

**SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF  
HEALTHY EATING:  
AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN COLOMBIA**

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**Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## ABSTRACT

The practice of health promotion has been dominated by approaches based on theories of the attitude and social cognition. Drawing on two basic assumptions, (a) that individuals are primarily rational, and (b) that there is a causal relationship between attitudes and behaviour, the interventions based on these models assume that the provision of information will affect the attitude and hence lead to behaviour change. Based on the theory of social representations the thesis develops a broader and more heuristic perspective for the study of health issues. This theory proposes that rationality is a collective issue and views the relationship between concepts and actions as symbolic phenomena to be understood in their context of occurrence. Based on this theory the thesis explores the contents and structure of the representation of healthy eating in four groups in Colombian society (two rural and two urban, professionals and non-professionals). A multi-method approach combines an observational study, a multi-level content analysis of media and group discussions, and the structural analysis of the representation using free association procedures. The data are analysed using qualitative techniques, analysis of corpus, factor correspondence analysis and calling into question procedures, and interpreted within the structural perspective of social representations theory. The results indicate that eating is being transformed into a dilemmatic issue of everyday life, reflecting important social and economic changes at the end of the century. The ambiguous and paradoxical representation of health and healthy eating is evident in the more affluent environments and both a transformation in the perceived relations between culture and nature, and concerns about the longevity and disease prevention. Health marketing and policy implementation, it is argued, must take account of these influences to develop effective campaigns. The thesis concludes with an examination of the potential contributions of the theory of social representations to understand the social psychological aspects of nutritional behaviour.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 The Problem of Consistency	10
1.2 The Healthy Eating Dilemma	14
1.3 From Attitudes to Representations	18
1.4 The Research Scenarios	22
1.5 Nutritional Transition and Overlapping in Colombia	25
<b>2 FROM ATTITUDES TO SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS</b>	<b>33</b>
2.1 The relationships between attitudes and behaviour	33
2.1.1 The Concept of Attitude in Social Psychology	33
2.1.2 The Historical Evolution of the Concept of Attitudes	34
2.1.3 The Study of Consistency in Attitudinal Research	37
2.1.4 The Historical Evolution of the Study of Consistency	38
2.1.5 The Theory of Reasoned Action	43
2.1.6 Reasoned Action and Healthy Eating	45
2.2 Problematic Aspects of Classic Attitudinal Theories	46
2.2.1 Deficiencies in the Model of Reasoned Action	49
2.3 Other Approaches to the Study of Attitudes	50
2.4 The General Theory and the Concept of Social Representations	52
2.4.1 Social Representations as Product and Process	54
2.4.2 The ideological context	55
2.4.3 Social Representations and Communication	58
2.5 Summary	59
<b>3 THE CENTRAL CORE OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS</b>	<b>61</b>
3.1 The Structural Perspective	61
3.1.1 The Concept of Social Representations From the Structural Perspective	61
3.1.2 The Central System of Social Representations	63
3.1.3 The Peripheral System of Social Representations	67
3.2 A Theoretical Re-Examination of The Distinction Between Core and Periphery in The Study of Social Representations	71
3.2.1 A Theory in Search of Identity: Crossing the Psychological and Sociological traditions of Social Psychology	72
3.2.2 The Cognitive Revolution in Social Psychology and the Notion of the Representational Structure	75
3.2.3 The Structural Perspective and the Theory of Reasoned Action	77
3.2.4 Psychometrics and the Structural Perspective: Social Representations Research or Attitude Scaling?	80
3.2.5 Re-Considerations	83
3.3 Summary	88
<b>4 THE LINKS BETWEEN CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES</b>	<b>90</b>

<b>4.1</b>	<b>General Overview of the Relationship Between Concepts and Practices</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Consistency and Rationality</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>4.2.1</b>	<b>The Phenomenon of Rationality</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>4.2.2</b>	<b>A View on Rationality</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>4.2.3</b>	<b>The Issue of Causality</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Belief Ambivalence: Stretching the Possibilities of Practices</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Social Concepts and Social Practices: A Proposal Following Some Considerations of the Structural Perspective</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>4.5</b>	<b>From Practices to Healthier Practices</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>4.6</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>The Multi-Method Perspective</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>The Methodological Tools of the Structural Perspective</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>5.2.1</b>	<b>Methodologies to Explore the Content of the Representation</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>5.2.2</b>	<b>Methodologies to Explore the Structure</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>On The Methodological Procedures of the Structural Approach</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>5.4</b>	<b>Description of the Methodology Employed</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>5.5</b>	<b>Observational Study</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>5.5.1</b>	<b>Research Settings</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>5.5.2</b>	<b>Procedure</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>5.6</b>	<b>Content Analysis</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>5.7</b>	<b>Media Content Analysis</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>5.7.1</b>	<b>Study Population</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>5.7.2</b>	<b>Procedure</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>5.8</b>	<b>Focus Groups</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>5.8.1</b>	<b>Study Population</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>5.8.2</b>	<b>Procedure</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>5.9</b>	<b>Structural Analysis</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>5.10</b>	<b>Exploration and Identification of Core Elements.</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>5.10.1</b>	<b>Study Population</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>5.10.2</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>5.10.3</b>	<b>Procedure</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>5.11</b>	<b>Verification of the Centrality</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>5.11.1</b>	<b>Study Population</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>5.11.2</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>5.11.3</b>	<b>Procedure</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>5.12</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>5.13</b>	<b>Grouping</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>5.14</b>	<b>Verification</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>5.15</b>	<b>Correspondence Analysis</b>	<b>151</b>

<b>6</b>	<b>THE PRACTICE OF HEALTHY EATING IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS</b>	<b>153</b>
6.1	Introduction: Eating in the Context of Nutritional Transitions	153
6.2	Dietary Changes: Historical and Ideological Elements in Food Choice	154
6.3	Eating Healthily and The Observed Practices	159
6.3.1	Space	163
6.3.2	Time	167
6.3.3	Menu	170
6.4	A 'Natural Experiment'	173
6.5	Some remarks	178
6.6	Summary	182
<b>7</b>	<b>THE DISCOURSES OF HEALTHY EATING</b>	<b>183</b>
7.1	Healthy Eating in the Mass Media	183
7.2	The Mass-Media of Communication and The Social Representations of Healthy Eating	184
7.2.1	The Polysemic Character of Eating and Healthy Eating	186
7.3	Group Discussions: Making Sense of Healthy Eating	201
7.3.1	The Kaleidoscope of Healthy Eating	204
7.3.2	Speaking Metaphors: The Body as Machine	207
7.3.3	Eating Contra-Natura	208
7.3.4	Past-Times, Good Times: Fallacies in Discourse	209
7.4	Summary	211
<b>8</b>	<b>THE CENTRAL CORE OF HEALTHY EATING</b>	<b>213</b>
8.1	The Frames of Healthy Eating	213
8.2	The Structure of Healthy Eating	216
8.3	The Semantic Universes of Healthy Eating: Mapping the Structure in Correspondence Analysis	224
8.4	Rating the Elements	231
8.5	Grouping the elements	235
8.6	Summary	239
<b>9</b>	<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<b>240</b>
9.1	On The Empirical Results	242
9.1.1	Whither Eating?	248
9.2	On the Structure and Dynamics of Representational Phenomena	252
9.3	Practical Consequences: From Attitude Change to Social Transformations, The Marketing of Healthy Eating	264
9.3.1	Social and Economic Influences	266
9.3.2	The Creative Role of Language:	267
9.3.3	The Complexities of Belief Systems	269

9.4	Concluding Remarks	270
<b>10</b>	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>272</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>281</b>
11.1	Appendix 1 Map of Colombia.	282
11.2	Appendix 2 Map of Bogotá.	283
11.3	Appendix 3 Observational Study: codes.	284
11.4	Appendix 4 Photographs as evidence.	285
11.5	Appendix 5 List of newspaper articles.	296
11.6	Appendix 6 Codes and definitions: media content analysis	299
11.7	Appendix 7 Index tree, media analysis	305
11.8	Appendix 8 Examples of the advertising of clystering.	306
11.9	Appendix 9 Codes and definitions: focus groups.	307
11.10	Appendix 10 Index tree, focus groups	312
11.11	Appendix 11 Focus groups: definition of healthy eating by group and gender.	313
11.12	Appendix 12 Questionnaire of free association.	314
11.13	Appendix 13 Questionnaire for verification of centrality (version for rural non-professionals)	315
11.14	Appendix 14 Criteria for Scoring: Categorisation Task	320

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1 Methodologies to study social representations	124
Table 5.2 Methodologies to access the central core of a social representation	124
Table 5.3 Scaling techniques to lift the central core of social representations	132
Table 5.4 Group participants	138
Table 5.5 Study population: exploration and identification of core elements	147
Table 5.6 Study population: verification of centrality	148
Table 8.1 Salient peripheral elements	217
Table 8.2 Preliminary identification of core elements	219
Table 8.3 Probable core elements group 1	222
Table 8.4 Probable core elements group 2	222
Table 8.5 Probable core elements group 3	222
Table 8.6 Probable core elements group 4	223
Table 8.7 The core of healthy eating	223
Table 8.8 Frequencies and contributions of the core elements	230
Table 8.9 Scores obtained in the categorisation task	236
Table 8.10. Illustration of sorting categories across groups	238
Table 9.1 Frames employed in the definition of healthy eating	245

**TABLE OF FIGURES**

Figure 6.1 Four components defining healthy eating in daily practices	161
Figure 6.2 Health mark 10	180
Figure 6.3 El Corral hamburgers	181
Figure 7.1 The frames of eating in the media	188
Figure 8.1 The frames of healthy eating	216
Figure 8.2 Healthy eating: group affiliation and frames	225
Figure 8.3 Word association by group affiliation	227
Figure 8.4 Distribution of word association by group and sex	228
Figure 8.5 Importance of meat for healthy eating across groups	232
Figure 8.6 Word distribution by rating	233
Figure 9.1 The collective social interaction in the organisation of social beliefs	261

## INTRODUCTION

The thesis is about healthy eating in Colombia. The empirical study is devoted to the analysis of how the Colombian society deals with this problematic construction. Healthy eating is presented as the product and the process resulting from a particular stage in the transformation of food ways in which concerns about health and disease prevention are increasingly defining eating practices. The empirical analysis explores the representation of healthy eating in four groups in Colombia: urban and rural, professional and non-professional in order to show the common and particular ways through which these groups interact with healthy eating as a social object. Healthy eating is offered as an example of the dynamics involved in the translation of science into common sense and the assimilation by social groups of a relatively novel object into their veryday life. The situation of nutritional overlapping in which conditions such as malnutrition and obesity co-exist seems to characterise the current stage in the process of nutritional transition in Colombia. A comprehensive analysis on how different social groups structure their understanding of healthy eating is a first and fundamental step for promoting and communicating health.

One of the key areas of social psychology is that dealing with behavioural change and related topics, i.e., persuasion, propaganda, influence, and strategic communication. The pervasive interest in behaviour change rests on the applications, and implications, in several fields including marketing, public policies, and health promotion. This thesis focuses specifically on health promotion, a topic linked to marketing and policy issues. It is not a proposal about behaviour change but an analysis of the contributions of a particular theory in social psychology, social representations, to public health issues, in this case public nutrition. Though attitudinal and conventional social cognition models of health-related behaviour change have dominated the scene, i.e. Theories of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980;Ajzen, 1988); Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986); Health Belief Model (Rosenstock, 1974), it is necessary to consider socio-cultural and unintentional aspects in health behaviours.

Some multi-causal models that include cultural and environmental determinants have been proposed (cf. Bennet, Weinman, & Spurgeon, 1990) but they lack theoretical integration and appear to be sets of variables linked by schematic relations. This thesis advocates the view that health and illness are not only individual matters but also socio-

cultural constructions where ideological, political, and economic factors converge. Yet, these factors must be seen within a comprehensive theoretical framework that takes into account their dynamics. Most social psychological theories on health behaviour are predominantly concerned with the behaviour of individuals, and assume health promotion and prevention from the perspective of individual behavioural change. The last edition of *The Handbook of Social Psychology* (Gilbert, Fiske, & Lindzey, 1998) is still tied up to a notion of behaviour prediction and change, the spectre of an old ambition in social psychology.

The links between attitudes and behaviour have been one of the central themes in the social psychological study of health. Health promoters assumed that behavioural choices were based on people's beliefs and therefore, the provision of information would affect the attitude and, consequently, it would give rise to behavioural change. Beginning with that naïve assumption, this thesis reviews the problem of consistency in social psychology before introducing a relatively novel perspective for the analysis of health issues, the structural perspective of social representations<sup>1</sup>. In order to present a clear exposition of the main topics this thesis deals with, three main themes are offered in the introduction: the problem of consistency, the dilemma of healthy eating, and the need to consider representational issues in the study of health and illness. Though confusion may be a successful rhetorical strategy in academic writings, I invite the reader to follow a rather sequential intellectual journey instead, which begins with the review of the consistency phenomenon in attitude studies (chapter 2) and ends outlining the complexities of the representational phenomena.

### *1.1 The Problem of Consistency*

Being deeply embedded in social psychological research, the relationship between what people know and what they do is one of the most fascinating problems of psychology and has received considerable attention (e.g. Deutscher, 1973; Liska, 1975). Social psychologists have asked themselves for many years whether people act consistently with their belief systems, with the information they have and with the attitudes they have formed. There is probably no single answer to that question as it must be considered in context since it depends on a great variety of factors, some of which have

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<sup>1</sup> I use the terms central core theory and structural perspective of social representations interchangeably.



been already studied (e.g. individual differences). Undoubtedly this research trend will continue to be strong in the future by virtue of its practical implications.

Central to the issue of the relationship between knowledge and actions is the question of rationality. In other words, rational behaviour has played an important role in the study of consistency between beliefs and actions. The problematic concept of rationality may have multiple meanings. It can be considered as the adaptation of the individual's behaviour to specific circumstances or as the representation of the consequences of a set of possibilities of action to choose the best option in the subject's view. More generally, it can also be understood as acts performed following an existing knowledge, that is, acts performed by a well-informed individual in order to achieve an outcome. Although people may seem 'rational' in determined circumstances, this is, acting consistently and accordingly with the knowledge they have, this will probably not be the case in all scenarios. This contingent 'irrationality', more than a weakness of cognitive processes, could be considered as an inherent aspect of our human condition and a pre-requisite for adaptation to everyday life.

