travelling. The time-use data sustain this assumption: the average number of breakfasts per working week is significantly higher for those who claim to have weekday breakfast usually at the dinner table than for those who claim to have weekday breakfast usually at the desk, while standing, travelling or being in another place. Weekday breakfast in another place than the dinner table or the sofa is a fast bite that is unlikely to be registered in the time-use diary.

Significant differences also exist between the working and the non-working population for the location of weekday lunch. 91.4 percent of the non-active population has lunch at the dinner table on weekdays. This holds for three quarters of the active population. The latter are more likely to take weekday lunch while standing or travelling or at the desk. 11 percent of the active population claims to take weekday lunch usually at its desk. This figure is somewhat lower than the figure for France: Poulain (1998a: 353) found that 15 percent of workers reported to eat at their desk or in the workshop, but not in the canteen. Again, there is a significant relationship between the location of weekday lunch and the number of weekday lunches registered in the time-use diaries. Those who usually eat weekday lunch while standing or travelling register significantly less weekday lunches in the time-use diary. Part of the skipped weekday lunches thus correspond to fast bites while standing or travelling during the lunch period.

Analyses also reveal that the location of weekday meals is influenced by the characteristics of paid work. Respondents with a predictable end of the working day are more likely to have weekday lunch at the dinner table and less likely to have weekday lunch at the desk, while travelling, standing or being in another location. However, contrary to our expectations, the predictability of the end of the working day does not affect the location of weekday dinner.

The type of the work schedule and the timing of work also have a significant influence on the specific location of weekday lunch. Respondents who work fixed hours and days are more likely to eat weekday lunch at their desk than respondents without a fixed work schedule. Analogously, regular day work increases the likelihood of having lunch at the desk and decreases the likelihood of having lunch at the dinner table.

Significant differences also exist between workers according to the type of work performed and the level of education. The differences for the active population confirm the differences found for the population in general: the chance of eating at the desk increases by educational level and is higher for those performing clerical work, than for the self-employed and the blue-collar (manual labour). On the other hand, the self-employed are significantly more likely to have weekday lunch while travelling or standing.

We may conclude that the specific location of meals is affected by a variety of factors. Although the majority of the population claims to take most meals usually at the dinner table, weekday breakfast and weekday lunch are most likely to occur at other locations like the desk. This is especially so for highly-educated, clerical workers, especially men, who work during standard office hours. Weekday dinner and Sunday dinner are most likely to be eaten at the dinner table. Respondents with children more often eat these meals at the dinner table than respondents without co-resident children, while young people and people who live alone more often eat in the sofa, in front of the TV. This section investigated the specific location of particular meals by means of a question in the questionnaire included in the Flemish time-use study of 2004. We can also get information on the location of eating occasion from the time-use diaries, although in less detail. In the next section, we assess the factors that affect the

location of eating on a more general level. More particularly, we investigate the factors that hinder eating from occurring at the home place.

## **7.2 Factors hindering eating at home**

In the first chapter of this study, it was argued that eating is considered primarily as a domestic occasion. Although other locations besides the home are considered more appropriate for particular meals, like business lunches, in the literature on the significance of the meal, the home place is generally considered as the usual place for day to day meal consumption. We argued that although eating increasingly occurs in others places, more particularly restaurants, the home place remains the main location for daily eating. In the following sections, we investigate which factors hinder eating occurring at home. First, we try to get an insight into the location of eating on weekdays and Sundays in general. Then, we study the factors affecting the location of particular meals, namely weekday lunch and weekday dinner.

### **7.2.1 Who spends little eating time at home during the working week?**

On average, about three quarters of working-week eating time occurs at home. Due to the non-normal distribution of the share of the home meals in working-week eating time, a dummy is used as a dependent variable. This dummy distinguishes between an extreme group, with comparatively little home meals (30 percent of the Flemish population has eaten at home less than 61 percent of working-week eating time), and a large group with average to high practice of eating at home.

#### *The effect of attitudes on the location of working-week eating time*

In the TOR'04 survey, the attitude towards home meals is assessed by means of the extent to which one agrees with the statement 'I prefer to eat at home'. Contrary to what we expected, the share of the population that prefers to eat at home is smaller than the share of the population who usually eats at home: only 56.2 percent of the Flemish population agrees with the statement 'I prefer to eat at home'. 18.5 percent disagrees and a quarter of the population agrees nor disagrees. This means that for a considerable part of the population the home is not the preferred location for eating,

although it most likely is the place where they usually eat. Disagreeing with the statement ‘I prefer to eat at home’ does not necessarily mean that one prefers other locations, like restaurants, to the home. Nevertheless, the preference for eating at home significantly affects the location of eating practices. Agreeing with the statement ‘I prefer eating at home’ entails a lower chance of spending only a small share of working-week eating time at home (Table 7:1).

**Table 7:1 Model explaining the probability of a low share (<61%) of eating at home on a working week, Exp(B)- effects, model for general population (TOR’04)**

	<b>&lt;61% of working-week eating time spent at home</b>
<b>Intercept</b>	2.512***
<b>Labour-market engagement</b>	***
Working man	Ref.
Working woman	0.659**
Not-working	0.204***
<b>Lifecycle phase</b>	***
Young (18-39) or middle-aged (40-59) respondents living in couple, with parents or alone	Ref.
Elderly (60-75) respondents living in couple or alone	0.328
Living with children	
<b>Attitude ‘I prefer eating at home’</b>	***
Disagree/ no opinion	Ref.
Agree	0.560
n	1668
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	20.3% (14.4%)***

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

*The effect of social class on the location of working-week eating time*

The location of working-week eating time is also subject to social class differentiation. The higher the social class, the more likely one is to eat only few meals at home during the working week. However, the effect of social class disappears once controlled for the effect of employment status. Indeed, in the contemporary labour market with its strong emphasis on the service economy, employees are much more likely to be engaged in clerical work (white-collar workers) than in manual labour (blue-collar workers), while the non-active population is more likely to have been employed in manual labour (manufacturing) before retirement.

*The effect of the wider availability of food on the location of working-week eating time*

It is often argued that the omnipresence of food entails that food is also eaten in any place (Schneider, 1997: 91). It was therefore expected that an easier access to food at other places besides the home place would decrease meal consumption at home. However, living in an urban region does not promote eating outside the home. Although the infrastructure available in an urban region offers more opportunities to eat in other places besides the home, it does not really promote the outdoor consumption of food in practice.

*The effect of the household situation on the location of working-week eating time*

We assumed that the share of eating time spent at home is strongly affected by the household situation, more particularly by one's phase in the lifecycle. Significant differences exist between young, middle-aged and elderly singles in the likelihood of spending little eating time at home. Analogously, younger couples also differ from elderly couples in their likelihood of eating at other places than the home during the working week. There was no significant difference between single parents and parents living in couple. The significant interaction effect between age and the household type entails the construction of a composed variable measuring the lifecycle phase.

Adults who live with their parents, young and middle-aged persons living alone, and young couples show a significantly higher chance of spending only a small share of working-week eating time at home than persons with co-resident children. As expected, the presence of children in the household promotes that eating occurs at home. This is in line with earlier findings which suggest that the more persons there are in a household, the more meals are prepared at home (Laurence, 2004) and the less fast-food and restaurant meals are consumed (Bonke, 1993). Elderly persons, who live alone or in couple without children, take even more home meals than parents with co-resident children. These findings are in line with earlier French findings (Larmet, 2002): elderly persons (alone and in couple without children) have a higher chance of withdrawing in the domestic atmosphere. However, the difference between parents with co-resident children and elderly persons in couple or alone disappears, once

controlled for the engagement on the labour market. Parents register a lower rate of home meals than the elderly population, due to their engagement on the labour market. We therefore distinguish between two lifecycle phases: young (18-39) and middle-aged (40-59) respondents who live in couple, with parents or alone on the one hand, and parents with co-resident children or older (60-75) respondents in couple or alone on the other hand (Table 7:1).

As mentioned earlier, elderly persons are more likely to eat at home due to the fact that they do not work. People with a job thus spend less eating time at home on weekdays. However, the engagement in paid work does not have the same effect on men and women: a working man has a significantly higher chance of spending little eating time at home than a working woman and a non-working person. We took into account the interaction effect between sex and personal engagement on the labour market by means of a combined variable distinguishing between working men, working women and the non-active population (Table 7:1).

We may conclude that taking weekday meals at home largely depends on the preference to eat at home, the employment situation of the respondent, the respondent's sex and the phase in the lifecycle. 20.3 percent of the variance is explained by taking into account these factors.

#### *The effect of work-related factors on the location of working-week eating time*

The location of working-week eating time is significantly affected by work-related factors. However, work-related factors have a different effect on active men and active women. This compels us to present separate models for active men and active women (Table 7:2).

**Table 7:2 Model explaining the probability of a low share (<61%) of eating at home on a working week, Exp(B)- effects, model for active men and active women (TOR'04)**

	<b>Active men</b>	<b>Active women</b>
<b>Intercept</b>	(0.557)	0.323**
<b>Number of working hours</b>	1.016*	1.034**
<b>Work schedule</b>	***	**
No fixed hours and days	Ref.	Ref.
Fixed hours and days	2.375	2.260
<b>Lifecycle phase</b>	**	***
Young with parents, single or in couple	Ref.	Ref.
Elderly singles or couples	0.523	0.365
Living with children		
<b>Attitude 'I prefer eating at home'</b>	**	**
Disagree/ no opinion	Ref.	Ref.
Agree	0.540	0.538
N	528	432
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	11.8% (8.3%)*	15.8% (11.6%)*

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

For active men as well as for active women, we find a positive relationship between working fixed hours and days and a small share of working-week eating time spent at home. Nevertheless, this relationship is somewhat stronger for men than for women (Table 7:2). A fixed work schedule promotes eating at work. People who work fixed hours and days are more likely to have weekday lunch at work, which decreases the share of home meals in the working-week meal pattern. Conversely, less standardised work schedules, like regularly or always performing evening work and working in shifts, promote eating at home. Workers who do not have a fixed work schedule have a lower chance of eating at work as they often work on times not appropriate for meals (nights, evenings....) and sometimes do not have the appropriate infrastructure at hand to eat at work (Costa, 1996: 9-10; Waterhouse, Buckley, Edwards et al., 2003). This finding is also consistent with earlier findings on partner commensality: working mothers are also more likely to engage less in partner commensality during the working week, when they work during regular office hours. The share of working-week eating time spent at home is not only affected by the timing of work, but also by the duration of paid work. The more working hours performed during the working week, the less eating time is spent at home. This effect holds for active men and active women, but is somewhat stronger for the latter (Table 7:2).