The relationship between knowledge and actions may be viewed from different perspectives, some of which emphasise rationality as maximising utilities. Microeconomics theory, for example, considers the individual a rational being who can make optimal decisions to maximise his/her utility under certain restrictions provided he/she has the information they require. It is possible that some individuals conduct themselves in a different way but they are a small proportion and their deviations are corrected by the average. The interest is not in predicting individual behaviour but the average behaviour of the individuals. The rational perspective of human behaviour is the classic paradigm of economics and it is opposed to a psychological view. From a social psychological standpoint, behaviour is affected by the social context and by our representation of it and not necessarily by the optimisation of a choice.

Neither a study on rationality nor an analysis of the different positions in relation to the topic of rational behaviour is attempted in this research. Different from classic economic theory, which stresses the idea of rational behaviour in terms of the use of a perfect knowledge to maximise gains, many psychologists have questioned the role of this notion of rationality in the determination of behaviour. The strong economic version of rationality supposes direct causation of behaviour and complete consideration

of all the information available. Individuals, however, may show intransitive preferences, and preferences may not remain stable over time. We rarely see ourselves engaged in a probabilistic assessment of the possible outcomes of our actions. As the debate continues by arguing and counter-arguing based on experimental results, the discussion on rational behaviour has become unclear and rather sterile (Lea, Tarpy, & Webley, 1987).

The relationship between a dimension that may be called knowledge and a behavioural dimension has usually been conceived in terms of rationality or in terms of consistency. Instead of referring to the correspondence between knowledge and overt behaviours in terms of a traditional approach to rational behaviour or in terms of a classic approach to consistency, the problem is addressed in this thesis from a distinctly social and cultural perspective. This correspondence has been considered, traditionally, in social psychology, in terms of consistency between attitudes and behaviour. A deterministic conception of attitudes as the causes of behaviour underlies this view. Although not every model of attitudes submits them to this treatment (e.g. cognitive dissonance theory), it shows the general trend in the study of attitudes and behaviour. A particular example from this perspective is the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The model asserts that attitudes are causes of behaviour via intentions to engage in the behaviour. The theory is similar to subjective expected utility models (Edwards, 1954), which assumes that individuals choose the alternative with the highest utility.

To challenge this view, my position is to analyse the relationship between knowledge and behaviour from a broader social psychological perspective. I conceive consistency as any correspondence between a concept and the occurrence of a practice. As a social psychologist, I make every effort to put the relationship in the social context of its manifestations. I also give considerable attention to the analysis of cultural issues and therefore I refer to the relationship in question in terms of social concepts and social practices. This is a change from looking at consistency as an individual level phenomenon to considering consistency as a socio-cultural phenomenon where preferences are contingent and what is deemed to be rational might be considered as the practice of a collective knowledge. I am aware that this alternative notion of rationality is incomplete but it will serve as a general orientation for the present research. This will be a cultural approach to rationality, where practices and knowledge are prone to change, following contextual changes. The idea is close to, but not identical with the

concept of subjective rationality. From the perspective of subjective rationality, satisficing is more feasible than maximising and the course of action is oriented by 'good reasons' instead of by a 'perfect knowledge' (Simon, 1983). However these versions of rationality are still under an individualistic perspective, that is, it does not consider socio-cultural factors.

There are signs that a classic microeconomic approach to rationality is insufficient to understand the complex ways by which the ordinary people make choices. The individualistic approach to social behaviour embedded in this view fails to consider the social framework and it reduces all social action to economic behaviour (Zafirovski, 1999). At the centre of the analysis is the epistemological debate between a conception of economics as a natural science versus economics as a social science (cf. Hekman, 1983). The first would be willing to apply rational choice models to all social phenomena while the second would consider the impact of non-economic variables to the economy, an essentially historical subject (Weber, 1968). In an attempt to improve the predictive power of microeconomic models, some researchers have oriented their efforts to study time-inconsistent preferences, (e.g. Pollak, 1968). Current studies include the analysis of inconsistent choices (e.g. O'Donoghue & Rabin, 1999). Yet, these attempts are more concerned with individual variables such as self-control. The role of culture and ideology has not been seriously considered; the concept of rationality may be no more than a social representation. Still, I am not surprised that in the consumption-obsessed societies in which we live, individuals and groups' behaviours are being increasingly explained in economic terms (Becker, 1996).

The reason to bring the issue of rationality into research on health and eating is that both concepts, rationality and consistency, have been closely related to the study of health behaviours, health promotion and food choices. Most health related models of behaviour- change are grounded on the assumptions that individuals are primarily rational in a classic microeconomic sense and that with the same information they have similar utilities, which remain stable over time. By suggesting the need to include the socio-historical aspects, I emphasise the flexible and constructive character of social life, the distinctive nature of everyday knowledge. Then, rationality is a contextual and communicative issue and the rational individual has the ability to meta-represent, that is, to characterise his/her representations in the light of the other's.

Markus & Zajonc, (1985) pointed out the pendular trend, in social psychology, between the conception of the individual as a perfect thinker, and the interpretation that the individual is prone to bias and errors in the processing of information. In this thesis, I advocate an alternative view, that the individual is a rational and a rationalising being. I do not pretend to draw a line between the two, for both notions are strongly linked, dialectically compromised. This idea has gained currency in social psychology since some time ago. In the words of Rokeach (1968): “Perhaps the major way in which contemporary psychology differs from the psychology of twenty years ago is that Man is now seen to be not only a *rationalising* creature but also a *rational* creature –curious, exploratory, and receptive to new ideas” (p. 186, italics in the original). He said so more than thirty years ago. Moscovici (1998), following Lévy-Bruhl (1926), is, in my view, completely right when he links this dynamic with the differentiated nature of the social: “...collective representations are rational, not in spite of being collective, but because they are collective” (p. 218). In that way, he recovered the importance of common sense. Rational thought is not exclusive to scientific thought; it is also a collective issue constructed around what is sensible to do.

## 1.2 *The Healthy Eating Dilemma*

The research on consistency covers many topics, from consumer behaviour to decision making, and an understanding of the processes of consistency has important practical consequences for society, i.e. policy making and implementation. The interest of my research is particularly focused on health behaviour, and more specifically, on healthy eating, which is a controversial issue in contemporary society. Some argue that healthy eating is a political issue (Keane, 1997). Being politically charged, the concept of healthy eating is essentially polemical. Above all, the concept of healthy eating is dilemmatic, a topic of public and scientific debate as acknowledged in the following extract from Canada’s guidelines for healthy eating:

“While some controversy still exists about what constitutes a healthful diet, the nutritionally optimum diet is a concept that is more understood” (Task Group on Canada's Food Guide., 1990 p. 227)

There are a number of reasons for choosing this particular topic for an analysis of consistency between representations and practices and in general, for studying social representations. First, health is a major concern for society as a whole and for

individuals in particular. People have gained much knowledge about health and the media devote an enormous space to communicating matters relating to health. This is especially true in the case of the concept of healthy eating, which has a considerable importance in the media agenda. People are interested in knowing more about diet because of its link with health, and they want to be updated with the latest 'scientific discoveries' in the field of nutrition. The heated discussion around food safety and food technology obliges people to take a position and to talk about the controversial issue of healthy eating. Lay microbiologists and lay nutritionists reveal their theories, reject opposing views, judge, and sentence.

Second, the concept of healthy eating is a very suitable topic for the study of social representations, particularly in the analysis of how people re-create knowledge, from science to common sense. This knowledge, no doubt, will be communicated, represented and transformed and will interact with people's practices. It is in this sense that science transforms the modern world. New words come onto the scene: Nutra-sweet, dietary fibre, cholesterol, fat-free products, unsweetened, vegetarians, olestra, light, and so on. The conceptualisation of eating has undergone transformations throughout history, and it is in this sense a historical concept. Healthy eating is a new concept, a complex product of contemporary societies, such as healthy food, positive eating or balanced nutrition.

Third, health and eating as social products offer a rich opportunity to study social life. The representations of eating include a wealth of beliefs, ideologies, identities, cultural practices, and codes. Eating is not only a health matter but also a theme of fashion and physical attractiveness in the era of the cult of fitness. Eating displays a wonderful world of social relations, shared beliefs, and sentiments. It is far from being a neutral topic, and, on the contrary, offers the possibility of studying a quite sensitive issue of everyday life. Eating is also a means of expression; it unveils our identity, our conflicts, and our past. Latin American literature has shown this passion for eating in the popular books like *Like water for hot chocolate* (Esquivel, 1993) and *Aphrodite* (Allende, 1999). In the first, Tita, the main character of the novel, employs food as a way of communicating. In the second, Allende paints the relations between food and sensuality.

Finally, the links between health and eating, from the perspective of public health, are so important that they cannot be ignored. The relationship between diet and cancer and

diet and coronary heart disease, to mention but two examples, make promotion and prevention activities an extremely necessary effort in contemporary society. Governments have put nutrition amongst the priorities of health plans and tremendous efforts have been made to educate people on healthy eating. People may have the knowledge, but the conditions under which they act appropriately on that knowledge are not fully understood. The provision of data does not seem to be enough and many health campaigns and policy implementations fail to consider the global aspect of representations, of which data are only a part.

The comprehension of the social factors which promote consistency between beliefs and practices is a major concern for social scientists in general and for public health practitioners in particular. Yet, this comprehension must start by studying how this relationship works, which help us to increase the outreach of interventions and to improve social marketing strategies. However, any initiative in the study of beliefs and practices must necessarily look at the historical and social circumstances in which the relationship takes place. There is a huge difference between traditional societies, in which beliefs and practices were deeply prescribed by traditional systems of myths, and contemporary societies in which knowledge is fragmented and systems to prescribe practices ever-changing.

The considerations mentioned above demand a theoretical background to understanding social processes and, especially, the relationship between beliefs and practices. This background needs to be an integral conceptualisation about how people construct social reality and act upon it. It must also have heuristic power to be in accordance with such integral conceptualisation. Finding such a theory is a challenge, as it must outline the content and the structure, the social and the individual, the shared and the particular aspects of social beliefs, all at the same time as solving apparent paradoxes. This is especially the case in the area of food and nutrition, in which a number of environmental, political, economical, cultural, historical, and technological factors come together to affect what and how we eat.

The end of the twentieth century is witnessing an interesting stage in the transformation of food and eating: News on the 'BSE<sup>2</sup> crisis' in British cattle has travelled around the globe and, more than a decade after detecting the first case of BSE, the consumer's trust

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<sup>2</sup> Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

has not recovered. Genetically modified foods pose a significant challenge to the biotechnology industry because of public opposition, mainly in Britain and France. Coca-Cola, an icon of the modern world, experienced a public relations setback in the summer of 1999 after allegations of contaminated cans in Belgium and France. The company reassured consumers all over the world. Earlier, during the spring, the 'Belgian crisis' provoked collective hysteria following declarations of dioxin-contaminated chicken. Bans on European meat were imposed in several Asian countries. The Chinese government banned French wine over fears of contamination with the agent responsible for BSE and in Malaysia, hundreds of pigs were killed after what was believed to be an outbreak of Japanese encephalitis. There were rumours of a conspiracy to exterminate the Chinese minority, the main consumers of meat of pork. Meanwhile, in Scotland and England a particular strain of *Escherichia coli* (0157) has caused several deaths since 1996, following food contamination with the bacterium.

These are a few examples of what the newspaper *Le Monde* called 'L'horreur alimentaire' (August 15/16 1999). Food security accompanies the distribution of hazards. Eating has turned into a predicament; science and scientists are proving useless in calming down the situation, people do not trust. Eating is going through a period of world crisis in which affluence and shortages, risk and safety, go side by side. In global markets, the risks derived from contamination in food go beyond national boundaries. News on the 'mad cow disaster', the 'dioxin crisis', or the famine in Sudan is broadcast to even the remotest countries, making global threats from local problems. Along with perceived technological developments, there are increased public concerns about the risks involved in the alteration of the natural order. The discourses on health and on the environment are closer than ever. According to Beck (1992), we live in a risk society. The discourses about risk dominate the crisis of late modernity as they do in public health (Petersen & Lupton, 1996). Eating combines needs and hazards. As social activity, eating is engaged in the transformation of culture, increasingly affected by the politics of health.

When we eat we are not only expressing an individual choice; we are materialising in one activity the conditions of economic production, moral concerns, social norms, the collective construction of the edible, tradition, and so forth. Eating involves production, processing, acquisition, preparation, consumption, digestion, and metabolism. The study of how we live the concept of healthy eating in our everyday lives requires

acknowledging the collective dimension of eating, for it is the result of a group's creation.

The idea of focusing particularly on healthy eating was made after some previous considerations. First, healthy eating refers to a social practice itself. Although social representations can be studied in relation to products, my specific interest relates to practices. The analysis of healthy eating as a social representation, is the study of the different ways people organise the everyday action of eating. Healthy eating displays the complete range of functions of a social representation: it is knowledge that assimilates new data; it is identity; it is a social practice and permits the justification of positions already taken.

I suspect a strong overlap between healthy eating and other representations such as healthy diet; all of them integrated within the impressively rich universes of food and health. However, healthy diet is an issue relegated to its medical connotation. This reading of healthy diet is not unknown for advertising campaigners. Healthy diet has been perceived by manufacturers as 'an outdated label'; 'a women-led obsession'; 'a bit too girly, with poor connotations'; 'a punitive term, against the macho image'. (*Independent on Sunday*, February 8 1998, p. 13). In three pilot interviews I conducted in Colombia in December 1997, healthy diet was linked exclusively to a medical prescription.

To avoid these connotations, some food manufacturers have proposed a change to the term *light*. However light food has become associated with 'Americanism' and snobbery, and being related to the ethics of moderation it refers to specific aspects of healthy eating, e.g. fitness, and to particular groups, e.g. *yuppies*. The groups with lower education in this research have not appropriated the concept of light, as it was not part of their everyday life. One of the participants in the focus groups, a university student, said, "light food is unpleasant and is for losing weight".

### 1.3 *From Attitudes to Representations*

The notion of attitude as currently conceived, an individual phenomenon, lacks the heuristics to penetrate the dynamics and convolutions of social affairs. After reading the chapter on social cognition by Markus and Zajonc in the third edition of *The Handbook*



of *Social Psychology* (Lindzey & Aronson, 1985), I expected the vindication of the concept in the next edition, its re-creation as social phenomenon as originally conceived (cf. Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918). However, in the new edition the concept was included in the part devoted to the study of intrapersonal phenomena (Gilbert, Fiske and Lindzey Eds, 1998), maintaining the association of North American social psychology with an individual form of social psychology. The separation between social (European) and individual (North American) forms of social psychology does not favour the study of social psychological issues. It just perpetuate the idea of a world with two centres, North America and Europe.

While it is indeed true that the concept of attitude remains chained to individual processes, notions like culture are gaining currency in contemporary accounts of social psychology (See Gilbert, Fiske and Lindzey Eds, 1998). The influence of biology and evolutionary theories is evident in these versions of culture, which assumes continuity in the organisation of systems. However, the study of the collective demands consideration of the ruptures within that continuity, such as, for instance, the role of the symbolic. Therefore, we need a concept that envisages rupture within continuity, the distinctive character of the psychological over the biological, and of the social and collective over the psychological. In short, a concept that allows the integration of psychology as scientific discipline while preserving the objectives of applied areas.

I consider the concept of representation as the most important notion, currently available, to integrate and understand the different levels of human activity. In this thesis I deal with the concept and with a specific formulation of it in social psychology: the theory of social representations (Moscovici, 1961/1976). The thesis is not a comparative analysis between a conventional approach to attitudes and social representations since, being at different levels of analysis, the individual and the collective, the comparison would not be valid.

The first would deal with behaviour, the individual level, while the latter would consider the practice, the socio-cultural level. Nevertheless, the representation as a phenomenon may be approached at the individual level, the individual mental representation. That is why the concept of representation, and of social representation, allows linking the micro and macro levels of action. The adjective social in the theory of social representations indicates that this formulation of the phenomenon of

representation is at the collective level; it is concerned especially, and explicitly, with communication and interaction. This is made explicit because even individual mental representations suppose interaction (Piaget, 1955); they are affected by the socio-cultural context that engenders them.

Still the concept of attitude and social representation share some similarities: they compete to explain phenomena such as beliefs; they use similar constructs like structure; they aim to explain the relationship between concepts and actions. The move from a restricted notion of attitude towards a concept of representation that emphasises the collective creation of social life is driven by the inadequacy of models that explain the social as mere aggregation (Allport, 1935). Attitudinal models have failed to give full account of phenomena that, like eating, suppose ideological and political forces. In the area of health promotion, where activities are aimed at the collective level, applying individual-based models may be ineffective. A review on how and why conventional attitudinal theories appear limited to deal with complex social issues, such as health, seems a first necessary step before introducing a competing approach.

To begin the discussion, I will review some existing explanations of the phenomenon of consistency within social psychology. This review evolved towards the analysis of the phenomenon of consistency from the perspective of social representations, and focuses on the theory of the central core, i.e. the structural perspective. I argue that both formulations offer useful opportunities for investigating the relationships between concepts and behaviour from a broader perspective than the traditional research on attitudes. This has practical implications for policy making and social marketing. As Farr pointed out, “The theory of social representations is relevant to devising successful campaigns” (Farr, 1995a, p.10) and he added with reference to mental illness as an example:

“We believe a number of conceptual problems need to be worked through if health is to be marketed more effectively and if care in the community is to become a reality for those who are mentally ill or those with a disability” (Farr, 1995a, p.10)

Yet, I argue that the central core theory of social representations, one of the currently most influential perspectives of the theory, puts the notion of social representations at risk of being subsumed under a conventional and inadequate perspective of social cognition. Though I advocate the opportunities brought about by the theory of social

representations, and especially by the structural perspective, I want to suggest some key re-considerations that frame the notion of structure in a paradigm that stresses the communicative components of social life. Conceiving the notion of a representation in the making, flexible enough to deal with the paradoxes and contradictions of everyday life is, I shall argue, a first and necessary step in overcoming some difficulties in the development of a structural theory of the representation.

The general objectives of this research are:

- (1) to gather the contents of the representations of healthy eating as a way of exploring consensual theories;
- (2) to identify the structure of this representation in terms of its elements and their relationships, in a critical review of the structural perspective;
- (3) To detail the practices of healthy eating in order to study the practices in relation to the content and the structure of the social representation.

To study the effects of the context, I compare both content and structure in four different groups. Comparative studies within a single culture are a useful tool to contemplating social problems within their own roots: I mapped representations of healthy eating while learning about those groups. The groups included in this study belong to the same nation, sharing common features and exhibiting differences at the same time. This is a return to the study of culture as an essential element of social psychological research as proposed by Farr (1998).

In this thesis, I will start by looking at some general contributions to the study of consistency, particularly the theory of reasoned action of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). Then, following a critique of the poor explanatory power of several theories in the field of consistency and health-related behaviour, I will refer to the theory developed by Serge Moscovici in France, namely, the theory of social representations (Moscovici 1961). This theory, from my point of view, offers a broad conceptual framework to study the way people construct social knowledge, in this particular case the social construction of healthy eating. Then, I will focus on the central core perspective of social representations as proposed by Abric (1987). Firstly, because this is a well-known structural approach to social representations which presents a proposal to study the organisation of social beliefs, and secondly, because this perspective is particularly concerned with the way social representations relate to practices. My idea takes on

board previous considerations in the sense that the orientation of behaviours has been repeatedly mentioned as a function of social representations (Abric, 1987; Moscovici 1961). However, the mechanisms by which social representations relate to social practices are not well understood, and more research is needed to integrate a growing number of concepts and empirical findings in order to stress the basic idea that social concepts and social practices are inextricably linked. This project is a response to that need.

As part of the analysis, a review of the relevant literature on the social and cultural dimensions of healthy eating is made. Most of the literature shows the relationship between beliefs and healthy eating behaviours from the traditional perspective of attitudinal theories. My proposal is that this relationship could be better understood if we consider these beliefs as social representations. In so doing, we are looking not only at the individual's mind but also at the wider environment, the social context, where these beliefs take place. I attach particular importance to communication as a means of knowing. I am particularly insistent on viewing social representations as an integrative concept of the elements that Gaskell and Fraser (1990) called widespread beliefs, namely opinions, attitudes, and ideologies. The theory of social representations remains a very productive idea for the study of social life.

In order to explore the issue of healthy eating, a multi-methodological approach is set out:

1. The collection of data on healthy eating through direct observation, in order to study these practices in relation to the content and the structure of the representations
2. The content analysis of media (newspapers) reports on healthy eating in Colombia, and the analysis of group discussions in order to conform to a multi-level content analysis;
3. The exploration of the core and peripheral elements of the social representation of healthy eating, using the techniques developed by other researchers to achieve the same goal (cf. Abric, 1994c; Moliner, 1994).

#### *1.4 The Research Scenarios*

The study compared the beliefs and practices of healthy eating in two different settings within Colombia (see map appendix 1). The first one, the capital Bogotá, a city with a

population of over six million, where two groups of professional and non-professional urban people were interviewed. The other setting, Arauca, a small town of nearly forty thousand inhabitants, placed in a relatively isolated area in the Orinoquia region, in the plains of northern Colombia. In Arauca, professional and non-professional groups were interviewed as well. The two populations have important differences in terms of food opportunities. The first one living in a fertile plateau on the Colombian mountains with all the opportunities and constraints of a large, polluted, metropolis. The latter, living in the tropical South American savannah, a rural area with more limited variety of foods.

Bogotá was founded on August the 6th, 1538 with the name of Santafé de Bogotá. The city was appointed as capital of Colombia on December 17th, 1819 during the celebration of the Angostura Congress and it was given the name of Bogotá, which changed again to Santafé de Bogotá D.C. (Capital District), under the constitution of 1991. The district is divided in nineteen localities and the rural area of Sumapaz. Situated at 2,640 meters above the sea level and with an average annual temperature of 14 degrees centigrade, the city is the centre of government. It is also a major commercial, financial and industrial centre.

The estimated population for 1995 was calculated around 6,205,708 inhabitants, with an intense migration from rural areas, which increased in the last few years due to the displacement of the population as consequence of the internal conflict (Profamilia, 1995). The life expectancy is around 71.5 years, 75 years for women and 68 years for men, affected mainly by injuries, intentional or accidental, as the first cause of death, and followed by ischemic heart disease and cerebrovascular disease, respectively (Departamento Administrativo de Planeación Distrital, 1997). Data for 1995 registered chronic malnutrition in sixteen per cent of children under five years and global malnutrition in six per cent. Respiratory infections appeared by 1994 as the first cause of morbidity in children between 0-4 years and hypertension for adults 45+ years.

Bogotá is the city most affected by migratory processes in the whole country. The poor, new migrants establish in periphery sectors of the city in what are called *misery belts*. Bosa and Soacha, the two sectors where urban non-professionals were interviewed, have been particular foci of migratory waves. The new inhabitants press the demand for basic services, including water and electricity. The literacy rate in Bogota is high, around ninety-six per cent, and the average education is eight years.

In relation to the rural scenario, the town of Arauca was founded on December 4th 1780 in a zone inhabited by the Guahibo people before the arrival of the Spaniards. Located in the planes of Northeast Colombia, in a region called The Orinoquia because all its rivers flow into the Orinoco River, the town is situated within the tropical zone. Settled at 120 meters above the sea level, the average temperature ranges between 28 and 35 degrees centigrade. The region has a rainy season between April and October and a dry season between November and March.

Arauca is the capital city of the Arauca province, which includes seven towns. Administratively, the city comprises the urban centre and the surrounding rural areas. The 1993 census reported a population of 42,829 inhabitants<sup>3</sup>. The projected population for 1999 is of 74,030 in the urban centre and 15,395 in the surrounding rural area. The drastic increase in these figures merits some interpretation. Acknowledging the possibility that this demographic data is not as accurate as it should be, the dramatic increase of population is explained by successive migrations that reached levels extraordinarily high by the end of the 1980s.

Since the arrival of the first colonists, the economy was based mostly on cattle raising for the production of meat. Some commercial activities flourished, encouraged in the 1970s by the purchase capacity of neighbouring Venezuelans. Soon after their currency was devaluated against the dollar, the commerce was deeply affected and lost some of its impulse. Ranching continued however as the major economic source. In a region isolated from the rest of the country, with no roads to communicate with the interior of Colombia, rivers were the main mean to transport cattle from the farms to other cities.

The only paved road available to link the town with the nearest provincial capital (Cúcuta) ran through Venezuelan territory. By the early 1980s, the population did not have access even to Colombian television stations, so people watched Venezuelan television programmes. During the rainy season, the precarious roads available became impassable and the only ways to access farms were by horses and light aircrafts. The communication with the capital Bogotá was possible only by air with a service provided by several companies (one-hour long flight on average). In the early 1980s the first private telephones were installed.

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<sup>3</sup> Figures for Arauca are from: Gobernación de Arauca. 1995. Anuario estadístico

Although there is still an insufficient infrastructure capacity, a road, unpaved in some parts, links the city of Arauca with the rest of Colombia. The situation has been changing drastically since the mid-1980s with the arrival of oil companies. The region, completely neglected until that time by the central government, began to receive some attention as the result of the influx of money. Oil companies not only put some appreciated cash in the depleted coffers of the local government. They attracted people from rural areas with the prospect of working and studying so they could improve their living conditions. However, oil companies also attracted a strong migration from different regions of Colombia in search of opportunities.

Attracted by the prospect of higher living standards, caravans of families with children, retailers, prostitutes, unemployed people, and young professionals, moved to the new rich town to satisfy a presumed work force demand. In the process, the tension between migrants and locals resulted in a veiled conflict and stereotyping, where the latter accused the former of stealing the resources and job opportunities that belonged to them. The whole process was distinguished by scandalous episodes of corruption. The expression used by local people to refer to those who arrived mainly from central parts of Colombia is *guates*. In the process of migration, the new has enriched local life, in which local traditions have been kept alive.

By 1985, the population in the urban centre was about 19,012 inhabitants and 7,724 in the rural area. For the urban centre these figures increased to 31,174 in 1990 and to 46,378 in 1995. Regarding the rural population, the increases were 9,878 and 12,644 respectively. In sharp contrast with the situation in Bogota, in Arauca, thirty-four per cent of the population is in a situation of misery and almost fifty per cent do not have access to basic services. While in Bogota life expectancy reaches 70.6 years, in Arauca it is 58.4 years. These patterns place Arauca within the typical socio-economic profile of rural areas.

### 1.5 *Nutritional Transition and Overlapping in Colombia*

According to the World Health Report (World Health Organization, 1998) being overweight and obesity are public health problems all over the world. Because of the well-known association between diet and illness, governments have given considerable attention and resources to nutritional problems. Social and economic transformations are closely linked to epidemiological transitions and to changes in nutritional patterns and lifestyles. These changes have been documented in urban societies where the consumption of diets high in sugars, fats and calories coexist with sedentariness (Popkin, 1993). In Colombia, the process of epidemiological transition has not followed a uniform trend. On the contrary, an average improvement in social and health indicators has been recognised though important regional and local differences persist. These variations are associated, among other factors, with social inequalities.

The phenomenon of epidemiological transition has been documented in developed countries (Popkin, 1993), although it is not clear if in these countries the trend is uniform across groups. An epidemiological transition is characterised by a decrease of mortality rates associated with infectious diseases and the gradual increase of chronic non-communicable diseases. In Colombia, the situation is described by a relative increase of chronic non-communicable diseases and by mortality rates related to infectious diseases still high in absolute terms.

Chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, stroke, and some cancers, are associated with diet quality. In most developing countries, they coexist with micronutrient deficiencies (iron, vitamin A, and iodine), malnutrition, and parasitic diseases, generating a mixed epidemiological profile. In a sense it would be possible to refer to epidemiological overlapping instead of transition (OPS, 1995). The phenomenon of overlapping can be illustrated in the case of obesity, which may have different implications according to socio-economic status. In disadvantaged groups, overweight may occur concomitantly with micronutrient deficiencies (Ibid.).