Besides the addition of work-related factors, the model for the active population corresponds to a large extent to the model for the general population (Table 7:1). The

lifecycle phase and the value attached to eating at home affect the odds of spending a small share of working-week eating time at home in the same way, among the active population and the general population. Despite the inclusion of a number of work-related factors, the model for the active population results in a lower explained variance than the model for the population in general.

Eating at home during the working week is more easily explained for working women than for active men. As shown in the model for the general population (Table 7:1), active women spend more working-week eating time at home than active men. However, the type of work schedule and especially the number of working hours strongly affect the likelihood of spending working-week eating time at home for active women. Moreover, the phase in the lifecycle has a stronger impact on active women than on active men. As expected, the presence of children in the household implies that active women, more than active men, spend more working-week eating time at home. Women's family responsibilities still affect the location of eating during the working week, even if they have a job.

### 7.2.2 Who spends little eating time at home on Sundays?

On weekends, the percentage of eating time spent at home is even higher than on weekdays. Especially on Sundays, the day of the week generally considered as a real family day, eating at home appears to be very common. 78.5 percent of Sunday eating time is spent at home. The share of eating time spent at home on Sundays is highly skewed to the right, with 70.3 percent of the population spending all their Sunday eating time at home. A dummy distinguishing between those who spend all Sunday eating time at home and those who do not, is used as a dependent variable. In this section, we explore what factors hinder that all Sunday eating time is spent at home.

#### *The effect of attitudes on the location of Sunday eating time*

As on weekdays, the likelihood of spending Sunday eating time at home is influenced by the attitude towards eating at home. The more one prefers to eat at home, the more likely one spends all Sunday eating time at home. The value attached to a sociable

Sunday meal does not affect the likelihood of spending all Sunday eating time at home.

The TOR'04 questionnaire also includes a statement that assesses the value attached to eating out on Sundays. 18.4 percent of the Flemish population agrees with the statement 'Sunday is a restaurant day'. The more one agrees with the statement that 'Sunday is a restaurant day', the less Sunday eating time is spent at home. The value attached to eating at home is not included in the final model anymore, due to its strong correlation with the phase in the lifecycle and the attitude towards eating out on Sundays. The more one agrees with the statement that 'Sunday is a restaurant day', the less one prefers to eat at home. Moreover, the preference to eat at home and the lower value attached to eating out on Sundays are characteristic of the elderly population. Due to the strong correlation between the preference to eat at home and other explanatory factors, only the value attached to the Sunday as a restaurant day is included in the final model (Table 7:3).

**Table 7:3 Model explaining the probability of not spending all Sunday eating time at home, effects (Exp(B)), model for men and women (TOR'04)**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>Intercept</b>	0.192***	0.314***
<b>Lifecycle phase</b>	***	***
With co-resident children	Ref.	Ref.
Elderly persons in couple or alone		0.346**
Young or middle-aged persons in couple, alone or with parents	1.855	1.828**
<b>Labour-market engagement</b>	***	Ns
Not working	Ref.	Ref.
Working	2.103	Ns
<b>Attitude 'Sunday is a restaurant day'</b>	*	***
Disagree/ no opinion	Ref.	Ref.
Agree	1.489	2.745
N	777	788
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	6.6%(4.7%)***	11.6%(8.1%)***

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

#### *The effect of social class on the location of Sunday eating time*

The time-use data show that there are no social class differences as far as the likelihood of spending only little Sunday eating time at home is concerned. As on weekdays, day to day eating practices mainly occur at home, irrespective of social class.

### *The effect of the wider availability of food on the location of Sunday eating time*

We expected that the wider availability of food would foster eating at other places besides the home. However, on weekdays as well as on Sundays, the residence in an urban region does not promote eating at another place than the home.

### *The effect of the household situation on the location of Sunday eating time*

As on weekdays, the location of Sunday eating is significantly influenced by the household situation. However, on Sundays, the composition of the household affects the level of eating time spent at home in another way than during the working week. During the working week, only young and middle-aged people who live with their parents, in couple or alone are more likely to eat at other places besides the home, than respondents in all other household situations. On Sundays, more differentiation exists, at least for elderly women. Contrary to what we found on weekdays, mothers take less meals at home on Sundays than elderly women, who live alone or in couple (Table 7:3). This finding corroborates the likelihood of withdrawing in the home atmosphere among elderly women. Fathers do not differ significantly from elderly men who live alone or in couple.

Next to the effect of the lifecycle, men and women also differ as far as the effect of the professional situation is concerned. Women's employment situation does not affect the location of Sunday eating, while working men take fewer meals at home on Sundays than non-working men. Due to the different effect of the lifecycle phase and the employment status for men and women, separate models are presented for men and women (Table 7:3). Despite the fact that only two variables are included in the model for women, the explained variance is higher than for men. Obviously, among women, the location of Sunday meals depends more on their phase in the lifecycle and their attitude towards eating out on Sundays, than for men.

### 7.2.3 Factors affecting the location of meals

In this section, we investigate which factors affect the home location of particular meals. Eating at home is not expected of every meal to the same extent. The home

location of eating especially holds for dinner, also called the home meal (Murcott, 1983). On an average weekday, 88.1 percent of the population spend dinner time at home. On Sundays, this percentage amounts to 78.3 percent. The high prevalence of eating dinner at home on specific days of the week does not allow for analysing the factors behind the location of dinner by means of a logistic regression. We are convinced that the general model explaining for Sunday eating time as presented in 7.2.2 provides a good insight in the factors affecting the location of all Sunday meals. Indeed, on Sundays, breakfast (94.1 percent at home), dinner (78.3 percent at home) and lunch (76.2 percent at home) are spent at home by most people. On weekdays, however, significant differences exist between lunch (58.8 percent at home) and breakfast (93.6 percent at home) or dinner (88.1 percent at home). Weekday dinner occurs almost exclusively at home. Weekday breakfast most often occurs at home when registered in the time-use diary, but as shown in section 7.1 breakfast is often taken as a fast bite ‘on the go’ or at the desk. Of all weekday meals, weekday lunch is least likely to occur at home. In this section, we therefore exclusively focus on the factors that hinder weekday lunch from occurring at home.

### **7.2.3.1 Who does not take weekday lunch at home?**

In order to get an insight into the location of weekday lunch, we take into account the location of all lunches during the working week. All respondents who had registered at least one lunch during the five days of the working week are included in the analysis<sup>42</sup>. In contrast to weekday dinner, weekday lunch is not expected to be a home meal. Especially for the active population, weekday lunch is less likely to be taken at home. The time-use data confirm this assumption: while 65.4 percent of those who are not active on the labour market spend all weekday lunchtime at home, this holds for only 27.1 percent of the active population. In this section, we only assess which factors affect the location of weekday lunch among the active population. The aim of this analysis is to gain more in-depth knowledge on the location of working-week eating time (as discussed in section 7.2.1), more particularly on the effect of work-

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<sup>42</sup> Most respondents (79.8 percent of the 1,630 retained for this analysis) have registered at least three lunches during the working week. Therefore this method is preferred to taking into account one single day or lunch.

related factors on the location of weekday lunch. We research which factors entail that employees do not take all (registered) weekday lunches at home.

The likelihood of not spending all weekday lunchtime at home is significantly influenced by work-related characteristics. As for the location of working-week eating time in general, work-related characteristics have a different effect on active women and active men. This finding is in line with our expectations: we expected working women to organize weekday lunch in a different manner than active men. Therefore, separate models are presented for active men and active women. While the explained variance of the general model for the location of eating during the working week is higher for women than for men (Table 7:2), the opposite occurs when explaining the location of weekday lunch. For men, the location of weekday lunch in particular is highly dependent on the characteristics of paid work. For women, this holds to a lesser extent.

**Table 7:4 Model explaining the probability of not eating all weekday lunches at home on a working week, Exp(B)-, model for active men and active women (TOR'04)**

	<b>Active men</b>	<b>Active women</b>
<b>Intercept</b>	(0.436)*	(0.223)
<b>Number of working hours</b>	1.030**	1.033**
<b>Work schedule</b>	***	ns
No fixed hours and days	Ref.	Ref.
Fixed hours and days	3.081	ns
<b>Day work</b>	*	**
Never or exceptional day work	Ref.	Ref.
Regular or always day work	2.178	3.375
<b>Social class (EGP92)</b>	***	***
White collar worker	Ref.	Ref.
Self-employed	0.151***	0.099***
Blue-collar worker	0.506**	0.457**
<b>Attitude 'I prefer eating at home'</b>	Ns	*
Disagree/ no opinion	Ref.	Ref.
Agree	Ns	0.591
N	483	407
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	20.9%(14.2%)*	16.4%(11.6%)*

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, n.s.: p≥0.05

Work-related factors have a stronger impact on the location of the weekday lunch (Table 7:4) than on the location of weekday eating time in general (Table 7:2). In contrast to what we found for the working-week eating time in general, the location of weekday lunch is also affected by the type of work one performs. Clerical work (white-collar workers) entails a higher chance of not eating at home. This finding is in

line with earlier findings: in section 7.1 we found that white-collar workers have a higher chance of eating at the desk at work. Blue-collar workers and especially the self-employed are more likely to take weekday lunch at home. The effect of performing clerical work on the location of the weekday lunch is similar for active men and active women.

In contrast to what was expected, the household situation does not affect the location of the weekday lunch. This holds for active women as well as for active men. The presence of children promotes the active population and especially active women to eat at home during the working week, but not during weekday lunch. This means that the presence of children only promotes eating at home beyond working hours, that is during weekday dinner and possibly also during weekday breakfast. However, when we focus on working parents, we find that working mothers are more likely to take all weekday lunches at home than working fathers. This is in line with earlier findings. For France Sjögren-de Beauchaine found that active mothers are more likely than active fathers to spend weekday lunch at home. As suggested in section 7.1, working mothers eat at the dinner table more often than working fathers because they go home. Conversely, working fathers have a higher chance of spending weekday lunch at their desk than working mothers.

The type of work schedule also affects the location of weekday lunch. Active men who work fixed hours and days less often take weekday lunch at home (Table 7:4). Although working fixed hours and days does promote eating at another place than the home place during the working week for active women, it does not promote taking weekday lunch in particular in another place. This means that a fixed work schedule affects the location of other weekday meals, like breakfast and dinner. For women, working fixed hours and days decreases their chances of taking weekday breakfast or weekday dinner at home. We hypothesize that this means that working women do not let the work schedule affect the location of their weekday lunch, while they use the possibilities of non-fixed work schedules as much as possible to spend a larger share of eating time at home.

In contrast to what was found for working-week eating time in general, the location of weekday lunch depends on the timing of working hours within the day. Regular day

work enhances the likelihood of not taking all weekday lunches at home. This means that being at work during office hours promotes taking lunch at work for both men and women (Table 7:4). As expected, the number of working hours also affects the location of the weekday lunch. The more working hours, the more likely active men and women are not to spend weekday lunch at home (Table 7:4).

By taking into account social class, the attitude towards the home meal and work-related factors, 20.9 percent of the variance is explained in the model for active men and 16.4 percent of the variance is explained in the model for active women. The preference for the home meal does not affect the location of weekday lunch for active men, although it does among active women. For active men, the preference for eating at home affects the location of eating during the working week, but not during lunchtime, when work-related factors are considered more imperative.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have investigated the spatial organization of eating. Notwithstanding the expansion of eating out, daily eating remains predominantly a domestic occasion. The home location of meals is chiefly due to the phase in the lifecycle and the non-engagement on the labour market. Self-evidently, being active on the labour market decreases the likelihood of spending meals at home. Especially weekday lunch is less likely to occur at home among the active population. Employees who usually work during standard office hours are more likely to take weekday lunch at the workplace.

Next to the labour-market engagement, the household situation also affects the location of meals. As expected, co-resident children foster eating at home. Elderly people also more often eat at home. They are more thrown back on the home place, partly due to their non-engagement on the labour market. Young and middle-aged respondents who live alone, in couple or with their parents tend to eat out more often. They are less committed to their household situation, which entails that eating is less often a domestic activity. These persons (in the non-committed phase of the lifecycle) also reveal a lower preference of eating at home than parents or elderly respondents. Only 47 percent of the young and middle-aged respondents who live alone, in couple

or with their parents prefer to eat at home, compared to almost 60 percent of parents and elderly respondents. These figures reveal that eating at home is not an ideal for all Flemings. Only 56 percent of the Flemish population agrees with the statement 'I prefer to eat at home'. For almost half of the Flemings, the home is not the favourite location for eating, which does not necessarily mean that other locations are preferred to the home place to have a meal. Yet, only 18 percent of the population agrees with the statement 'Sunday is a restaurant day'. However, this attitude assesses the suitability of Sundays as a day for eating out, but does not really assess the preference for eating out. Despite the fact that the home is the preferred place to eat for only half of the population, daily eating practices remain a domestic affair.

Alongside the home place, the dinner table is not unanimously considered as the ideal location for eating either. Only 63.1 percent of the population believes that eating should occur at the dinner table. Again large differences exist across the lifecycle. Young people less often value eating at the dinner table and tend to eat in other places, like the sofa or while standing or travelling. Despite the fact that the meal at the dinner table is only valued by 63 percent of the population, daily eating mainly occurs at the dinner table. Nevertheless, the time-use data reveal that part of the fast bites that are not registered in the time diaries are more likely to occur at another location than at the dinner table (or the sofa).



## **Conclusion**

### *The ideology of the proper meal and the three-meal-pattern: guiding structured eating practices*

Western eating habits are the subject of considerable public debate nowadays. Certainly, the debate over Western eating habits is not one of the central contemporary debates, yet, it cannot be denied. Suffice it to refer to the persisting starvation in large parts of Africa. In the West, seemingly less important issues are at stake. The current debate on eating habits focuses among other things on the social organization of eating practices and, more particularly, on the fate of meals. This concerns the organization of social life in general. Broadly speaking, (“traditional”) meals are often considered to belong to the past, and to be overrun by snacks. This process often assumes that present-day eating habits are on the decline. Compared to previous eating habits, current eating practices are believed to be in violation of collective, social norms guiding eating practices. The normative expectations concerning the social organization of eating are not met in practice and this is believed to be increasingly so. Like all social behaviour, eating comes with normative expectations. There are specific norms that guide eating behaviour. These collective norms render eating practices a high level of structure and predictability. As such, when these normative expectations are not met in practice, eating practices increasingly are perceived as “at random” practices, averse from any kind of structure. Hence, the decay of Western eating habits is often referred to as a destructureation process. The assumed modern, “snacky” way of eating entails that eating occurs in an “accidental” way, among others, with regard to timing, company or location.

One of our first aims was to set out the normative expectations guiding eating practices. How exactly eating practices *should* be organized, in Belgium and Western societies in general, was inferred from a variety of qualitative studies that are mostly aimed at grasping the normative significance of the meal. From these studies, we gathered a frame of reference, a collective ideology that governs our eating habits. This frame of reference reveals a clear structure in Western eating habits on a temporal, social and spatial level. Eating habits are highly institutionalized, in the

value systems of modern Western societies. In this ideology, the meal pattern is a highly structured ensemble of eating habits. The daily meal pattern concerns the organization of eating occasions throughout the day in terms of meals. The cultural idea of a meal entails that eating practices are organized in a specific manner, among other things, with regard to the use of time, the social context and the use of space. Nowadays, in Western Europe, a “proper” meal pattern (i.e. applying the norms) consists of three daily meals, namely breakfast in the morning, lunch and dinner. Dinner is considered as the most important meal of the day, which is revealed by stricter rules concerning time use, social contact, and location. On weekdays, dinner should take place in the evening; on Sundays, dinner should take place at noon. The main meal of the day should be shared with family members, and take place at the dinner table at home. For breakfast and lunch, these rules apply to a lesser extent.

We not only aimed to set out the normative expectations guiding Western eating habits, but also how these normative expectations came into being. Contrary to what is generally believed, the three-meal pattern and the proper meal are not time-honoured, universal ideals. Historical inquiry has revealed that these ideologies were only gradually institutionalized since the second half of the nineteenth century. Before that time, there was little proof of a highly institutionalized, collective manner of eating. The spread of this ideology is strongly linked to the rise of the bourgeoisie. A quick breakfast in the morning before work, a light lunch at noon and the main meal of the day after work fitted in neatly with the bourgeois work life. At the same time, meals, and more particularly dinner, came to assume a special role in family life. Before the middle of the nineteenth century in Europe, bourgeois households rarely shared meals, let alone for reasons of expressing a sense of family solidarity (Marenco, 1992: 113 in Kaufmann, 25: 86). The emphasis on the family meal also emphasized the domestic character of meals and more particularly dinner. Dinner became a highly formalized and ritualized institution, which was to take place at a set time, with the family in the dining room. Although the proper meal pattern is a sort of anomaly from a historic point of view, it has rapidly achieved the status of an important social institution in Western societies.

The importance attached to the ideology of the proper meal and the proper meal pattern was revealed by various studies on the normative significance of the meal. The

same ideas on how daily eating practices had to be organized, were regularly repeated by the respondents in these studies. Despite their pervasiveness, the proper meal and the proper meal pattern seem to live foremost an ideological life: these ideals were considered as important guidelines, but could not be put in practice on a daily basis. In this study, we have considered the ideology of the proper meal pattern as an important analytical frame. This ideology provides eating practices with a considerable amount of structure. In this study, the main focus is on eating practices, more particularly, on the deconstruction of eating practices. The idea of the proper meal and the proper meal pattern are used as a frame of reference, that allow for generating operational hypotheses on the deconstruction of our eating practices.

The aim of this study is to get a better insight into recently shifting eating practices, and more particularly, how eating is organized regarding time use, social contact, and use of space. This study set out with two central research questions. The first research question concerns the veracity of the deconstruction thesis. Here, we tackle to what extent individuals hang on to the commonly (culturally and socially) shared structure of eating on the temporal, social and spatial level, and how this has developed over time. The second research question concerns the reasons behind the deconstruction of eating practices, and studies which factors affect the temporal, social and spatial organization of eating practices.

So far, there has been very little systematic evidence of the occurrence of actual changes in the temporal, social and spatial organization of eating practices. Studies on changes in eating habits hardly appeal to historical comparison. The condition of our *current* eating habits is for the most part inferred from studies on spending patterns or aggregate data about the increasing number of fast-food outlets or vending machines. These studies come to the conclusion that we have wound up in a snack empire, due to an increasing number of fast-food outlets, the spread of microwave ovens, the increased number of women on the labour market, and so on. Such outcomes are readily reported in the popular media, linking them to more or less panicking information or interpretations (De Morgen, 01/06/2005, De Standaard, 19/11/2004, Het Belang van Limburg, 22/10/2002; Het Laatste Nieuws, 10/04/2000; Het Laatste Nieuws, 12-13/07/2003, VDAB, 2003). However, sales figures and spending patterns do not tell us how meals are actually organized. They reveal nothing on the temporal,

social and spatial dimensions of the meal. Neither do these aggregate figures allow for establishing the real decisive factors behind meal deconstruction: a simultaneous increase in the number of microwave ovens and eating alone does not necessarily mean that the microwave oven promotes solitary eating.