The information available suggests that social, economic and demographic transformations are all relevant in shaping nutritional habits. Low-income people are especially at risk of developing obesity and chronic conditions related with diet. Diet composition, specifically, is strongly affected by a wide range of social and economical factors. While urban areas show a consumption pattern close to those of the United States and Canada, some other areas of the country show tendencies similar to those



found in the 1960s. Rural communities and marginalised urban groups are especially vulnerable. The situation in Colombia in relation to nutrition can be framed in terms of three general dimensions: Rapid urbanisation, demographic transition, and social and economic changes, all of them interrelated.

Rapid Urbanisation: Colombia has undergone a process of rapid and disorganised urbanisation. The urban population increased from twenty-nine to seventy percent between 1938 and 1990 (Profamilia, 1995). The process has been highly unequal, and consequently, seventy-three percent of the urban population lives in the Andean Zone. The circumstances have become more difficult in the last few years due to massive displacements resulting from the internal war. It was estimated that since 1985 the number of displaced Colombians reached a figure around 920,000 (Codhes, 1997). The migrants and displaced are typically peasants with low educational levels and precarious economic conditions. Their arrival to urban centres modifies previous patterns of physical activity and diet. The most affected city by these movements of population is the capital Bogotá.

Demographic Transition: The Colombian demographic transition is depicted by a decrease in fertility rates, pointing out changes in reproductive behaviour, and relatively low mortality rates with changes in its structure by causes. The population figure was estimated in 1995 around 36 million, 50.3 per cent women, and 49.7 per cent men. Demographic changes are associated with the reduction of the average family size and the increase in the urban population.

Social and Economic Factors: Economic growth has influenced the improvement of nutritional standards. Increased educational opportunities and the entrance of women as part of the labour force are both factors that have had an enormous impact on eating practices. In general, there is a decline in structural poverty. Between 1973 and 1983, the percentage of families with unsatisfied basic needs decreased from 58.9 to 20.6 per cent in urban areas. The situation is different when poverty is assessed by purchase capacity, especially in the last few years, as the country is passing through a series of institutional and social crises.

At the end of the 1980s, a new economic model was adopted in order to improve the system's efficiency and to stimulate international competition. The model has followed

two strategies: The modernisation of governmental institutions, engendered mainly through privatisation; and the globalisation of the economy, by way of the policy of economic openness<sup>4</sup>. The scarce clarity with which the process is being implemented and the lack of a coherent policy of modernisation have delayed the achievement of the intended objectives.

These political, social and economic factors have had a strong impact in the nutritional status of the Colombian people. The inequalities in income distribution and poverty have prevented the access of large segments of population not only to adequate food but also to services related with nutritional status. Global malnutrition was found in thirteen per cent of the group below five years while almost fifteen per cent were considered at risk (Ministerio de Salud & Instituto Nacional de Salud, 1990). The lack of comparable opportunities has led to discrepancies between the rural and urban sectors. In rural areas, the access to health services is deficient, being characterised by a poor infrastructure as well. In addition, the rural population has a lower income and education (Ministerio de Salud & Instituto Nacional de Salud, 1990). Not surprisingly then, those areas are affected by problems of malnutrition: the proportion of chronic malnutrition reaches nineteen per cent in rural areas (Profamilia, 1995). While in urban areas the proportion of households in situation of misery decreased from thirteen to six per cent between 1973 and 1993, in the rural the decline for the same period ranged between 44 and 31 per cent (Departamento Nacional de Planeacion, 1996). It is estimated that in 1992 around sixty-five per cent of rural habitants were poor by income

Diet composition in Colombia is rich in fat and refined sugars. There is also a trend towards an increased intake of meat, fats and animal and vegetable oils (Universidad del Valle, 1995). The current situation is a product of a long history of economic, technological, social and cultural circumstances that have led to a continuous transformation in the Colombian dietary practices. In this transition, traditional and modern ways to eating superpose to each other. Healthy eating as a contemporary product reflects this clash of *cuisines*. These encounters, however, are not new. Since 1492, with the 'discovery' of the New World, there has been an exchange of products and recipes that enrich both New and Old Worlds menus (Rozin, 1992).

#### The National Plan of Food and Nutrition 1996-2005

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<sup>4</sup> The *apertura económica*

Before the need to develop policies and strategies oriented towards the solution of nutritional problems in Colombia, the government designed the National Plan of Food and Nutrition (PNAN 1996-2005). The proposal is based on an inter-sector approach that includes the ministries of Health, Education, Communications, and Agriculture, along with NGOs, international agencies and local governments. The plan has been structured around eight general guidelines:

- Food accessibility
- Food quality
- Prevention and control of micronutrient deficiencies
- Prevention and treatment of infectious and parasitic diseases
- Promotion of breast-feeding
- Promotion of health, nutrition and healthy lifestyles
- Evaluation
- Training of human resources in food policy.

These guidelines follow general recommendations of the Pan American Health Organisation (WHO's regional office), which are oriented towards the control of the diverse facets and presentations of the problem of nutrition in the region. In particular the promotion of a culture of healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle are of special interest in this research. PAHO has recognised the relevance of cultural factors in the appreciation of the problem and the design of interventions (OPS, 1995). It is in this sense that I believe the theory of social representations offers helpful insights.

At the time I conducted the fieldwork, Colombia was living out one of the most intense stages of its internal conflict. The country was passing through a difficult historical moment: fiscal crisis, unemployment rates above twenty per cent in some cities, killings by the guerrilla and the paramilitaries. As in any other country in crisis, hunger was an everyday issue for many unemployed or displaced Colombians. This is something important to mention in research on healthy eating.

The data collection process was divided into two different stages, the first one in September 1998, and the second between December 1998 and January 1999. In the second stage, an observational study was conducted, which was relatively affected by the intensification of the conflict. I could neither take all the pictures nor observe all the

people I wanted to. This was specially problematic in the Arauca province, where on December 12th, 1998, seventeen people died in a bombing attack during a fight between guerrilla and the military in events which are still obscure at the time of writing this introduction. By the end of December, the conflict intensified with attacks against small towns, prior to the peace meetings between the government and the guerrillas on January 7th. Unfortunately, after this day, the drama has continued. This is part of the historical context.

This research examined the potential contributions of the theory of social representations to understanding the social psychological aspects of nutritional behaviour. The promotion of nutrition and healthy lifestyles is part of the National Plan on Food and Nutrition 1996-2005 proposed by the Colombian government. I am convinced about the contributions of the study of social beliefs for the design and development of such preventive activities. At the theoretical level it is a review of the structural perspective of social representations and a contribution to understanding the complex ways through which people behave socially.

The thesis is divided into nine chapters, including this introduction. Chapter 2 contains some considerations about the relationship between attitudes and behaviour in the context of the history of social psychology and introduces the theory of social representations. Chapter 3 gives a full account of the structural perspective and it emphasises the differences and common aspects between the general theory of social representations and the structural perspective. It also presents a critical view of the latter and emphasises the need for conceiving of cognition in terms of a paradigm different from that of information processing, from a psychology of cognition to a sociology of knowledge. Chapter 4 explores the links between practices and representations at a theoretical level. Chapter 5 gives the details of the multi-method approach used in data collection and analysis. Chapter 6 is a presentation of the social dimension of eating including some contextualisation about eating in modern societies as an introduction to the empirical studies. It includes the presentation of the observational study. Chapter 7 presents the multi-level analysis of social discourse in both groups and the media. Chapter 8 offers the results of the structural analysis. Finally, chapter 9 presents a critical discussion and suggests some points that deserve further and careful consideration in the study of social beliefs.



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## 2 FROM ATTITUDES TO SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

### 2.1 *The relationships between attitudes and behaviour*

The study of the relationship between attitudes and behaviour has been one of the leading enigmas of social psychology. This study has been carried out from the perspective of a psychological form of social psychology, that is, emphasising individual psychological processes and the use of experimental methodologies. Even though the contributions of individualised forms of social psychology to the investigation of the relationship between attitudes and behaviour has been recognised (cf. Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), a much broader approach is needed to understand the multiple ways by which attitudes influence behaviours.

Any attempt to review the extensive literature on consistency between attitudes and behaviour may fall short because of the immense amount of empirical research conducted. The concept of attitude is one of the pillars of social psychology, perhaps the most characteristic. The interest in researching attitudes has been substantial, and part of this interest has rested on the assumption that attitudes are useful predictors of behaviours. The evolution of research on consistency is strongly linked to the evolution of the concept of attitude itself, and for that reason a brief account of the changes and innovations in the history of the study of attitudes is in order.

#### 2.1.1 **The Concept of Attitude in Social Psychology**

Despite the relatively long history of the concept of attitude, we lack an adequate definition of it. Correspondingly, given the multiple definitions proposed, there is no consensus on how to conceptualise it, which has led to the frustration of concluding that an attitude is that which is measured by an attitude scale. When reviewing the multitude of definitions, every author states at the beginning of his/her work the concept of attitude to be used in that particular context. In other words, the concept needs to be operationalised in order to attain some clarity. Some definitions are narrower than others, hoping in that way to reach some degree of objectivity but achieving, instead, a reduction in the scope of the construct and risking its explanatory power.

From Allport's definition as "a mental and neural state of readiness" (Allport, 1935) to the more current conceptualisations in social cognition or the more socially explicit definitions (Billig, 1991), there is a long road strewn with the wrecks of years of continuous strife and debate. In spite of this conceptual diversity, there seems to be considerable agreement on the judgement dimension of attitudes. Thus, attitudes are frequently defined as evaluative tendencies that express the relation of an individual to a social object (McGuire, 1985). Moliner and Tafani (1997) summarised three essential components in the apprehension of the concept: Attitude is (1) an internal process that can be observed indirectly; (2) an evaluative activity; and (3) a tripartite construct with cognitive, affective, and behavioural components.

### **2.1.2 The Historical Evolution of the Concept of Attitudes**

One of the main concerns within the American tradition of psychology has been the prediction of behaviour. The hypothetical construct of attitude developed essentially to fulfil this end, although it must be remembered that at the beginning of the century the concept had a wider connotation. This broader definition refers to the social aspect of the concept of attitudes as it was conceived by Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) in their work *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Within this framework attitudes were thought of as eminently social; attitudes would be the reflection, at the individual level, of the social values of the group of reference.

By the 1920s the social view of attitudes had changed under the influence of behaviourism, the dominant approach in psychology in the United States. The distinctive contribution of behaviourism was to define the purpose of psychology as the prediction and control of behaviour. Manifest behaviour became the object of study of psychology and experimentation its methodology. The study of behaviour was understood in terms of stimuli and responses, neglecting the role of what might be designated as the mental process. At that time social psychology developed a strong emphasis on the individual, and this way of thinking had in Floyd H. Allport one of its most important protagonists (Graumann, 1985). Since then, the individualisation of the social has been one of the most noticeable characteristics of North American social psychology. Nevertheless, some important paradigmatic changes have occurred during the history of the concept and the influence of the social context has begun to play an increasingly important role in more recent studies.

The changes experienced by the concept during the twentieth century were clearly described by McGuire (1986). McGuire distinguished three periods in the study of attitudes, each reflecting the dominant paradigms in social psychology. These are the attitude measurement era, the attitude-change era, and the attitude-structure era. The first period (1920s-30s) was heavily influenced by the ideas of Allport and it was centred on attitude measurement and the prediction of behaviour. The most popular scaling methods were created during this period (e.g. Thurstone scale) and their use has remained widely accepted in applied areas such as public health.

Along with the sophistication of measurement techniques, the concept became an individual phenomenon and its original social roots were completely ignored. As the complexities of the reality the concept tried to explain exceeded by far the theoretical explanations, the investigation of attitudes experienced a decline not to be overcome until the mid 1940s. The scant evidence for considering attitude as a predictor of behaviour was not the only reason for the decline of research on attitudes by the end of the 1930s. As McGuire said, there were also internal factors such as conceptual over-elaboration, excessive practical application and hyper-quantification (McGuire, 1986).

McGuire referred to a second period (1945-65) as the attitude-change era. During this period, the issue of influence and propaganda marked a revival on the study of attitudes. Persuasion and influence were the major themes of research, stressing the idea of a direct relationship between attitudes and behaviour and the predictive value of the concept of attitudes. By this time, the use of more complex designs and the advent of sophisticated statistical analysis allowed the study of the effect of multiple variables at the same time. At the conceptual level, the view of attitudes as cognitive structures began to impregnate research efforts. This change has been known as the cognitive revolution and its impact is felt even today.

During the cognitive revolution (1950s-60s) social behaviour began to be explained in terms of cognitive processes. The 'black box' was opened up as many psychologists considered that behaviourism could not explain many aspects of mental life. Thus, social psychology developed a strong cognitive orientation, and behaviour was thought of mostly as the product of beliefs and perceptions. The first works on social cognition, which became the dominant paradigm in social psychology in the 1960s and 1970s and



has continued to produce a large number of empirical and theoretical researches in the 1990s, heavily influenced the attitude-change era.

This cognitive social psychology was influenced extensively by Gestalt psychologists such as Heider, (1946), and Asch (1946). They inspired the work of Abric (1987) on the structure of social representations. Let us bear in mind that the contributions of Gestalt psychology to social cognition are characterised by the idea of the structural organisation of cognitive elements and the interaction among them. Asch, for instance, considered attitudes to be cognitive structures in which information plays a major role. However, this information is historically and socially determined, as it is part of a wider environment. When it becomes affected by needs and interests, the knowledge turns into beliefs (Asch, 1987).

Asch defined attitudes as: “An organisation of experiences and data with reference to an object. It is a structure of hierarchical order, the parts of which function in accordance with their position in the whole” (Asch, 1987, p.580). This hierarchical order shows some structural similarities with the central core perspective of social representations, as I will evince later. The idea, for example, that there is an organising principle and the notion of interdependence where the change in an element produces changes in the whole structure is close to the structural approach of social representations. Yet, there are important differences, as both perspectives are grounded in different traditions of social psychology.