Sociologists do not agree on the level of deconstruction in our eating practices either. Sociologists have mainly focussed on what we eat, rather than the temporal and organizational aspects of eating. To assess the veracity of the deconstruction of our eating practices and its reasons, we prefer a quantitative approach on the basis of generalisable data on practices. In this study, time-use data are used to assess eating practices. To date, time-use data have been scarcely used to study eating practices. Time-use studies are aimed at grasping a person's daily time use. Therefore, they are also suitable to investigate the way daily eating practices are organized. Time-use diaries are especially aimed at grasping the temporal aspects of people's behaviour, but they also allow to grasp the social and spatial context of practices. The main shortcoming of the time-use diary method for this research is the fact that short activities, including short eating occasions, are underregistered in the time diaries, especially in the Flemish TOR'04 dataset.

#### *The veracity of the deconstruction of Belgian eating practices*

The first research question that is central to this study is to what extent Belgian eating practices reveal a deconstruction trend, more particularly to what extent the temporal, social and spatial structure in Belgian eating practices is taken into account less than before. To assess the veracity of the deconstruction of Belgian eating practices, we compare Belgian and Flemish time-use data from three different research years, namely 1966, 1999 and 2004. The 1950s and to a lesser extent the 1960s, are often considered as the high days of the proper meal pattern. The comparison of recent time-use data (1999 and 2004) with older time-use data (1966) has allowed us to study the veracity of the deconstruction of Belgian eating practices in a satisfying manner. Nevertheless, due to a lack of information, not all aspects of the deconstruction process could be investigated through time.

a. The temporal deconstruction of Belgian eating practices

The temporal deconstruction of eating practices implies that eating is organized in a more flexible manner regarding time use. The daily rate of eating, the timing of eating and the duration of eating are assumed to deviate more from the collective norm.

The time-use data reveal that eating practices in Belgium are still considerably structured regarding timing: at 12 o'clock at noon, other activities, including paid work, are collectively pushed aside for the midday meal. More than any other meal of the day or the week, weekday lunch operates as a real hinge of the day. In general, however, meals operate less as *Zeitgebers* nowadays than they did in the 1960s: meals claim wider time spans and the meal peaks are considerably lower than before. This means that the timing of meals shows more variation than in the 1960s: 12 o'clock is less often the sign to sit down to the dinner table.

Despite the increased flexibility with respect to the meal's timing, eating remains collectively tied to specific times during the day, more particularly the collectively recognized mealtimes. Food is generally not eaten in an accidental way throughout the day. Collectively maintained temporalities, like meals, may be somewhat more flexible than before, but they are definitely not replaced by individualized patterns of organization. With Cheng, Olsen, Southerton and Warde (2007, 55), we argue that the temporal re-organization of food consumption is not as radical as often implied. Although the time-use data do not allow to draw any conclusions on (the evolution of) the rate of snacks, we have serious reason to believe that the impact of snacks on the Belgian meal pattern is limited. The time-use data do not reveal the end of meals and the era of snacks. The meals are still predominantly there, be it somewhat more flexibly timed and more often skipped than before. We may assume that extraprandial intakes are present in people's meal pattern, but for most people they represent only a small part of their meal pattern. Generally, snacks do not appear as substitutes (being in competition with) for meals, but rather as small additions to meals. Most Belgians' eating pattern mainly relies on meals. However, for a small part of the Flemish and Belgian population, who does not register any or only one daily meal, snacks and fast bites must represent the principal or at least an important part of their meal pattern.

Compared to 1966, eating practices reveal a deconstruction as far as duration is concerned. Eating time, like other time spent on personal care, is under pressure in modern, Western societies (Davies and Madran, 1997: 80; Schneider, 1997: 94, Glorieux, Koelet, Mestdag et al., 2006). The time-use data show that the time spent on eating has decreased significantly in Belgium over the last 40 years. The decline in eating time is partly due to the fact that meals are more often skipped. Eating was most of all stripped of its status as a culturally valued activity, during the breakfast period (6:30-9:10), and by 1999, the four o'clock break in the afternoon had also lost its status as a separate meal. Breakfast only takes little time and has a high likelihood of being squeezed into another activity, like paid work or travelling. In contrast to breakfast, lunch and dinner are less likely to be skipped and also take more time. Despite its important role as a *Zeitgeber*, weekday lunch is more likely to be skipped than weekday dinner. These findings sustain the reevaluation of eating during working hours. Lunch is more likely to be skipped or reduced to a very small break nowadays than in the 1960s. Conversely, by 1999, the meal in the evening had assumed a more important place in the daily meal pattern: it takes most time and is least likely to be skipped. Its importance also appears from its sociable character, compared to other meals.

Belgian eating habits reveal another use of time in 1999, compared to 1966. Yet, it can hardly be concluded that the relationship between time and meals is reversed nowadays, compared to 30 years ago. Although the occurrence of disrupted eating occasions (while doing something else) and the decline in time spent eating partly sustain the thesis that the time for eating is increasingly a matter of remaining time (the time which is left over once all other activities have scheduled), eating still reveals a high level of temporal regularity. The temporal structure of eating still assigns a separate status to eating as a culturally valued activity, and meals still operate as an important reference point in a person's daily time use.

b. The social deconstruction of Belgian eating practices

The social deconstruction of eating practices implies that eating occurs more in social isolation and less often in primary interaction, i.e. with household members, than before. Sociability during meals is especially expected from the main meal of the day,

dinner. Compared to the 1960s, there has been an increase in eating in social isolation. On weekdays, more than a quarter of eating time is spent alone. On weekend days this is somewhat less. Moreover, the importance of eating in social isolation is partly underestimated by means of the available time-use data. Due to the underregistration of short eating occasions, the share of eating time spent in social isolation is most likely to be somewhat larger than the estimations from the time-use diaries. Still, the majority of eating time is spent in primary interaction -that is with at least one household member present. Nevertheless, eating with household members is less likely to occur than in the 1960s. Primary commensality is most likely to occur during dinner, which sustains the important status of the evening meal. Commensality patterns do not only vary according to the timing of the meal, but also vary according to the type of meal. Meals at work are more likely to be taken with colleagues, while restaurant meals can be taken with co-resident and non-resident family members, colleagues and even persons whom one is unfamiliar with. The above does not allow to conclude that the link between food and sociability has been broken up, as suggested by some (Fernandez-Armesto, 2002:19, Gauthier, 1992). We do not agree with Falk (1994: 35-36) and Gofton (1995a: 172-173) that the meal has lost its function as an event of communion. The meal is still a time to bond, especially with household members, but also with others.

c. The spatial destructure of Belgian eating practices

The spatial destructure of eating practices implies that eating is less spatially demarcated than before. Instead of occurring mainly at one, exclusive location, namely at the dinner table at home, daily eating practices would increasingly take place at a variety of locations. The time-use data reveal that the “delocalisation” of eating is still in a very early stage in Belgium and Flanders. Despite the confronting figures of money spent on eating out, despite the increasing number of fast-food outlets and public eating places, the time-use data confirm that daily eating was and remains predominantly a domestic affair. With Grignon, we conclude that there is a huge difference between the actual importance of fast-food in the Western meal pattern and the importance it assumes in the media (Grignon 2001: 19-22). Although there has been a slight decrease in eating at home and a slight increase in eating at other places, in the last four decades, eating remains predominantly a domestic

occasion. Self-evidently, workers are more likely to spend weekday lunch at work, although a considerable part of workers still goes home for lunch. Nevertheless, compared to 1966, it has become harder to organize weekday lunch at home. This is also reflected by the fact that weekday lunch is less likely to occur with household members than in 1966. A small part of weekday lunches is also taken at the desk. This mostly holds for fast bites. Of all meals, weekday breakfast reveals the highest likelihood to occur while standing or travelling, or at the desk. In general, fast bites are more often than meals taken at other locations, like while travelling or standing. Most likely, we underestimate the delocalisation of eating practices, as the short eating occasions are underregistered in the time-use diaries. Snacks 'on the go' is a reality that was partly grasped by the questionnaire, but was not registered in the time-use diaries. Despite the underestimation of snacks 'on the go', eating behaviour has certainly not developed to be mainly nomadic behaviour, as suggested by some (Schneider, 1997: 94-95).

Besides the home, the restaurant has also achieved the status of an ideal location for eating. On a weekly basis, more than an hour is spent on meals in restaurants. Nevertheless, for most people eating out remains a rather uncommon practice that does not occur on a weekly basis. For that reason, we did not go into this practice more deeply by means of the time-budget data. Nevertheless, the time-use data reveal that meals in restaurants are highly structured eating occasions (see also Warde and Martens, 1999: 120). They almost never occur alone. Although they do occur with household members, they are very likely to occur with non-resident family members, friends and colleagues, and even persons whom one is rather unfamiliar with. Restaurant meals also take a considerable amount of time. As such, the temporal and social structure of eating is highly emphasized by restaurant meals.

The time-use data reveal that although the actual changes in eating practices are more modest than what is often assumed in the media or by trendwatchers, it cannot be denied that eating practices are less likely to be modelled according to the ideology of the proper meal and the proper meal pattern nowadays, than in 1966. Our second research question tackles the reasons behind a different temporal, social and spatial organization of eating.

### *The reasons for another organization of eating practices*

A variety of factors is believed to affect the organization of eating. So far, little scientific research had been conducted for the factors that actually affect the temporal, social and spatial organization of eating practices on an individual level. In this study, we were not guided by one or several large theories as far as the reasons for another organization of eating practices is concerned. Although, occasionally we take on assumptions from various theories of change, our main aim has been to conduct an empirical research for the impact of a variety of factors that are often assumed to affect the organization of eating practices. As our expectations are not to be subsumed under large theories, this thesis is not aimed at testing the validity of large theories.

Our research for the factors that affect the organization of eating practices has been based solely on the time-use data collected for Flanders in 2004. The models that explain the temporal, social and spatial organization of eating generally have a low explained variance. This is partly due to the nature of the dependent variable. In this study, we try to explain concrete eating practices performed on a particular day or week in a person's life. Such concrete practices are hard to predict. Still, our analyses do allow for drawing some important conclusions on the actual effect (or lack of effect) of a variety of factors on the temporal, social and spatial organization of eating practices. In the following sections, we tackle the most important conclusions that can be drawn from our explanatory analyses.