From the dynamic view, Heider’s work on interpersonal relations must also be recognised as a major contribution to social psychology (Heider, 1958). Heider’s balance theory provided a model to understand attitudes in the process of interaction. The model assumes that cognitive structures tend towards equilibrium. A structure is composed of elements and of relations between elements, being the relations expressed in terms of valences. As with the other developments made in the field of Gestalt psychology, his work caused increasing interest in the social-cognitive approach within the North American tradition of research. The cognitive balance theory of Rosenberg and Abelson and of Festinger’s cognitive dissonance are also part of the approach to social psychology from a cognitive perspective (cf. Abelson, 1968).

The theory of cognitive dissonance is one of the best-known theories of consistency in social psychology (Festinger, 1957). Most of the research conducted in the 1960s followed Festinger's assumptions. Its mention in this chapter is due mainly to the fact that this theoretical view greatly influenced the research on attitudes when cognitive theories began to prevail upon research efforts. But is also due to the fact that it showed that behaviour may influence attitudes, and questioned the unidirectional view of attitudes as causes of behaviour. The basic principle of the theory is that individuals tend to maintain a consistency between attitudes and behaviour. When this relationship is inconsistent, the result is a dissonance, which impels the individual to re-establish the equilibrium. The dissonance can be reduced by changing the existing cognition or creating new ones. Therefore, in a situation of dissonance, previous attitudes are modified in the direction of the performed behaviour.

A third period in the history of attitudes was traced by McGuire back to the mid-1960s, the attitude structure era. Since then, the social cognition approach for the study of attitudes has remained popular. Efforts have concentrated on the structure and functions of attitudes. This view reached its splendour during the 1980s and continues as an enormous contribution to attitudinal research. There are two main ideas from this approach which radically challenged early behaviourist conceptions. Firstly, the image of an active organism adapting to a complex environment, against the notion of a stimulus-response model. Secondly, the existence of representation which mediates between stimulus and behaviour.

The idea of a represented reality is, in my view, one of the most important and beautiful revelations of social cognition, which, while it may seem obvious today, was not so obvious in the North American tradition of social psychology during the first half of the twentieth century. The impregnation of social psychology with a cognitive perspective has been crucial. As pointed out by Markus and Zajonc: "The result is that one can no longer view today's social psychology as the study of social behavior. It is more accurate to define it as the study of the social mind" (Markus & Zajonc, 1985, p.137) .

### **2.1.3 The Study of Consistency in Attitudinal Research**

There is ample agreement that the study of the relationship between attitudes and behaviour has been of paramount importance in the history of social psychology. It is

legitimate to say that the importance attached to the concept of attitudes is due to its potential use as a predictive tool. Our common sense states that people usually behave according to their beliefs, values, norms and attitudes. This assumption is relevant for an adequate social functioning and morally related to virtues such as honesty. However, it is incredible how unpredictable we can be. In the following section I will proceed to make an overall review of the study of consistency in attitudinal research.

#### **2.1.4 The Historical Evolution of the Study of Consistency**

The issue of consistency has passed through highs and lows, remaining unresolved and highly relevant. In order to present a historical analysis of how the problem has been approached, I followed the description by Zanna and Fazio (1982). The history of the study of consistency between attitudes and behaviour follows the vicissitudes of the concept of attitude and, at the risk of reiteration, the study of consistency is inextricably mixed with the conceptual development of attitudes.

Zanna and Fazio (ibid.) distinguished three periods in the study of consistency: firstly an approach to the relationship between attitudes and behaviour in terms of a perfect association that the authors characterises as the period of the “*Is*” question; secondly a period of specification of the conditions which increase the strength of the association, which they called the period of the “*When*” question. Finally, the move towards a third period of analysis of the process by which an attitude becomes behaviour, referred as to the period of the “*How*” questions. These three stages in the evolution of the research into consistency clearly show the vicissitudes in the controversy on consistency and the persistence of the desire for prediction.

During the period of the ascendancy of attitude measurement in the 1920s-30s, researchers believed in a strong correlation between attitudes and behaviour. They thought that knowing people’s attitudes would allow them to predict their behaviour. This original assumption changed drastically when a study, conducted by LaPiere in the 1930s, analysing the problem of consistency, failed to support it (LaPiere, 1934). Another seminal work cited frequently in the literature on consistency was presented by A.W. Wicker thirty-five years later (cf. Wicker, 1969). Both papers provide the most influential evidence that the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is not as easy and direct as previously considered.

The classic study on consistency published by LaPiere in 1934, revealed marked differences between what people say and what they do, that is, between attitudes and actions. LaPiere, travelling with a Chinese couple along the West Coast of the United States, was accepted for accommodation in all the places they wanted to stay but one. Six months after the end of the journey, he sent a questionnaire to the owners of those establishments they had visited and asked them if they would receive Chinese guests. Contrary to their earlier experience, over ninety per cent refused to have Chinese guests or argued that it would depend upon the circumstances.

These findings were considered as a demonstration of the inconsistency between attitudes and behaviour. As McGuire has noted, “low attitude-action correlation has remained a scandal of social psychology ever since” (1986, p. 92). LaPiere himself tried to explain his findings by stating that verbal responses to symbolic situations (attitudes) are not the best way to access behaviours as they correspond to a different phenomenon. He argued that a questionnaire could only secure a verbal reaction to an entirely symbolic situation (LaPiere, 1934). The implications of this statement have not received enough consideration.

The second big blow to the assumption of consistency was the study by Wicker (1969). Wicker compiled the results of thirty-two different investigations and found that the correlation between attitudes and behaviour did not exceed 0.30. The results were followed by deep mistrust in the use of attitudes to predict behaviour. This mistrust resulted in a strong critique of the concept of attitude, the relevance of which was questioned. Yet, this was not the end of the quest for prediction.

After Wicker, researchers began to question the conditions in which attitudes predict behaviour. Zanna and Fazio (1982) referred to this period as the period of *when*. The objective was to find mediating variables to explain the relationship. Some of these developments include Belief Dimensionality (Schelegel & DiTecco, 1982), Self-Monitoring (Snyder, 1982), Impression Management (Tedeschi & Rosenfeld, 1981), Situational Context Factors (Abelson, 1982), and the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Schelegel and DiTecco (1982) suggested the importance of viewing attitudes in multidimensional terms, considering the dimensions of affect, cognition and behaviour. Accordingly, they proposed the term attitude structure to include the large number of beliefs underlying attitudes. From this idea, the authors demonstrated that the behavioural repertoire related to a particular attitudinal object expands when subjects enlarge information and experience regarding that object. There is an increase in belief dimensionality. Consequently, a general evaluative response (an attitude) would not be able to integrate the set of beliefs in high dimensionality and the consistency would be low. In such cases, a multidimensional approach of attitudes is required in order to understand the relationship between attitudes and behaviour.

The description of the attitudinal structure is possible through the use of advanced statistical methods such as factor analytic techniques. The hierarchical factor analysis developed by Wherry (1959, cited by Schelegel and DiTecco, 1982) was, for the authors, a useful technique to identify, describe and examine attitude structures, which I mention because of its similarity to the methods currently in use to investigate the structure of social representations. The rationale of such a method is to map out beliefs in a psychological space where the dimensionality of a given belief is expressed as factor solutions arranged hierarchically through the appropriate transformations (rotations).

The need for this hierarchical attitude structure seems important in order to improve the explanatory power of attitudinal theories, which have conceived attitudes in a relatively horizontal ways. However, this exercise demands a considerable effort, since it is not enough just to attribute to the structure cognitive, affective and conative characteristics. It is necessary to explain how these dimensions interact and what happens when there are inconsistencies amongst them. In other words, the structural character of this approach lacks a dynamic view.

From another perspective, Snyder (1982) suggested that the correspondence between social behaviour and attitudes was possibly related to the particular characteristics of individuals and situations. According to Snyder, the relationship would be mediated by Self-Monitoring. At the individual level, high self-monitors (those who guide their behavioural choices following situational information) would show a minimal consistency, while low self-monitors (those who guide their behavioural choices from

information about inner states), would have a high consistency. At the situational level, some environments enhance consistency, either by providing a 'thinking environment' or by inducing states of objective self-awareness.

As the relationship between attitudes and behaviour appears to be contingent on individual characteristics and situations, from Snyder's point of view there are two general principles which account for the correspondence between attitudes and behaviour: the availability and relevance principles. The availability principle has to do with making the knowledge of general attitudes available to serve as potential guides to action, thus generating a correspondence between attitudes and actions in low self-monitors. In other words, memory accessibility is greater in low self-monitors. The relevance principle refers to the appropriateness of acting in accordance with one's attitudes, given the particular characteristics of the situation. This pragmatic way of socially behaving generates correspondence for both high and low self-monitors. Nevertheless, the effect of Self-Monitoring as mediator in the relationship between attitudes and behaviour has not been demonstrated successfully in experimental research (Ajzen, 1988).

Other theories, such as impression management theory, explain consistency as an external need (Tedeschi & Rosenfeld, 1981). It is not an internal motivation but the need to appear consistent to others that must be taken into account, since consistency is important to achieve credibility in the social scene. From this theory I want to keep the notion of the social function of consistency, which I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 4. The impression of being consistent in terms of the impression management theory is stronger than the need to be consistent in terms of cognitive dissonance. The formulation of the impression management theory has received considerable support from a wide range of studies (Markus & Zajonc, 1985).

To summarise, the idea that the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is moderated by internal and/or external variables prevailed in most of the research conducted in the 1970s and corresponds to the stage that Zanna and Fazio called the period of *When*. As we have seen, there are numerous theoretical attempts to try to explain the problem of attitude-behaviour consistency. Abelson summarised them in two lines of argument: (a) the definitional specificity, where consistency is associated

with the level of generality (e.g. Ajzen); and (b), the Situational Context Factors (Abelson, 1982).

Focusing on the latter, Abelson (1982) analysed three mediating context factors: individuating, scripting and de-individuating. The degree of consistency would vary according to the situational context, which affects the strength of the association between attitude and behaviour. The maximum level of consistency could be found at the level of individuation where the individual acts following private beliefs. The minimum degree of consistency could be expected in de-individuation where attitudes are symbolical, that is, strongly impregnated with emotional components. These notions deserve attention since they highlight the idea of the differential character of the public and private scenes in the study of social beliefs.

Zanna and Fazio (1982) described a third period in the study of consistency as the period of *How*, where the interest was to analyse the process by which an attitude becomes behaviour. Because of the huge number of mediating variables believed to explain the relationship between attitudes and behaviour, researchers have tried to build models to integrate the effect of those variables. One example of such an attempt is Fazio's processual model, which would correspond to the third generation of research on consistency previously described (Fazio, 1986). This model assumes that attitude accessibility in memory is a variable with an important impact on behaviour. The accessibility would affect the immediate perception of the attitude object due to a process of selectiveness and this immediate perception would influence the behavioural response. Social norms and the interpretation of the situation would also play a role in the response by affecting the definition of the event.

We might continue to set forth many other explanations for attitude-behaviour inconsistency. However, in view of the huge number, a moment's reflection seems appropriate. The most evident problem seems to be the lack of a heuristic framework for the analysis of the consistency problem. The point to be solved refers not only to the great number of micro-theories but also to the plurality of mediating variables proposed, the number of which is legion. Ajzen said: "The number of variables that might moderate the relation between general dispositions and specific actions is potentially unlimited" (Ajzen, 1988, p. 85).

There is also an additional problem brought up by the same author in relation to the moderating variables and their effects on consistency. That is the possibility that the moderating effect of a particular variable would depend upon other moderators. As a result, we might have an infinite number of variables in our explanatory model and yet still fail to determine the relationship between them. Such a plurality is an effect of the lack of a conceptual framework to explain consistency. The insufficient explanatory power of isolated variables or perspectives to explain why inconsistency occurs has been evident for almost fifty years (cf. Deutscher, 1975).

### **2.1.5 The Theory of Reasoned Action**

One of the products of the multivariate view of attitudes is Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasoned action, (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), which I consider represents a classic theory of attitudes. The theory of reasoned action was introduced by Fishbein in 1967, based on an expectancy-value model. This model states that attitudes are a function of people's beliefs, which in their turn are the product of the sum of expectancies times the value (or evaluation) attributed to that expectancy. In other words, an attitude is a function of the beliefs about the attitude object and of the evaluative component of these beliefs. Ajzen defined attitude as "a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event" (Ajzen, 1988, p.4) favouring a strong evaluative element in the definition.

From the point of view of reasoned action, an attitude is transformed into overt behaviour through behavioural intention. The behavioural determinant, in this theory, is not the attitude itself, but the person's intention to perform the behaviour. This is a function of two major determinants: (a) the individual's attitude toward the behaviour, and (b) the subjective norms, which are normative beliefs acting as points of reference for the individual. Behavioural intention is used as a proxy measure of behaviour, which is a linear regression function of the attitude towards the behaviour and the subjective norm.

This is the first major difference between reasoned action and other theories of attitudes; the theory does not deal with attitudes towards targets but with attitudes toward behaviours. Following the expectancy value model, attitudes towards behaviours are a function of behavioural beliefs (e.g. the belief that a certain action will produce a certain



outcome) multiplied by the evaluative component (e.g. how important I consider that outcome). Similarly, subjective norms are a product of normative beliefs (e.g. the belief that somebody thinks I should behave in a certain way) multiplied by the motivation to comply with that expectation.

Since people face important constraints when behaving, Ajzen (1988) also proposed the theory of planned behaviour to deal with the problem that many times people do not have complete control over the possibility of performing a particular action. Thus, perceived behavioural control was added to the model of reasoned action to reflect how intentions and behaviour are affected by the perception of the constraints reality imposes, and by the possibility of coping with these.

Constraints can be the result of internal or external factors, which affect the perception of behavioural control. Perceived behavioural control is a proxy measure of actual control and, again, following the expectancy-value model, this variable is a linear function of the perceived opportunities to achieve a certain outcome multiplied by the importance attributed to that outcome. Citing research results, Ajzen stated that three components (attitude toward the behaviour, norms, and perceived behavioural control) make independent contributions to the predictor of behaviour, just as variables in a multiple regression model do.