#### a. The gastro-anomy thesis largely rejected

According to Fischler, the destructurement of eating practices is due to a lack of hegemonic regulation in every aspect of food behaviour. A growing variety of (socialization) agents comes to play a part in food socialization in contemporary society, and all convey different, often contradictory messages. The result is the more diverse eating behaviour of "disoriented" modern eaters, who model eating practices without any kind of basic guiding principle. Although the "disorientation" of the modern eater is hard to test in practice by means of quantitative data, the available data do allow to test to what extent the ideology of the proper meal pattern and the

proper meal are valued nowadays, and to what extent these opinions influence eating practices.

The questionnaire data show that opinions on some eating-related attitudes differ considerably. This means that, at least in some cases, there are no hegemonic (i.e. generally agreed with) rules guiding eating behaviour. A hegemonic code seems to be largely lacking as far as the timing of eating is concerned, while taking adequate time to eat and pleasantly lingering at the dinner table is valued by almost all Flemings nowadays. The opinions towards the temporal organization of eating also affect actual eating practices. A stricter attitude towards the timing of eating results in a lower likelihood of eating beyond proper mealtimes, while a higher appreciation of lingering at the dinner table increases the time spent on eating during the working week. However, in general the effect of these opinions on actual eating practices is very modest. Some opinions show a somewhat stronger effect, possibly because the opinion was more precisely geared to the eating practice assessed. As such, we found a rather strong, negative effect of agreeing that the meal is ruined by the TV and the likelihood to eat while watching TV. However, for other opinions, we find that the actual practice was more widespread than the related opinion. Eating at the table, for example, seems to be more widespread in practice than considered as a social norm.

In general, we found little support for Fischler's gastro-anomy thesis. From the above it was clear that there is a collective structure apparent in Flemish and Belgian eating practices. Eating practices not only reveal a collective structure, with regard to time use, location and social context, but they are also structured by social class, age, lifecycle phase and so on. The time-use data reveal considerable social differentiation in the temporal, social and spatial organization of eating practices. Our modern eating practices reveal to be modelled by a number of guiding principles. We therefore cannot agree with Fischler's point of departure: there is no sign of a completely unpredictable variety of eating practices. We agree with Warde that the uniformity in eating practices still outweighs individualisation and stylisation. Habit and routine, rather than reflexivity and rationality, play a key role in our contemporary eating habits (Warde, 1997: 12). However, the modest effect, or the lack of effect, of most eating-related opinions, does reveal that the ideology of the proper meal pattern and the proper meal only has a very modest impact on current eating practices. This

finding awards some validity to the gastro-anomy thesis. Possibly, other attitudes, that were not measured here, have a stronger impact. We assume that other attitudes are more manifest today, like the valuing of efficiency, health and body weight, and are therefore also more likely to affect eating arrangements. Unfortunately, such attitudes and their effect on eating practices could not be assessed here. The modest range of attitudes in the questionnaire has allowed us to only partly test the gastro-anomy thesis.

b. A strong effect of the lifecycle phase

Our analyses emphasize the importance of the phase in the lifecycle in shaping eating practices. The phase in the lifecycle appears to be one of the most important bases of differentiation in current eating practices. This holds for the social context of eating as well as for the temporal and spatial organization of eating. Each lifecycle phase seems to involve its particular organization of eating practices. So far, eating habits had been largely studied within the realm of “traditional” families, composed of two parents with young, co-resident children. It was in these families that the *ideology* of the proper meal pattern and the proper meal was found to be largely supported. Our findings reveal that this particular lifecycle phase also entails more structured *eating practices*. The presence of a cohabiting partner or a co-resident child results in a lower likelihood to eat beyond proper mealtimes, a lower likelihood to eat while watching TV, a higher likelihood to eat with the primary commensal circle, and a higher likelihood to eat at home and to spend dinner and weekend meals at the dinner table. Persons who do not live with a cohabiting partner or co-resident children more often reveal another organization of eating practices. Their household situation is characterised by less family commitments. They have more freedom to organize their eating practices according to their own preference. This results in fewer meals with the primary commensal circle and more meals with non-household members, more eating in other places than the home, fewer meals at the dinner table and more in other locations, more TV-meals and more eating at atypical times.

The less structured organization of eating does not hold for all those who live without a co-habiting partner or co-resident children, but especially for young and middle-aged singles and young adults who still live with their parents. Old age, on the

contrary, gives rise to another organization of eating practices. Elderly singles and couples are more likely to stick to proper mealtimes and take most meals at home. However, due to their withdrawal in the domestic atmosphere, elderly singles have a very high likelihood to eat alone. Compared to other singles, elderly singles are less likely to have a non-cohabiting, steady partner. They are much less likely to share meals with non-household members. As a result, meals are more likely to be solitary occasions for them than for any other lifecycle phase.

Our analyses only reveal an individualization of eating practices, insofar as by individualization we understand an increase in solitary eating over time. Though the increasing individualization of eating practices in Belgium cannot be denied, eating alone remains uncommon. Yet, eating alone on a regular basis is a matter of not having any choice, of being forced to eat alone due to the lack of a primary commensal circle with whom one is supposed to share most meals. The explanatory power of the attitude towards eating alone was negligible compared to the explicative power of the actual household situation. This finding does not support the individualization of choice to be a (main) reason behind the increase in solitary eating. The time-use data do not suggest that the increase in eating alone is to be considered as a behavioural change, with solitary eating as a voluntary practice. Although more than half of the population claims that they do not mind to eat alone, the practice of eating alone is much more strongly related to living alone than to the opinion towards eating alone. The individualization of eating practices, i.e. the increase in solitary eating, is rather due to constraining circumstances, namely changing household structures.

One might however argue that the increasing share of single-living persons itself attests to an individualization of choice, and therefore, consider the increase in solitary eating as an indirect effect of an individualization of choice. However, our findings seem to reveal that, whenever they get the chance, single-living persons prefer to turn the meal into a commensal occasion. Persons who live alone try to compensate for the absence of “meaningful” meal partners at home by engaging in secondary interaction and work-related interaction during meals: single-living persons who work are less likely than other workers to eat weekday lunch at the desk, and are more likely to eat weekday lunch at the dinner table. Moreover, we do not know to

what extent the situation of living alone, is a desired living situation, and as such a manifestation of an individualization of choice. With Elchardus and Smits (2006: 308), we argue that a shift in the nature of the structuration of behaviour, in this case eating practices, should not be judged on the basis of the (forced) adaptation to (externally imposed) conditions. We, therefore, do not consider the increase in eating alone as a result of the individualization of choice but rather as a forced adaptation to changing household situations.

Analogously, the decline in eating with the family is to a large extent to be understood as a change in the structure of households. Although the available data do not allow to assess to what extent meals with the entire household occur, it is beyond doubt that eating occurs primarily with household members. People, who live with a partner or with a partner and children, spend on average 80 percent of weekly eating time with a household member. These findings do not allow us to conclude that eating with the family is a 'thing of the past'. Murcott (1997:45) emphasizes that the fear over the decline of the family meal is very old: even in the 1920s, before its so-called high days, the decline of the family meal has been mourned. The prevalence of eating with the primary interaction partners does not only allow us to deny that eating with the family belongs to the past, but also leads us to suspect that household members will continue to be common meal partners, as long as respondents share households with significant others like a partner, children or parents.

c. Household technology and the easier access to food: convenient solutions, rather than promoting meal destructureation

Contrary to what is often suggested, the omnipresence of food does not entail the omnipresence of eating. Our analyses reveal that the wider availability of food does not promote a more destructured organization of eating practices. We do not agree with Mintz (1983: 166) that the overall availability of food has eliminated the structure of meals and the calendar of diet in daily life. Although food may be more easily available in space and time (Schneider, 1997: 91), this does not promote that eating takes place at any time or any place. Possibly, the fast bites which are not grasped by means of the time-use data, reveal a more flexible relationship between eating and the use of space and time, but, broadly speaking, eating remains tied to

specific locations and times. The ownership of a freezer or a microwave oven was not found to significantly influence the temporal organization of eating practices either. In contrast to what is often suggested, the presence of a microwave oven or a freezer in the household does not promote that eating occurs more beyond proper mealtimes. Such household technology does not have a corrosive impact on the sociable nature of meals either: the microwave oven and the freezer do not promote eating in social isolation neither do they hinder primary commensality.

The lack of an effect in our analyses may be put down to two different factors. On the one hand it is possible that the infrastructure as such does promote atypically timed eating and eating in social isolation, but only in combination with particular types of food, namely convenience food. It is possible that the microwave oven is only used as a means of self-servicing, promoting meal deconstruction, when convenience food is also available. Unfortunately, the available data do not allow for testing such a hypothesis. On the other hand the microwave oven (even in combination with convenience food) may be used just as much as a convenient solution to enable timely meals with the primary commensal circle, rather than atypically timed meals in social isolation. Warde points to the importance of such household technology in enabling family meals. Electrical appliances, as technologies of discontinuity, help us to get the different modules organized in an acceptable manner: microwaves allow for managing the de-routinisation in contemporary family life. The meal is prepared when there is time for meal preparation, and it is frozen afterwards. Our findings seem to suggest that the microwave oven is used in this way at least as much as in the way that deconstructs the social and the temporal aspects of the meal pattern. 'Eating conveniently is probably a precondition of one of the most highly valued forms of sociability' (Warde, 1999: 524). The available data show that small households, like single-person households, are significantly less likely than larger households to have such infrastructure at their disposal. This finding equally tends to sustain the use of microwave ovens and freezers for "family cooking" rather than for self-servicing.

Women's activity status does not automatically turn family dinner into an impossibility, but rather into a less obvious event, requiring more preceding organization and arrangement (Mc Intosh, 1999). This might result in other preparation procedures and another structure of the meal's contents (what is on the

plate) than what is prescribed by the ideology of the proper meal (see also Murcott, 1982b, 1983a). In this study, we could not go into the structure of the meal's contents. We did not go into meal preparation either. The effect of the increased female labour-market participation on the preparation procedure and the use of convenient solutions like convenience food and household technology like microwave ovens or freezers remains an important domain for future research that is ideally tackled by the combined use of time-budget information and household-budget (i.e. expenditures) information from the same households. Future research should also be conducted on the factors that affect the structure of the meal's contents. Possibly, a variety of factors that is not found to affect the temporal, social and spatial organization of eating practices, does have a significant effect on the structure of the meal's contents.

d. Work-related factors: a matter of the timing of work, rather than the duration of work

From the literature, we inferred that the working situation, more particularly of the modern worker in the highly-educated knowledge economy, would strongly affect the arrangement of eating practices. However, only few work-related factors appear to have an influence. In contrast to what we expected, the number of working hours does not have an impact on the temporal, social or spatial organization of eating practices. Rather than its duration, the atypical timing of work appears to have a corrosive impact on the organization of eating practices. Work at standard working times, that is day work, results in a lower likelihood of eating beyond proper mealtimes. However, it also results in a higher likelihood of eating weekday lunch at work, and therefore also a lower likelihood to eat with the partner during the working week. Contrary to standard working times, atypical working hours result in more temporally destructured eating practices. Regularly or always doing evening work, increases the likelihood of skipping weekday dinner on a regular basis and promotes eating beyond proper times. Moreover, regular evening and night work goes hand in hand with eating while working. Regular night work and working shifts significantly decrease the time spent on eating during the working week. Our analyses reveal that meals remain collectively maintained temporalities, but only insofar as paid work fits within these temporal boundaries through standard working hours. Paid work still shows a clear collective rhythm and this is also reflected in a clear temporal rhythm of meals.

However, for a small part of the population, these collective temporal rhythms of work do not hold, and this has an impact on the timing of eating. Workers, who are subject to severe temporal deregulation due to paid work beyond standard times, are unable to respect proper mealtimes. Despite the corrosive impact of atypically timed working schedules on the timing and duration of eating practices, atypically timed working schedules do not promote eating in social isolation neither do they hinder primary commensality. Obviously, personal strategies to achieve primary commensality must play an important part here, to prevent that eating occasions occur largely in social isolation.

Our study shows that the assumed changes in our eating practices as proclaimed by trendwatchers and frequently perceived by the public, often appear to be exaggerated. We assume that different methods largely account for different conclusions. Focussing on increasing expenditures on meals outside the home or snacks only picture a small part of the organization of daily eating practices. Although eating practices may be organized in a more flexible manner with regard to time use, social context and use of space compared to 1966, eating practices are still highly institutionalized practices. Our analyses also show that some of the “alleged” reasons of meal deconstruction do not affect the organization of eating practices on the individual level. The organization of eating practices takes on a different form according to the social group (age, household situation, lifecycle phase, social class,...) one belongs to. We hope that these insights will prove useful for public health services whose campaigns aim at adapting the eating behaviour of particular groups in society.

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## **Appendix A: The most important studies used to get an insight into the structure in Western eating habits**

The structure within Western eating habits is mainly inferred from sociological (and anthropological) studies on the normative significance and symbolic meaning of food practices. These studies are discussed here in alphabetical order.

**Bove, Sobal and Rauschenbach's study of newly married couples' food choices** ("Food choices among newly married couples: convergence, conflict, individualism and projects"). This study focusses on the effect of marriage on couples' food choices. It includes 20 newly married couples, from three adjacent counties in Upstate New York. 20 women and 14 men collaborated in the study. Most were in their 20s or 30s and had never been married before, although most had been cohabiting prior to marriage. During 1997 and 1998, semi-structured, personal in-depth interviews were conducted twice: once as the respondent entered marriage and once again one year later. Interviews focussed on a variety of food-related issues (Sobal, Bove and Rauschenbach, 2002; Bove, Sobal and Raushenbach, 2003: 25-27).

**Charles and Kerr's study on the reproduction of gender, age and class through food practices** ("Women, food and families"). The original focus of the study was on the formation of eating habits in young children (Charles and Kerr, 1988: 2). Due to the focus on the reproduction of social order and child socialization, the study was conducted with families with at least one child under school age. Given women's main responsibility in feeding issues in the household, only women were interviewed on a wide range of topics which involved food within the family. 200 women were included in the study. The respondents come from the north of England (York and surrounding districts), and come from different social classes. As ethnic minorities are virtually unrepresented in the study, the findings are considered to be specific to white British households. Most women lived together with the father of their children in a nuclear family. Most were aged between 20 and 34, 60 percent were not engaged in paid employment. The fieldwork was conducted during 1982 and 1983. After a first interview on food-related topics, the women were asked to hold a diary on the food and drink consumed by their household members during a two-week period. 157 of the 200

families kept a diary record in a successful manner. After the two-week diary period, a second interview was conducted on the family diet. All the interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and coded for the computer. As such, the interviews were used as qualitative open-ended interviews but also as quantitative data since the sample was large enough to produce statistical data (Charles and Kerr, 1988: 1-16).

**De Vault's study of the *work of feeding in the family*** ("Feeding the family. The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work"). The aim of this study is to examine the everyday experience of feeding work. The focus of the study is on the character of the work itself, rather than on attitudes towards household work. Feeding work has often been neglected by previous studies and especially its constructed character has been taken for granted. The study was conducted between 1982 and 1983 and is mainly based on interviews with those who are responsible for feeding work in 30 families with children (30 women and 3 men). Interviews were organized around several very general questions, but respondents were urged to talk about their experiences in great detail (De Vault, 1994: 28). The aim of these open-ended interviews was to explore the contours of the "ordinary" experience of household work in a range of household settings. Respondents live in the city or the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois and come from a variety of social (economic, class, racial, ethnic) backgrounds, household types and lifecycle phases. The aim of such a varied group was to incorporate multiple versions of feeding work (De Vault, 1994: 20).

**Douglas and Nicod's study of working class meals** ("Taking the biscuit: the structure of British meals"). The aim of this study is to discern common structural rules underlying the meal system of the British working class. This study is based on participating observation of eating practices in four households with working-class household heads and co-resident children, in four different cities (East Finchley, Durham, Birmingham and Coventry). Nicod observed the mealcycles in these households first-hand during at least one month, as a lodger who openly claimed to be interested in the food system. The households were not interviewed about their food practices, the pattern of eating practices was simply directly deduced from the observed behaviour (Douglas and Nicod, 1974: 747).

**Kemmer's study on the impact of the transition from single to married or cohabitation on eating patterns, food choice and nutrient intake** ("Marriage Menu: Food and Diet in Transition" as one of the research themes under the general project by the Economic and Social Research Council, "The Nation's Diet: The Social Science of Food Choice"). This study was conducted from October 1994 to September 1996 and was restricted to the central belt of Scotland (Marshall and Anderson, 2002: 194). The study concerned 22 couples, between the ages of 19 and 33. Respondents were predominantly middle-class and all were in full-time or part-time employment or full-time study. The study involved various methods. Both partners of the couple were interviewed separately on food-related topics, about three months before marriage or cohabitation. After the interview, individuals were urged to complete a seven-day food diary. Semi-structured interviews on the same topics as discussed in the earlier interview and the completion of the individual food diary were repeated about three months after setting up a home together. 19 of the 22 couples provided diaries from both phases of the research (Kemmer, Anderson and Marshall, 1998: 51-53; Marshall and Anderson, 2002:193-195).

**Murcott's exploratory study of food beliefs and the social organization of eating** ("An investigation of attitudes to, and use of, food by expectant and new mothers- a feasibility study"). This study is based on unstructured interviews with 37 expectant mothers from South Wales. These women were between the ages of 16 and 40. They represent a cross-section of socio-economic groups. 20 of them were interviewed before and after the birth of their child. Next to these interviews, a card-sorting technique was used in order to reveal concepts and categorizations of food. The concern of this study was 'with the more or less conscious expression of folk models of food and the proprieties of domestic eating, and with their connection with other major features of household and everyday life' (Murcott, 1982b: 678), rather than with what people actually ate.

**Sjögren-de Beauchaine's study of the eating habits of the Parisian bourgeoisie** ("The bourgeoisie in the dining-room. Meal Ritual and Cultural Process in Parisian Families of Today"). The aim of the study is to investigate the ritual of the family meal from as many different angles as possible, in order to clarify the meaning of such a common phenomenon in contemporary daily life (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 24).

This study includes 104 Parisian families, mainly of the professional bourgeoisie and living mainly in the 6<sup>e</sup> *arrondissement* of Paris. Most of the families are families with children (98 of the 104 families). The educational level of the families is very high and half of the women work outdoors (most of them full-time). Although this study is not representative in terms of household types (overrepresentation of families with many children, only professional bourgeoisie), the economic level of this sample seems to be representative of the bourgeoisie. The study was conducted between 1983 and 1986 and is mainly based on fieldwork. Material was collected by means of systematic interviews with 65 persons from 65 different families, freely initiated contacts and participation in meals with 25 families (Sjögren-de Beauchaine, 1988: 12-25).

Part of the theoretical framework on the structure within our eating habits is inferred from (developmental) psychological studies on the course of a family meal. These studies consider the family meal as an excellent situation to study the functioning of the family as a socialization agent. At that time the study of socialization in its *natural setting* was [is] in its infancy [personal emphasis]. The home was considered as the basic training ground where socialization takes place for most children (Feiring and Lewis, 1987: 377) and the evening meal as one of the most stable family rituals in which the child participates (Dreyer and Dreyer, 1973: 291-292). Despite this specific focus, these studies also provide interesting information on the common structure present in our eating habits. These studies are discussed here in alphabetical order.

**Dreyer and Dreyer's study of child socialization during family dinner in middle-class families** ("Family Dinner as a Unique Behaviour Habitat"). This study focusses on mealtime behaviour in 40 white, middle-class, nuclear families with at least one child aged under four, from three suburban communities in northeast Connecticut. The study occurred by means of observation under two conditions: the home environment and a laboratory. During the meals at home, the presence of all family members was insured and the observer did not participate (Dreyer and Dreyer, 1973: 291-293).