The theory of reasoned action is a model of rational behaviour. This theory assumes that the individual considers the information available and the implication of his/her actions when behaving. It must be noted that Ajzen declared consistency as an inherent characteristic of the human condition, which is one major assumption in his model of reasoned action (Ajzen, 1988). This consistency is expressed by the fact that people use the information available to consider the implications of the actions they are undertaking. However, he recognised that in some situations such consistency does not exist, as has been shown by empirical research (*ibid.*).

As social psychologists have made every effort to explain the issue of inconsistency and to maintain the notion that it is possible to predict behaviour from a concept such as attitudes, Fishbein and Ajzen argued that attitude and behaviour needed to be considered at different levels of analysis. (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Ajzen pointed out that people do behave in accordance with their attitudes when attitudes are seen as

general behavioural inclinations and we are looking at global behavioural tendencies and not at single actions (Ajzen, 1988). The same level of generality or specificity must be considered when measuring attitudes and actions, the principle of compatibility.

According to Ajzen, single actions can be predicted from attitudes when these represent a particular predisposition to performing a particular act. Thus, the same level of specificity must be observed in relation to the action, target, context and time. We may then certainly question the relevance of studying the relationship between knowledge and actions when the level of specificity press such a level of reduction that the attitudes and behaviours studied lack social relevance. In other words, the consideration of such a fine-grained level of analysis might be useful for very specific individual actions but the effect for the study of social psychological problems would be worthless.

### **2.1.6 Reasoned Action and Healthy Eating**

The theories of reasoned action and planned behaviour have been applied extensively to the study of health-related behaviours (Conner & Sparks, 1996). However, the use of the theory of planned behaviour has not become as popular as the theory of reasoned action in spite of claiming a greater applicability (Conner & Sparks, 1996). This fact may be related to the need to clarify the operational definition of perceived behavioural control and the determinants of this variable. Public health has been especially inclined to use the model of reasoned action for the study of food choices (Anderson & Shepherd, 1989; Saunders & Rahilly, 1990; Shepherd, 1988). There is a huge body of research conducted under this model to determine, for instance, whether or not knowledge and perceived norms predict dietary change (Patterson, Kristal, & White, 1996); to analyse attitudinal differences in the consumption of sweet snacks by gender (Grogan, Bell, & Conner, 1997); to discover the association in food preferences between parents and children (Stafleu, van Staveren, De Graaf, Burema, & Hautvast, 1995), to mention just some examples.

These studies do not consider important aspects of the social context where the choice takes place and largely ignore important ideological and historical determinants in food choice. On the other hand, the theory of reasoned action lacks an account of how previous experiences affect behavioural intentions and that forms of behaviour such as food choices are not always reasoned actions but automatic processes or behavioural

scripts that result from repetitive past experiences. This is a general and very important criticism that will be emphasised in the section dedicated to the deficiencies of this model.

Food can be bought routinely and people do not always engage in systematic decision-making processes. In addition, the model of reasoned action centres more on specific intentions to eat specific foods, conveying a highly particular explanation of food choice. This is related to the level of specificity that was mentioned before. Brug et al, (Brug, Lechner, & de Vries, 1995), used the ASE model of Attitudes, Social Influence and Self-Efficacy, to investigate determinants of fruit and vegetable consumption. This model is similar to Ajzen's model of planned action. They found attitudes, social influences and self-efficacy to be significant predictors associated with the intention to consume salads, but social influence was not associated with the intention to consume boiled vegetables. Moreover, self-efficacy was the only significant predictor of intention to consume fruit. Let us try to imagine the application of the model for every kind of food available in the market in different contexts, to realise the immense possibilities offered by the combinations of predictors and choices.

In my view, the issues of food and eating cannot be approached as isolated processes. It is necessary to think about how cultural patterns, the development of new technologies in the food industry, and conflicting messages in the area of nutrition interact in the everyday act of eating. If we fail to take these processes into account, then the mechanisms underlying food choices and eating will not be understood. The consequences could lead to the lack of success of preventive activities in the areas of food and nutrition.

## *2.2 Problematic Aspects of Classic Attitudinal Theories*

The conventional view of attitude as portrayed throughout many years of empirical research and theoretical proposals have failed to give a more heuristic and thus useful explanation of the relationship between attitude and behaviour. Although attitudinal theories can be criticised on multiple bases, it is important to stress that most criticisms underestimate the differences in attitudinal models and frequently stack diverse perspectives under the single category of a restricted form of social psychology. Even though those simplifications are understandable considering the need for integrating a

rather fragmented and disperse body of knowledge, it does not fairly acknowledge the heterogeneous contributions of the studies on attitudes. The following criticisms of some important flaws of attitudinal theories are focused on their common aspects.

The first important shortcoming of conventional attitudinal studies for the study of the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is related to the fact that most of the research has been conducted in laboratory settings. The experimental tradition in social psychology has been a central methodological aspect in the study of consistency as it has been for the study of attitudes in general. However, a more natural approach to the study of behaviour is absent and a more careful consideration of the context where actions take place is required. The need to appear consistent in an artificial situation and the tendency to fulfil the expectations of the experimenter, make the results of such studies an investigation into consistency in experimental settings and no more.

This methodology is the result of the notion of attitudes as an individual phenomenon, whose analysis has been considered feasible in isolated contexts outside the broader framework of social communication and interaction. The individualisation of the studies on attitudes is typically reflected in the description of the functions of attitudes. From the functional perspective, the taxonomy of Katz (1960) is a relevant example. The original taxonomy provided by Katz has been preserved in contemporary accounts on the functions of attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Katz's description of the functions of attitudes (i.e. knowledge, instrumental, value-expressive and ego-defensive) does not mention the social functions at all, though values are cultural products and the self is a social construction. The neglected social component of attitudes has remained as one of the most important shortcomings of attitudinal studies.

A second problematic aspect refers to the validity of examining overt behaviour in terms of verbal behaviour. The findings in the study conducted by LaPiere were interpreted by himself in terms of the differential realm of words and deeds. Deutscher (1975), who was particularly critical of the studies presenting associations between attitudes and behaviour, agreed with LaPiere's considerations suggesting that verbal behaviour and overt behaviour may be viewed as different segments of a single act. Deutscher also signalled the importance of the context, with the interpretation of the act needing to be made in the context of its meaning to the actors.

A third flaw of attitudinal theories for the study of consistency has to do with a poor theoretical integration and no consolidation of empirical findings. In spite of the evidence showing poor direct determination between attitudes and behaviour, research continued after LaPiere, and then after Wicker, refusing to accept the evidence available at that moment on inconsistency. Social psychologists were determined to find a concept that allowed them to predict social behaviour, and that of attitude seemed to suit their needs. In forcing the concept to explain the phenomenon, multitudes of definitions were given, and the concept was threatened with such vagueness that some suggested its re-definition (DeFleur & Westie, 1975).

This vagueness, and the profusion of definitions that McGuire (1986) refers to as an “impenetrable jargon to outsiders”, still persists. The lack of a cumulative tradition is one of the most notorious problems in the study of attitudes and deserves to be confronted in future research (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Most of the work on consistency can be traced to the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, when the cognitive revolution took place. This period, which McGuire calls *the attitude-change era*, was prolific in theoretical explanations and research work on attitudes. To a large extent, such explanations were micro-theories attempting to explain the relationship between attitudes and behaviour from very specific perspectives. Thus, their predictive power was very poor. With reference to the impression management theory, for instance, Ajzen (1988) pointed out that this theory has not provided a consistent framework to understand the consistency phenomenon. This is the case for every theory of attitudinal consistency. They have been able to demonstrate specific relations and to find significant variables that explain one aspect of consistency. However, they have also consistently failed to consider the social conditions under which this relation occurs.

A common deficiency of conventional studies on attitudes is that they avoid the issue of affect as emotion. This is specially important because affect seems to have an important impact on the relationship between attitudes and behaviour and this is especially relevant in the case of health behaviours (Zanna & Rempel, 1988), especially in the case of eating. Some explanation needs to be given for the fact that many times the feeling is not necessarily congruent with the information, when for instance nutritional information conflicts with taste or when the reluctance towards an unhealthy meal surrenders to the affect professed towards the one who cooks it. It is possible, as

suggested by Markus and Zajonc (1988), that we make a decision based on the affective properties of the referent and then we use cognitive information to justify that decision.

The importance of affect (symbolic aspect) was repeatedly mentioned by Abelson (1982), and constitutes an important element in the consideration of the ambivalence of attitudes. This ambivalence, which may arise when the sources of information are inconsistent, affects not only the stability of the attitude but also its power to orient a given behaviour. Zanna & Rempel (1988) suggested that an important task for future research might be to investigate what happens when various sources of information combine and interact. As stated by Salancik (1982) it is possible to hold more than one attitude to the referent and then to act in an apparently inconsistent way. This is related to the importance of the context, something that has not been the object of detailed research in classic research on attitudes. Fortunately, some research traditions are beginning to consider the plasticity of attitudes as for instance the rhetorical approach, which I review briefly later in this chapter.

### **2.2.1 Deficiencies in the Model of Reasoned Action**

As with the rest of the theoretical formulations on attitudes, the theory of reasoned action has not escaped a significant number of criticisms at both the theoretical and methodological levels. However, due to its predictive validity and to its applications in diverse fields, the theory has continued to produce a rich number of empirical studies.

The first relevant criticism refers to the rationalistic view of the individual in the sense of the perfect cogniser. In the theory of reasoned action, the subject is closer to the *Homo economicus* than to the conflictive social individual. This theory, for instance, does not consider motivational and emotional components in decision making, considering it a harmonious and logic information processing phenomenon. The view behind such a formulation is that of a mechanistic individual who uses a probabilistic perspective in action taking.

Although we must not neglect the possibility that, in some circumstances, we do consider the information available and assess the implications for our actions, it is also true that such mechanical information processing would correspond to just one aspect of social behaviour. If we take the ideas of Abelson previously set out, the theory of

reasoned action would apply in the case of individuation but would not be useful to understand the phenomena of symbolic attitudes.

Another problematic aspect of this theoretical approach is that it makes an artificial distinction between the attitudes towards the behaviour, as a product of behavioural beliefs, and subjective norms, a result of normative beliefs. If we were to consider this as a fact, it would suppose that individuals had the potential to split subjective norms from their beliefs. If a strong association exists between subjective norms and the attitude towards the behaviour, a problem of multicollinearity might arise and then it would risk the utility of the regression model.

A third frequent criticism of the theory of reasoned action is that it does not consider the role of past behaviours, which seems to reduce the predictive power of the model. Theorists of reasoned action do not consider that the addition of past behaviours in the model increases its predictive power since past behaviours do not affect directly either the behaviour or the behavioural intention. For them it is in the attitude itself that we find the effect of past behaviour and thus, there is not need to include any more variables in the model. However, we already know that habits have an important effect in health-related behaviours and some authors have been able to show that past experiences may have a direct effect on behaviour and behavioural intention (Sutton, 1994).

A final criticism I want to mention has to do with the methodological trick of using multiple behaviour measures in order to increase the measure of association between attitudes and behaviour. As Eagly & Chaiken pointed out “much of the variation in attitude-behaviour correlations can be understood in terms of elementary psychometric principles” (1993, p. 158). The use of a composite index enlarges the predictability of an attitude when the behavioural measure aggregates across specific behaviours. Thus, consistency would not be a fact but an artefact related to a methodological procedure.

### *2.3 Other Approaches to the Study of Attitudes*

Attitudes have also been considered from other points of view, which take into account the social context in which they are generated. These perspectives depart from the mainstream tradition of attitudinal research. The rhetorical approach is one of these.

perspectives (Billig, 1991; Billig, 1993). For Billig attitudes are “stances taken in matters of public controversy” (1991, p. 143). He acknowledged the broad context where attitudes are formulated, and distinguished their shared and non-shared aspects. Thus, attitudes are more than an evaluative response to an object. According to this approach, they are mainly arguments containing not only the capacity to express a particular position but also offering the possibility of negating counter-arguments.

As the Rhetorical Approach does not assume consistency in argumentation, these counter-arguments may be expressed as arguments if the rhetorical context changes. Argumentation, therefore, involves both sides, one of which remains implicit. The possibility of making counter-arguments explicit takes place through a process that Billig called “taking the side of the other”. This process occurs when changes in the social context where attitudes are expressed take place. Billig has called these implicit aspects the unstructured part of the attitudinal structure. As Billig stated, “Consistency itself may be a rhetorical strategy, and part of the argumentative context rather than a social psychological property of beliefs” (1991, p.147).

New insights from these ideas can be summarised into three major points:

1. Take into consideration the social contexts where attitudes are produced and expressed.
2. By contemplating the implicit and explicit argumentative aspects of attitudes, the rhetorical approach reveals the possibility of an internal inconsistency of the attitudinal structure;
3. Attitudes are dynamic constructs and in this sense they are essentially historical.

It is possible to cut the matter short by saying that the problem of consistency between attitudes and actions can be seen as either a methodological problem (e.g. Fishbein and Ajzen), or a theoretical problem (e.g. rhetoric). In the latter we might include the work of Gergen (1994) and his view of the self as a narration. According to his social constructionism point of view, attitudes as well as other inner mental states such as schemas, attention and memory do not exist. The self is a narrative construction and the knowledge we have about ourselves is a social construction via interaction.

Gergen developed a strong critique of cognitive psychology. The cognitive revolution, according to him, is the wrong revolution where many social psychologists got off.



This critique extended to the relationship between thought and actions. For him there was no clear account of how a system of abstractions (cognitions) generates concrete actions. The cognitive orientation could explain not only the origin of its structures but also the means through which cognition affects actions. In his call to change from an individual to a social epistemology, Gergen proposed a shift from mind to language, in which social phenomena would turn, then, into a matter of relationships.

Even though these ideas offer new possibilities, much more elaboration is needed to explain social actions without referring to mental categories. It is evident that attitudinal theories have not been able to produce a general framework to show the multiple and complex ways by which overt behaviour follows and changes the dictates of attitudes. But it is also certain that great developments have enriched the research on attitudes in the last three decades. The framework has been broadened and attempts to include issues such as affect are on their way (Lavine, Thomsen, Zanna, & Borgida, 1998). Markus & Zajonc (1985) have criticised the idea of the individual as an information processing machine and called for a more complex approach to the interplay between cognitive and social factors. This is without any doubt a starting point in understanding social behaviour. For this understanding I turned to the Theory of Social Representations, which I review in the next section of this chapter.