**Feiring and Lewis' study of the structure of mealtime habits, procedures, rules and roles** ("The ecology of some middle-class families at dinner"). 46 nuclear families with at least one three-year old child were included in the study. This child was the focus of the study. Mealtimes with all household members were videotaped, in order to obtain

the most complete sample of ongoing behaviour of the family members. The videotaped family meals were coded later. Two types of variables were coded: mealtime characteristics describing dinner procedures and verbal behaviour between family members. For dinner procedures, the focus was on describing the structure of dinner, and who did what kind of activities (Feiring and Lewis, 1987: 379-380).

**Appendix B: Original and reduced activity list of the BEL '66-  
'99 dataset**



<b>N°</b>	<b>Original activity list</b>	<b>N°</b>	<b>Reduced activity list</b>
00	Work	00	Work and study
10	Preparing meals, dishing up, clearing the table, working in the kitchen	01	Feeding work
11	Doing the dishes, putting the dishes away	01	Feeding work
12	Cleaning	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
14	Ironing and washing clothes	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
15	Repairing and taking care of clothes and shoes	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
16	Other repair works but 15 and 18	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
17	Gardening and keeping pets	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
18	Upkeep heating and water installation	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
19	Administrative management of the household	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
20	Care for children	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
22	Supervision of schoolwork	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
23	Playing with and reading to children	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
26	Bringing children to doctor or hospital	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
27	Other elements of caring for children	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
30	Purchasing current stock	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
31	Purchasing durables	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
32	Personal care outdoors	04	Personal care
33	Medical care outdoors	04	Personal care
34	Services	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
40	Personal hygiene, getting dressed, getting up, going to sleep, ..	04	Personal care
41	Personal medical care at home	04	Personal care
42	Caring for adults	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
43	Eating	03	Eating
44	Drinking (outside meals: 1999)	11	Drinking (only in 1999)
45	Sleep	05	Sleep
47	Rest	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
48	Private activities without	04	Personal care

	specification		
50	Taking lessons	00	Work and study
54	Studying	00	Work and study
60	Participation in organisations and demonstrations	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
63	Voluntary work	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
64	Participating in religious ceremonies and organisations	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
70	Attending sports events	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
71	Going to a circus, dancing, show, night club, fair or other spectacle	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
72	Going to the cinema	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
73	Going to a concert, theatre, opera or playhouse	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
74	Going to an exhibition or a museum	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
76	Going to a party, reception, date with friends, receiving visitors	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
80	Sports, physical exercise	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
81	Excursion, trip, hunting, fishing	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
82	Walking	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
83	Technical hobbies and building collections	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
84	Sewing clothes, crocheting, knitting	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
85	Artistic creations, painting, baking pots, sculpture	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
86	Playing an instrument and singing	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
87	Playing party games	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
88	Other leisure indoors	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
90	Listening to the radio	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
91	Watching TV or video	08	Watching TV
92	Listening to music	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
93	Reading	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
94	Travelling	09	Travelling
96	Talking, telephoning	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
97	Writing	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
98	Thinking, planning, smoking, doing nothing, meditating, sunbathing	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
99	Undefined time (almost non-existent in 1966 and 1999)	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular

**Appendix C: Original and reduced activity list of the TOR  
'04-dataset**



<b>N°</b>	<b>Original activity list</b>	<b>N°</b>	<b>Reduced activity list</b>
000	Work	00	Work and study
010	Activities related to work without compensation	00	Work and study
015	Help to partner	00	Work and study
020	Doing overtime	00	Work and study
030	Travelling during working hours	00	Work and study
040	Waiting or break during work	00	Work and study
050	Hot meal at work	03	Eating
051	Cold meal at work	03	Eating
060	Time spent at work, before or after work	00	Work and study
065	Coffee breaks at work	00	Work and study
069	Job on the side	00	Work and study
070	Activities related to unemployment	00	Work and study
072	Interviews, exams for a job	00	Work and study
074	Writing letters of application	00	Work and study
075	Checking advertisements for a job	00	Work and study
100	Meal preparation	01	Feeding work
110	Dishing up, clearing the table, working in the kitchen, emptying the dishwasher	01	Feeding work
111	Doing the dishes	01	Feeding work
121	Vacuuming, dusting, brushing	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
122	Tidying up	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
123	Cleaning the house, the bathroom, washing windows, ...	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
125	Making the beds	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
126	Washing, doing laundry	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
127	Ironing, Folding linen	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
130	Chores outdoors	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
131	Processing waste	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
132	Cleaning the car	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
133	Upkeep moped, bicycle, car	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
140	Purchasing goods in a food store	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
141	Purchasing goods in a chain store	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
142	Purchasing goods in another type of shop	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
143	Purchasing goods on the market or fair	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare

144	Purchasing goods in another place than a store or market	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
145	Storing, putting away goods	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
150	Repairing and taking care of clothes and shoes	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
161	Maintenance work in the house	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
162	Maintenance work outdoors	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
163	Light the stove	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
171	Keeping pets	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
172	Care for indoor plants	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
173	Gardening	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
180	Planning, organising	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
181	Administrative management of the household	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
200	Care for the baby	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
201	Feeding the baby	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
210	Care for children	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
211	Care for other householdmembers	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
212	Talking to others who educate children	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
220	Supervision of schoolwork	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
230	Reading and talking to children	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
240	Playing indoors with children	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
250	Playing outdoors with children, walking, going to the swimming pool	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
260	Medical care to children	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
270	Baby-sitting	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
280	Unpaid help to family, friends	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
285	Unpaid help to resident family	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and
310	Personal care outdoors	04	Personal care		
320	Medical care outdoors	04	Personal care		
330	Visit to the post office, the bank, health service,	02	Housekeeping, childcare	shopping	and

332	Visit to public services	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
333	Visit to the library	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
340	Visit to the launderette	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
341	Visit to maintenance services	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
345	Visit to other services	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
350	Telebanking, phonebanking	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
355	Consultance by telephone	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
400	Personal care, getting dressed, undressed	04	Personal care
405	Taking a bath	04	Personal care
410	Medical care at home	04	Personal care
430	Hot meal	03	Eating
431	Cold meal	03	Eating
432	Coffee klatsj, coffee party	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
433	Drinking	11	Drinking
434	Drinking coffee or tea	11	Drinking
440	Eating in a restaurant, snackbar	03	Eating
445	Take away food	02	Housekeeping, shopping and childcare
450	Sleep	05	Sleep
460	Ill in bed	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
470	Rest, siesta	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
480	Make love	04	Personal care
490	Smoking	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
500	Lectures at school, university, etc.	00	Work and study
501	Making homework, reading for school, university, ...	00	Work and study
505	Do a work placement	00	Work and study
510	Business training	00	Work and study
520	In-service training	00	Work and study
530	Training other than business or in-service training	00	Work and study
560	Attending a lecture	00	Work and study

565	Other activities related to school, university, training, ...	00	Work and study
570	Self-teaching	00	Work and study
590	Exams related to school, university, training, ...	00	Work and study
600	Activities related to the leadership in organisations	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
610	Activities related to the promotion of interests, action groups and politics	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
620	Activities related to other social life in organisations	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
630	Voluntary work	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
650	Practising religion	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
655	Prayer, meditation	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
660	Activities related to business organisations	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
665	Voting	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
700	Attending sports events	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
710	Attending parades	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
720	Going to the cinema	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
730	Going to theatre or playhouse	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
731	Going to a musical, opera, classical music concert, ballet	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
732	Going to another type of concert	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
740	Going to a museum, an exhibition, historical building, monument, ...	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
750	Going to a trade fair, market, ...	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
760	Going to a party, wedding, ...	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
765	Receiving visitors, paying a visit	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
770	Visiting a café, bar	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
771	Visiting a dancing	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
772	Visiting a youth club	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
780	Other social events	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
781	Ceremonies, rituals	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
800	Sports, physical exercise	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
811	Fishing, hunting	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
812	Bowling, billiards, darts,...	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
820	Walking in woods, parks, in the country	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
821	Walking in the city, shopping centre	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
822	Cycling trip	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
823	Going to the swimming pool	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
830	Going to the zoo, a recreation park, a fun fair	06	Leisure outdoors, going out
840	Crochetting, knitting and other needlework	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
841	Building a collection	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
842	Small paid chores other than at home	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV

850	Artistic creations, painting, baking pots, sculpture, processing films,...	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
855	Tinkering	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
860	Playing an instrument and singing	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
861	Do ballet dance, theatre	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
862	Writing texts or stories	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
870	Technical hobbies	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
880	Playing party games	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
881	Playing computer and video games	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
882	Do puzzles	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
900	Listening to the radio	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
901	Watching TV	08	Watching TV
902	Watching video	08	Watching TV
903	Consulting teletext	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
904	Communication via computer	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
905	Obtaining information via computer	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
906	Processing information via computer	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
907	Programming, intalling the computer	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
908	Listening to music (CD's, tapes, records)	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
909	Reading books (for pleasure)	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
910	Talking, fighting , chatting	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
911	Talking by telephone (fixed set)	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
912	Talking by telephone (mobile set)	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
916	Writing cards, letters, keeping a diary	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
920	Reading the paper	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
930	Going through advertisements	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
940	Reading a magazine	07	Leisure indoors, except for TV
950	Keeping the time use diary	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
960	Strolling around	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular

970	Relaxing, doing nothing	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
980	Thinking	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular
1000	Travelling to and from work	09	Travelling
1010	Travelling related to school and education	09	Travelling
1020	Travelling related to leisure	09	Travelling
1030	Travelling related to the household	09	Travelling
1040	Travelling related to children	09	Travelling
1050	Traveling to and from family	09	Travelling
1060	Other travelling	09	Travelling
1070	Waiting	10	Communication, writing, rest, relaxing, meditation, smoking, thinking, planning, stroll around, doing nothing in particular

**Appendix D: Percentage of Belgians aged 19 to 65 eating on every hour of the day, on working days, Saturdays, and Sundays (1966 vs 1999) BEL '66-'99**



This table represents the average number of respondents engaged in eating at each hour of the day in 1966 and 1999. The significance indications refer to differences between the six registrations per hour (one for every 10 minutes) in both research years.

Time of day	Weekday			Saturday			Sunday		
	% 1966	% 1999	p	% 1966	% 1999	p	% 1966	% 1999	p
0u00-0u59	0.70	0.53	***	0.00	1.35	***	0.00	0.12	***
1u00-1u59	0.17	0.23	ns	0.00	0.37	***	0.00	0.03	**
2u00-2u59	0.01	0.17	**	0.00	0.03	ns	0.00	0.02	*
3u00-3u59	0.02	0.07	ns	0.07	0.02	ns	0.00	0.02	ns
4u00-4u59	0.39	0.09	*	0.71	0.04	ns	0.00	0.05	ns
5u00-5u59	1.53	0.78	*	0.37	0.22	ns	0.00	0.14	***
6u00-6u59	5.40	3.06	ns	3.93	0.78	**	1.75	0.42	**
7u00-7u59	14.73	8.79	***	11.71	3.52	**	5.50	2.62	*
8u00-8u59	9.17	8.31	ns	13.69	10.57	ns	14.84	9.83	**
9u00-9u59	3.29	4.92	ns	4.32	11.19	***	11.94	11.70	ns
10u00-10u59	1.52	2.07	*	1.19	5.62	***	6.22	8.71	**
11u00-11u59	2.83	2.75	ns	2.58	2.96	ns	2.77	4.35	***
12u00-12u59	45.34	30.31	***	44.08	26.77	***	33.58	24.77	*
13u00-13u59	13.20	12.97	ns	17.75	15.69	ns	32.37	22.72	*
14u00-14u59	2.41	2.64	ns	4.40	4.74	ns	9.77	10.69	ns
15u00-15u59	3.10	1.68	***	3.69	2.60	**	4.26	5.76	ns
16u00-16u59	7.27	2.67	***	7.58	2.93	***	6.38	4.64	**
17u00-17u59	10.06	7.15	*	15.51	6.62	***	11.24	6.82	**
18u00-18u59	22.51	18.31	**	21.17	16.70	*	19.18	19.09	ns
19u00-19u59	15.99	13.96	ns	14.67	18.63	*	17.43	17.83	ns
20u00-20u59	5.17	9.17	**	3.30	14.99	***	5.74	9.82	*
21u00-21u59	1.78	4.90	***	1.66	9.75	***	2.28	4.98	***
22u00-22u59	1.52	2.35	**	0.61	6.02	***	2.50	2.44	ns
23u00-23u59	0.79	1.10	*	0.32	3.03	***	2.09	0.64	***

\*\*\*: p<0.001, \*\*: p<0.01, \*: p<0.05, ns: p≥0.05

**Appendix E: Page from the time-use diary (TOR'04 study)**  
**(English translation)**



<b>A. Activity: (fill in the numerical code)</b> <b>431</b>	
<b>B. Secondary activity: (fill in the code)</b> <b>900</b>	
<b>C. Beginning: 7:24 a.m.</b>	<b>E. New day: (note date)</b>
<b>D. End: 7:48 a.m.</b>	<b>7 / 6 / 04</b>
<b>F. Place (circle one of the following):</b>	
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 1. at home (including student room or temporary residence) <input type="radio"/> 2. place of work (not home) <input type="radio"/> 3. someone else's home <input type="radio"/> 4. elsewhere	
<b>G. If travel involved, what mode of transport did you use? (circle – several answers are possible)</b>	
<input type="radio"/> 1. walking <input type="radio"/> 2. bike <input type="radio"/> 3. scooter <input type="radio"/> 4. motorcycle <input type="radio"/> 5. car <input type="radio"/> 6. public transport (bus, tram, underground, train) <input type="radio"/> 7. other mode of transport	
Comments:	

<b>H. Presence of others (circle 1 answer)</b>
1. no one
2. yes, another person/persons present
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 3. yes, I engaged in the activity with another person or persons
<b>I. Talked with: (circle – several answers are possible)</b>
1. no one
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 2. spouse, partner, etc.
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 3. (own) children living with you
<input type="radio"/> 4. parents living with you
<input type="radio"/> 5. brothers and/or sisters living with you
<input type="radio"/> 6. other household members
<input type="radio"/> 7. family members not living with you
<input type="radio"/> 8. neighbours
<input type="radio"/> 9. colleagues, fellow students
<input type="radio"/> 10. friends, acquaintances, etc.
<input type="radio"/> 11. service providers
<input type="radio"/> 12. people to whom you provide services
<input type="radio"/> 13. someone you don't know
<input type="radio"/> 14. other: .....
<b>J. I engaged in this activity mainly ... (circle – preferably one answer only)</b>
1. because I have/had to
2. to please others, out of a sense of duty
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 3. out of necessity, because it is necessary in order to be able to do something else
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 4. because of the pleasure it gives me

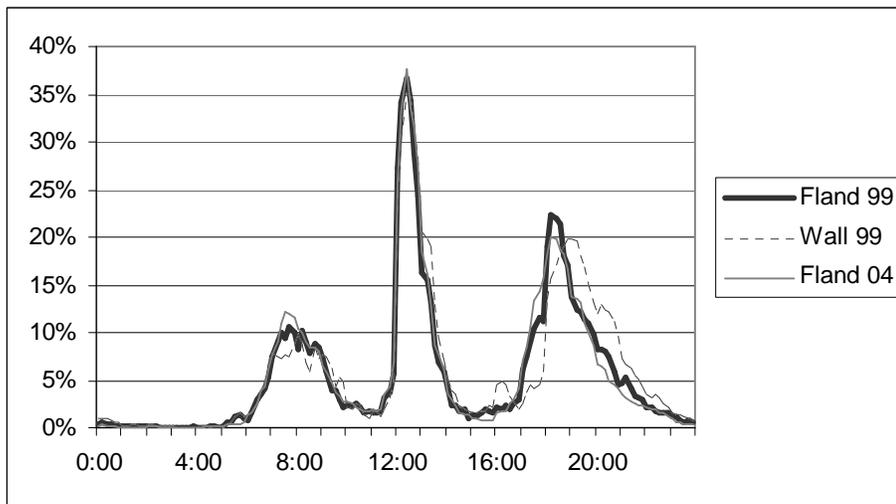


**Appendix F: The rhythm of eating in Flanders and the Walloon region**

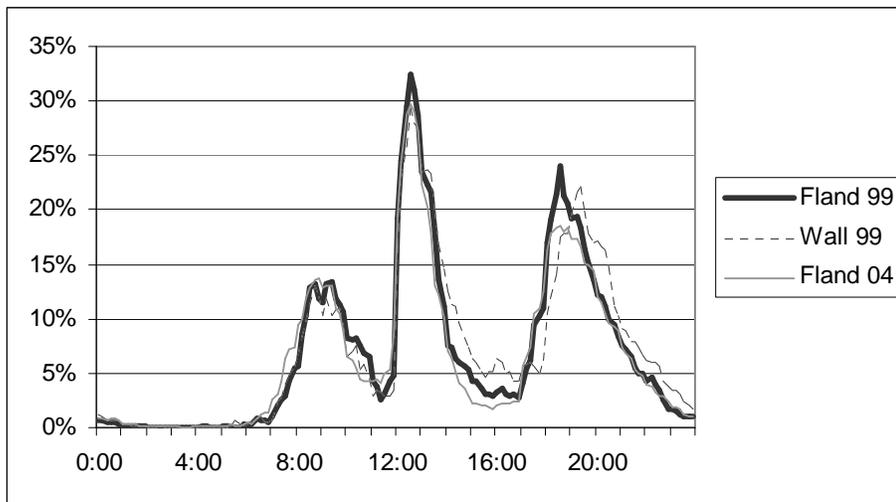


The TOR'04-dataset only relates to Flanders, while the NIS'99-dataset relates to Belgium. Belgium consists of three different regions: the capital region Brussels (smallest part), Flanders, and the Walloon region. The time-use data suggest that the Flemish and the Walloons differ as to the timing of meals. Figure 1 clearly shows that the Walloons dine later than the Flemings. This holds for weekdays as well as weekend days (see figure 2).

**Figure 1 The daily rhythm of eating on weekdays in 1999 for Flemings and Walloons (NIS'99) and for Flemings in 2004 (TOR'04)**



**Figure 2 The daily rhythm of eating on weekend days in 1999 for Flemings and Walloons (NIS'99) and for Flemings in 2004 (TOR'04)**



**Appendix G: The recoding of time spent on eating on a Sunday (TOR'04)**



The normality of the time spent eating on a Sunday is put at stake due to a high number (6.8 percent) of zero-registrations and a long tail to the right. In order to approach a normal distribution as closely as possible, a precondition for further analysis, zero-registrations are removed from the distribution (only participants are preserved) and all extreme registrations (outliers) are recoded. Due to the omission of non-participants (116), 1594 respondents are retained in the analysis. The respondents within the last decile are recoded to high values, without being outliers. This fosters the normality of the distribution. The rationale here is that it is highly unlikely that respondents spend such a long time eating on a single day. When these extreme values are recoded to a high value, these respondents stay in the analysis as respondents with a long time spent eating, but their value no longer hinders analysis. All values lower or equal to 2h50' are retained. For the 10 percent of respondents with values higher than 2h50' the duration of eating on a Sunday is adapted. For those 5 percent with acceptable values ( $\leq 3h30'$ ), adaptations are small. For those 5 percent with extreme values, adaptations are more substantial.

<b>Original value</b>	<b>Recoded value</b>
2h50' - 3h00'	2h55'
3h00' - 3h10'	3h00'
3h10' - 3h20'	3h05'
3h20' - 3h30'	3h10'
3h30' - 4h00'	3h15'
4h00' - 4h30'	3h20'
4h30' - 5h00'	3h25'
5h00' - 5h30'	3h30'
5h30' - 6h00'	3h35'
More than 6h00'	3h40'

We believe that omitting non-participants as well as recoding extremely high values does not entail any loss of valuable information. It is very unlikely that one has not spent any time eating on a particular day. Although not registering any eating occasion on a Sunday is in itself revealing, this information is useless when trying to assess eating duration. Recoding extremely high durations to more acceptable durations entails no loss of information either. These respondents are still considered as eaters with a long duration. The omission of non-participants and the adaptation of the last decile of durations results in the mean duration of eating on a Sunday rising from 1h33' to 1h35'.