#### *2.4 The General Theory and the Concept of Social Representations*

The Theory of Social Representations initiated by Moscovici in 1961 with his study on the diffusion of psychoanalysis in France (Moscovici, 1961/1976) is one of the most fruitful current research trends in social psychology. It is mainly a European tradition of research, sociological in nature as opposed to the tradition of a psychological social psychology. The large number of social psychologists attracted by the study of social representations is part of the response to the individualisation of social psychology.

The roots of this theoretical perspective may be traced to Wundt's *Volkerpsychologie*. Wundt understood that social phenomena should not be studied in terms of individual mental processes (Farr, 1983). Social psychological research should be undertaken from conceptual and methodological approaches other than those of experimental psychology. The concept of social representations came from Emile Durkheim's collective representations, but Moscovici preferred to use the term social representations

on account of their dynamics, shared origin and inseparable connection with language and everyday communication.

Durkheim's work was influenced by Wundt's ideas. Durkheim (1912/1995) distinguished between individual and collective representations, the latter being more than the sum of individual representations. The collective representations are universes with their own logic; they exist outside the individual's mind and are the object of study in sociology. Still, the concept of collective representations is static, inasmuch as it refers to institutionalised representations. They exist prior to the individual, who may not participate actively in their elaboration. Social representations, on the contrary, refer to consensual universes: common sense knowledge. They are socially created and communicated, and historically conditioned. In social representations theory the individual is not only an impersonator but also an active actor and reproducer.

The Theory of Social Representations takes into account previous considerations of representation from cognitive psychology. This idea of representation comes from Jean Piaget's genetic psychology. For Piaget (1955), to represent is to reconcile different perspectives about reality. It is the social exchange, through language, which allows us the representational thought, that is a socialised and a socialising thought. As Piaget pointed out, to build up a representation of reality it is necessary to include the phenomena in a network of relations each time further away from immediate perception and to inscribe those phenomena in a new reality created by reason (*ibid.*).

Thus representations are not images of reality, or reflections or static products of it. Social representations allow us to re-structure reality and its study offers a model of social behaviour, which includes symbolic, ideological, and linguistic aspects. This study offers a particular view of the relationship between individuals and society. The idea of a social representation challenges the conception of two opposed universes: that the individual and the social universes are completely different. Society is not something external to the individual. On the contrary, society is important in shaping individuality, which is the product of a historical process that involves interaction.

### 2.4.1 Social Representations as Product and Process

A social representation is a collective creation with the aim of making the unfamiliar, familiar. To study this conversion, Moscovici (1961/1976) described two processes: Anchoring and objectification. In anchoring, the unfamiliar is slotted into already existing categories, fitting within the specific category that best suits the 'new object' characteristics. Then, the new phenomenon is integrated into familiar views of the world.

The purpose of anchoring is classification, through which people dominate the object of representation, which becomes a familiar object to them. The social object is fully incorporated into already existing structures of knowledge which, at the same time, are affected by the new representation. Another important function of anchoring is to name the new object of representations. Indeed, it is by labelling things that they become familiar. We control the object when we can talk about it. Henceforward, the unfamiliar is no longer a threat. By anchoring, representations become codes of interpretation and action. A new meaning is given to the object of representation.

Objectification is the process through which the new object materialises; the conceptual scheme turns into something real (Moscovici, 1961/1976). Here the concept is reproduced in an image and, in the process, linguistic signs are attached to material structures. The abstract is then turned into something concrete through a process of three stages: a) selection, where data regarding a particular object are taken out of their original context in order to be re-organised; b) creation of the figurative scheme, to organise data in a structured way in order to reproduce the concept in an image, and c) naturalisation, where the elements in the figurative scheme become elements of reality.

We have referred to the process of social representations through the dynamics of objectification and anchoring. Before going through their structure as conceived by the central core theory, let us first describe the content of social representations, which is composed of three dimensions: the information, the image or field of representation, and the attitude (symbolic aspect). For Moscovici, attitudes are the most salient of these three, and probably the first one to be formed. This is the content that orients behaviour. Here it refers only to the evaluative (affective) aspect of the content. In other words, it is the symbolic element of a representation. The conception of cognition in social

representations takes into account the emotional components embedded in the construction of social knowledge.

It is highly pertinent that Moscovici viewed the three dimensions of a social representation as not, necessarily, coherent. Thus, the position an individual adopts in a particular matter does not depend, necessarily, upon the amount of data he/she has regarding that matter. He stated in his work on psychoanalysis:

“Psychoanalysis everywhere arouses determined positions (attitudes) and just in part coherent social representations”. And he added: “only after we have taken a position and in function of such position as consequence, it is reasonable to conclude that we become informed and we represent something”. (Moscovici, 1979, p. 49, my translation).

#### **2.4.2 The ideological context**

I argue that the social representation of healthy eating is deeply embedded in ideological systems diffused in media messages. Following the ideas of VanDijk (1988), media messages have a complex ideological structure which plays a major role in the reconstruction of social reality. The messages translate to the public the scientific discourse on nutrition. In the process, they reproduce and attach to that diffusion the interests of power-holders, institutions or elite groups in society. To complicate the phenomenon even further, ideologies in contemporary societies are far from being homogeneous. The possibility of dissenting and forming coexistent heterogeneous ideological representations under the umbrella of supra-ideological systems, e.g. individualism, is a feature of the ideological functioning. That it is why the notion of ideology in this work should be made explicit. Ideology will be a recurrent theme in the analysis of healthy eating.

We can refer to the relationship between ideology and social representations in three senses (Jodelet, 1991). The first is the view of representations as a process outside of or beyond ideology. The second is the representation as independent from ideology; i.e. they are two different phenomena. And the third is social representations as processes occurring within an ideological framework. This last view is an Althusserian approach to ideology. For Althusser, ideology is a system of representations with a given existence and a given historical role (Althusser, 1971). It is the way in which individuals relate to their social conditions, and not a misrepresentation of reality. Its

cognitive function is precisely to ensure the construction of a social reality within which individuals act according to its orientations. According to Jodelet (1991), experimental work on social representations shows the activation of ideological elements in the structuring and creating of a representation. She referred, here, to the work of the structural perspective of social representations.

Previously Moscovici (1972) has mentioned the phenomena of ideology and communication as the central object of study in social psychology. He has defined ideology as a system of representations and attitudes; he has considered ideology and representations as related, but independent, phenomena. Yet, he has not developed a clear conceptualisation of ideology and its relationships to social representations. The notion of ideology is as central to a sociological social psychology as attitudes are for experimental social psychology.

Ignacio Martín-Baró was a Salvadorian social psychologist murdered during the civil war. He became a martyr for Latin American social psychologists and prompted us in our role as social psychologists of the “sub-continent”: to unmask a common sense which perpetuates the oppression of our people (Martín-Baró, 1985). Martín-Baró was not a theorist and therefore he did not offer a model to understand ideological processes and did not give us explanations for social phenomena. His empirical investigations had to do with the institutionalisation of the internal conflict and with its causes. He stated in relation to ideology:

“Ideology is constituted by those psychological processes that determine the concrete manners of how individuals live (think, feel, act), whose adequate explanation cannot be found in the individual but in the reality of the group and in the ways the individual inserts himself in the social groups, in a given historical situation”. (Martín-Baró, 1985, p. 10, my translation).

Ideology can be understood as a set of representations borne by a social group. Its general functions are the construction of the social world, trying to show it as something homogeneous, and the orientation of social behaviour. It is not a misperception or false consciousness in the Marxist sense. However, ideology may turn into a relation of domination (asymmetrical relations of power) when particular agents hold the power and prevent others from sharing it. Then, ideology can be manipulated by power-holders or by their spokesmen. This position, closer to the Marxist conception, implies that ideology may mask class relations and express the interest of particular groups,

who through a number of processes such as naturalisation present ideologies as something given. However, as stated by Lipiansky (1991), the adhesion to a particular ideology cannot be explained only in terms of imposition. We might also think of this adhesion in terms of a consenting accretion of ways of thinking that make sense of the world and are part of social practices in everyday life.

The clarification of the notion of ideology in its relation to social representations is an expressed need (Scarborough, 1990). Certainly, there are many similarities between the two concepts. Both are system of beliefs, structured discourses with cognitive, axiologic and conative functions, differing in their level of analysis, i.e., ideology as a system of representations, and in their extension. Ideologies are abstract systems of beliefs; they integrate diverse social representations, and organise the symbolic field of the social life (Lipiansky, 1991).

Social representations are elaborated from the data people take in, along with reference to a system of values and social practices. Therefore, these data may pass through an ideological re-organisation. Other agents, who transform that data, make it easier to understand for lay people and ensure it is compatible with institutional codes. However, there is always the possibility of dissenting. In general, ideology has a regulatory function over representations and actions. This regulation is effected through a number of institutional agencies and mechanisms, including the media. Billig has referred to the paradox of ideology in the following terms: "The ordinary person is simultaneously a thinking and an unthinking being, the agent of thinking and a passive recipient of thoughts" (1991, p.5).

Social representations are no mere passive coding of reality. They are active constructions expressed in discourse and in behaviour. Differently to ideology, social representations are involved in the process of constructing particular objects. Their meaning comes from their relationship to previous representations, to a conceptual system and to ideology. Although much more elaboration is needed to understand the intimate relationship between ideology and social representations, the outline above helps to provide a basic understanding of this relationship. This understanding has implications for the study of consistency between representations and practices in contemporary societies in relation to the wider ideological frameworks in which the issue of food is embedded.

### 2.4.3 Social Representations and Communication

The analysis of communicative processes is particularly relevant in the study of social representations. Mass media analysis, for instance, was used in the origin of the theory with Moscovici's study on the dissemination of psychoanalytic ideas in the France of the 1950s. In his work *La psychanalyse, son image et son public*, Moscovici (1961/1976) distinguished three different forms of communicating psychoanalytic ideas in three different segments of French society: diffusion, propagation and propaganda. Each type of communication would correspond to a particular aspect of the social representation: Moscovici linked diffusion to opinions, propagation to attitudes and propaganda to stereotypes. Diffusion was the characteristic form of communication in the liberal-professional milieu. The objective of this form of communication was to inform and to attract the interest of the audience in relation to psychoanalysis. The relation between communication and action was not explicit though possible in this type of communication.

Propagation was characteristic of the catholic milieu. The communication was intended to accord the new object (psychoanalysis) with the values of this particular group by granting some concessions. The problematic was anchored within pre-existent categories and new interpretative frameworks were offered for actual or possible actions. Contradictions are mitigated and the group's identity is preserved. Finally, propaganda was characteristic of the communist milieu. Through the polarisation of positioning, the problematic (psychoanalysis) was opposed to the values of the group (communists). In this type of communication conflict is made explicit; the communication is aimed at having an explicit instrumental effect. Because these forms of communication are not rigid, they evolved according to context changes. In the second edition of *La Psychanalyse, son image et son public* Moscovici (1976) reported a change from propaganda to propagation in the communist press, responding to social historical changes.

The analysis conducted by Moscovici is especially relevant in evincing the diverse stages in the development of social representations. A social representation can be in different stages of development in the different groups that compose a society. Because the social representation of healthy eating seems to be particularly associated with urban

educated groups, a more structured representation could be expected in this group compared to rural or less educated groups. In other words, there would be not only an attitudinal component created but also a firmer field of representation and a broader erudition (information). A wider lexicon, the ability to reconcile apparent contradictions in the object of representation and the possibility of questioning social conventions in relation to that object, are all aspects that distinguish the relationship of the group with the object to be represented. These relationships will be explored in the empirical part.

## 2.5 *Summary*

Attitudinal theories have dominated research in social psychology for almost a century. This supremacy has extended to applied areas such as health-related behaviours. Lying behind the attitudinal models is the idea that individuals are primarily rational and that changes in attitude will motivate changes in behaviour. The theory of reasoned action is offered as a classic example of this perspective. The cognitive revolution made a significant contribution to the study of attitudes but conventional versions of social cognition continued to conceive the idea of an isolated individual and to offer models distinguished by unconnected variables. These models of health-behaviours are clearly insufficient for health promotion and disease prevention, activities that are mainly community-oriented.

Multi-causal models of health behaviour that consider the interaction between the individual and his/her environment and acknowledge the importance of sociocultural factors introduce a more holistic approach (cf. Hancock, 1993). However these models seem rather 'cocktail theories' and they do not offer a clear epistemological and theoretical framework as their aim is basically practical. In searching for answers to a theoretical question and to a practical problem, that is the social construction of knowledge in an applied field such as public nutrition, the search turns in the direction of the theory of social representations. Emphasising the communicative aspects of social life, this theory deals with the interaction between the group and a novel or problematic object as a source of common sense knowledge, social representations. The concept of representation is essential to articulate different levels of explanation of human activity. In the following chapter, the proposal of working within the framework of social representations focuses on the structural approach. It is argued that social



knowledge needs to be understood in terms not only of its contents but also of the structures that embody the relationship between its components.

### 3 THE CENTRAL CORE OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

#### 3.1 *The Structural Perspective*

The central core theory of social representations was initially developed by Abric (1976) in his doctoral thesis *Jeux, conflits et représentations sociales* in 1976. This theoretical contribution, which has particularly flourished in the south of France (Aix-en-Provence) with the work of the *Midi Group*<sup>5</sup>, has been especially concerned with the relationship between representations and social practices. It has been considered a less social approach to social representations, but the only one attempting to use a systematic method to research their internal organisation.

Abric used experimental methods to study the role of social representations in a situation of interaction, hypothesising that the individual's behaviour is determined by his/her representation. Using the *prisoners' dilemma*, Abric studied the relationship between the representation of the opponent and behaviour (cooperative-competitive), under the general hypothesis that: "It is not the actual behaviour of the opponent but the representation of the opponent which determines the choices of individuals in a situation of interaction" (1984, p.171).

Abric's was to approach the study of social representations experimentally in order to give them a scientific confirmation (cf. Abric, 1987). This affirmation conveys a paradigmatic separation with the general theory of social representations that accounts for the ruptures between the two models. The similarities and differences between the general theory and the structural perspective provide, in my view, fertile ground for discussion and for the development of new possibilities in social psychology. Although Abric disagreed with a narrow approach to social representations, the structural view is functionally equivalent to the mainstream social cognition theories that have dominated the North American scene. Yet, there are ruptures between these theories and the structural view as, for instance, when it stresses the ideas of phenomenology and the importance of the subjective experience.

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<sup>5</sup> Midi refers to the mediterranean region of southern France (see Sá, 1996).

### 3.1.1 The Concept of Social Representations From the Structural Perspective

Abric defined representations as “The product and the process of a mental activity through which an individual or a group rebuilds the reality he confronts and attributes a specific meaning to it” (1987, p. 64). Flament defined a social representation as “An organised ensemble of cognitions” (1994a, p.37, my translation). Another definition by Abric and Tafani presented social representations as “A socio-cognitive structure regulated by a double system composed of two distinct but complementary entities: the central system and the peripheral system” (1995, p.22, my translation).

The common patterns in these definitions are a) the structural organisation of the elements in a social representation; and b) the existence of relations among these elements. The methodologies used in the investigation of the structure aim to discover those elements and their relationships. However, the conceptualisation cited above emphasises strongly the cognitive component of social representations. This emphasis seems to relegate the social component to a secondary role, and by so doing, underestimates the interactive foundations of social beliefs.

Aware of this debatable description, Abric (1994a) agreed that representations are not exclusively cognitive systems. Social representations are systems with cognitive and social components; they follow the rules of cognitive processes but are affected by social determinants at the same time. Thus, according to Abric, social representations are under a double logic: the logic of the cognitive and the logic of the social. A social representation integrates simultaneously the rational and irrational aspects of social life. This may explain why a social representation can tolerate and integrate contradictions and incoherence, which do not affect its organised and structured character.

On account of the contextual essence of social representations, Abric (1994a) described the dual presentation of this context. It is a discursive context, because it is one of interaction and communication. It is also a social context in relation to the various ideological manifestations. Having taken into consideration the cognitive and social components, Abric (1994a) described four essential functions of social representations:

1. The function of knowledge: Social representations make sense of social life. This is the most widely investigated function of social representations. As common sense

knowledge, they assimilate novel experiences and practices within cognitive structures and allow talking about them.

2. The function of identity: Social representations are strongly related to group identity and to the preservation of the specificity of particular groups in society.
3. The function of orientation: Social representations orient behaviours and social practices. This orientation is the product of three essential factors: a) Definition of goals, to specify the relation of the individual with the object of representation. b) Anticipation of expectations, because they precede interactions and modulate them according to the representation of the situation. c) Prescriptions of practices, since they define legitimate practices according to social norms.
4. The function of justification: Social representations allow the individual or group to justify behaviours and practices when these violate normal expectations.

Central core theorists became interested in two apparently contradictory characteristics of social representations: That they are rigid and flexible, consensual and yet marked by inter-individual differences at the same time (Abric, 1993). The apparent contradictions oriented a theoretical formulation to apprehend individual experiences and knowledge in relation to collective processes. The question the structural approach has tried to elucidate is how social representations are organised, what factors determine this organisation and its eventual transformation. Answers to these questions not only deal with the structure itself but also with the apparent contradictions referred to above (i.e. its consensual character and its individual variation). To explain this absurdity, central core theory makes up two components of the representational structure.

Social representations are organised around a core that determines its meaning and structure, i.e. the central system. This core has a twofold function: creation and organisation. Through creating, the central system gives meaning to every element of the representation. By organising, it determines the links between the elements. The central system can only be understood in terms of its complement, the peripheral system, which is the interface between representation and reality. The periphery has two essential functions: a) it gives the individual modulation to a representation, and b) it intervenes in the defence and transformation of social representations.

### 3.1.2 The Central System of Social Representations

The basic assumption of the structural approach is that every representation is organised around a central core (Abric, 1994a). This component gives meaning to other elements in the representation, i.e. generating function, and determines the ties among those elements, i.e. organising function. The central core is the starting gate to release the constituents and their relationships in the representational structure. The central system is the consensual component of a representation. Because of the historical, normative and ideological origins, the core is stable and apparently unable to bear contradictions. It gives meaning to the whole representational field and responds for the permanence of representations over time, as it is resistant to change. Any modification of the central elements of a representation entails a complete transformation of that representation.

According to Abric (1994a), the idea of centrality is not new. Heider (1958) referred to unitary cores to explain attributional phenomena. Like the work of Asch (1946) in relation to the hierarchical character of the elements involved in the perception of personality traits, these theoretical views helped in the formulation of a structural approach to social cognitive life. In the specific framework of the theory of social representations, the notion of centrality comes from the idea of a figurative core. According to Abric the elements of a representation are categorised and interpreted in through this figurative core.

The central system is composed of three dimensions: Normative, functional and mixed (Abric & Tafani, 1995). The normative dimension is the structural reference to evaluate the object of representation. It is linked to the collective history and the value system of a social group. In the normative aspect, symbolic –affective- and ideological components intervene to evaluate a given situation. The functional dimension defines legitimate practices and orients actions, which in turn have an operational role within the representation. The mixed dimension combines normative and functional aspects, participating in judgement production, and in practice orientation.

Representations are made up of information, opinions, beliefs and attitudes. All these elements are interdependent and organised in a hierarchical order. The hierarchical order is thought to be associated with the differential weight each element has in the structure (Abric & Tafani, 1995). Weights determine the principal or adjacent character

of core elements, which at the time are determined by the relationship a particular group has with the representation. In other words, weights are a function of the context. The particular characteristics of the context determine the activation of elements within the representation and its relative importance.

As the core is the most stable component in the representation, and it is determined by historical, social and ideological conditions, it does not change even if the data that enters into the representation's structure contradicts previous knowledge. Its truthfulness cannot be questioned. Abric (1993) affirmed that the central core is coherent, historically marked and resists change.

To understand the structure of a representation it is also necessary to consider its second dimension, which refers to the existence of peripheral elements, i.e. the peripheral system. These elements are responsible for updating the normative prescriptions of the core. This is the functional part of the whole structure, which allows the individuals to take positions in consideration of the particular characteristics of the context. Its differentiated character lies in its inessential role in the existence of the representation.

The periphery is flexible and able to bear contradictions. By doing so, it does not only permit the adaptation of the action to the concrete reality but also protects the core from being disturbed. The periphery of the representation is highly sensitive to the immediate context. All the information the context provides is recreated and interpreted by this dimension. The periphery is also important for the integration of the individual experiences to the representation. As Abric noted, "If social representations are consensual by their central system, they can tolerate strong inter-individual differences in the peripheral system" (1993, p. 17).

Moliner (1995a), proposed a two-dimensional model of social representations based on the distinction between descriptive and evaluative aspects of the structure of social representations. One dimension was to be comprised of the already known relationship between the core and the periphery. The other implies a continuum between descriptive (functional) and evaluative (normative) functions. Descriptive functions involve the orientation of actions (action-oriented). In other words, they are those aspects of the representation that would act as general guidelines for behaviour. On the other hand, the

evaluative aspects of the representations correspond to the normative function (evaluation-judgement oriented).

Moliner considered both aspects to be present in the entire dual core/periphery dimension. This position differed from that of Abric, who considered that this distinction applied only in the case of the central core instead of pertaining to the entire representation. However, if one considers the distinction made by Moliner, the difference between components is their relationship with the core or peripheral dimensions of the representation. Therefore, descriptive central elements would correspond to the definitions, i.e. What defines this object? while evaluative central elements would deal with the evaluative criteria or norms, i.e. How I evaluate this object? In the case of the peripheral elements, the descriptive aspect refers to the graphic, descriptive characteristics of the object, whereas in the evaluative aspect would apply to the expectations, i.e. How I would want the object to be like? This hypothesis, although it requires further testing, provides additional tools to understand the functioning of a social representation.

A major characteristic of central core is its salience. Due to the ponderous character of core elements, they are the most frequent in discursive productions. Salience was considered the main aspect in defining the centrality of an element in the representational field. However, the symbolic property has also been advocated. For this reason, before the object of the representation, subjects evoke those elements that are meaning generators in order to be able to define it and to evaluate it.

Abric (1989) demonstrated the effect of the central core on memory. He carried out an experiment to study the central core of the representations of the artisans. After defining the central core of this representation through word association, the experimental situation was divided into four groups. The memorising task consisted of a recall list of 30 words the subjects were asked to remember, 5 of which were representations of the central core. There were two measures of recall: immediate memory (after listening to the list of words); and delayed memory (one hour after). Half of the subjects were presented with the five elements of the central core, the other half was not (First experimental situation, two groups). Within these two groups, two additional groups were obtained: those to whom the representations were invoked (they

would hear a list of words related to artisans), and those to whom the representation was not invoked (they would hear a list of words).

From this experiment, Abric confirmed that the elements of the central core were better recalled than peripheral elements, especially in delayed recall. Abric also found that when the five central elements were absent from the list, subjects tried to reintroduce them in memory evocation, which proved the significance of central core elements for the organisation and meaning of the representations (cf. Fazio 1986, who developed models to investigate memory accessibility in the relation attitudes/behaviour).

The idea of a core/periphery organisation of a belief is not unique to social representations. A stream of research using a similar distinction was identified by McGuire (1986) who called it the basal-peripheral analysis. Here we have a stable basal component and an easily changed periphery, sensible to ordinary social influence procedures. Cialdini et al. (1976) for instance, showed in their experiments that the elastic shifts that occur in opinions are strategies people use to maximise situational outcomes. In their own words:

“It is our feeling that the great majority of everyday interaction on one issue or another involves the strategic shifting about of one’s position rather than genuine changes in attitudes” (p.671).

The central core organisation of a social representation is not an idea unique to the researchers of the Midi Group. According to Guimelli (1993) a similar principle of organisation has been described by different authors, in social representations research, who have used terms like “position-generating principles”(Doise); “hard core”(Mugny & Carugaty); “organising nucleus”(Grizé, Vèrges & Silem); “common core” (Emiliani & Molinari); and “representative nodal”(Jodelet).

### **3.1.3 The Peripheral System of Social Representations**

Like central elements, peripheral contents are hierarchically ordered by reason of some elements being closer than others to the central core. They have three main functions, according to Abric (1994a):



1. A function of concretion: It allows the representation to be put into concrete terms, ready to face the reality the representation is dealing with.
2. A function of regulation adapts the representation to changes in the immediate context.
3. A function of defence protects the representation by different mechanisms: changing the weight of the elements, making conditional integration of contradictory information and giving new interpretations.

Although the role of the core has been intensively explored in research on the structure of social representations, peripheral elements had received relatively little attention prior to the work of Flament (Sá, 1996). However, they are as important as the core itself, inasmuch as they are the point of contact between the core and reality. This assumption makes these elements highly dynamic and essentially evolving. They are the operators of social representations.

Flament defined peripheral elements as schemata, in a sense similar to the scripts described by Schank and Abelson (1977): A sequence of acts within a situation. These scripts (scenarios) are mainly functional, because they allow us to behave in a particular way in a specific situation (Flament, 1989). Flament noted that they are organised by the central core, conforming to a principle of organisation that does not have an equivalent in script theories. Yet like scripts, the schemata assure the instant function of the representation.

According to Flament, the peripheral elements prescribe behaviours, they guide actions without making reference to central elements, and having taken into consideration the particular characteristics of the context where such actions are taking place. They also permit the individual's modulation of the representation through integration of the individual's own history and experiences. Resulting from their defensive function, they protect the central core, via the transformation of normal schemata into strange schemata.

Sometimes peripheral elements indicate very specifically the action to undertake, permitting the representation to function economically without involving the central core. Flament called these schemata normal schemata. In situations where normal schemata do not work, disagreements go directly to the central core, and under an

irreversible situation, the representation suffers an immediate breakdown, which is the extreme case. When practices oppose representations in an explicit manner, then those elements called strange schemata appear, making possible the sudden transformation of the representational structure.

Flament (1989) pointed out that periphery is like a car's bumper in the sense that it protects essential parts of the car in case of need but it can be dented. Normal schemata can also turn into strange schemata upon encountering rare elements, e.g. novel practices. Strange schemata are defined by four components: the call of the normal, the designation of the strange element, the affirmation of the contradiction between them, and the rationalisation of the situation as a defensive mechanism to hold the contradiction temporarily. In most circumstances, disagreements are absorbed by the periphery, ensuring in this way the temporary stability of the representation. In protecting temporarily the central core, e.g. by rationalisation, peripheral schemata suffer alterations. If the situation continues, the periphery cannot maintain this situation due to the proliferation of strange schemata, and the central core may be affected and undergo a structural transformation.

To consider the role of the peripheral elements, it is necessary to refer to two notions: contingency and reversibility (Abric, 1993; Flament, 1989). According to the notion of contingency, the central core is composed of absolute prescriptions, while periphery is made up of conditional prescriptions. The first distinction to consider is the difference between the nature of the cognitions. Some cognitions are only descriptive or only prescriptive, but in the domain of social representations both are present. This situation might be distinguished in the discursive level but not at the cognitive level.

The relation of contingency as proposed by Flament may certainly contribute with some conceptual tools to the study of the relationship between representations and practices. According to Flament's principle of contingency, in social representations prescriptions are prominently conditional. This however does not exclude the existence of absolute prescriptions (Flament, 1994a). In discourse only absolute prescriptions are referred, although at the cognitive and behavioural level, both types of prescriptions are present.

As Sá (1996) pointed out, this means that when people express absolute judgements in relation to an object or event, they already have several legitimate alternatives in their

conditional elements. This would explain discursive variations from changes in the context and possible inconsistencies between discourse and practices. Discourse by itself would not disclose the complete range of possibilities people have in relation to a social object.

The other notion refers to the reversibility of the situation: the perception of a situation as reversible or irreversible affects the transformation of social representations. For Guimelli (1994) in order to understand the process of transformation it is necessary to analyse, on one side, the existence or not of contradictions between the novel practices and representation, and on the other, the perception of Reversibility or irreversibility of the situation.

Abric (1993) proposed three possibilities for the transformation of a representation under a situation perceived as irreversible. Firstly, the representation may resist change if the periphery succeeds in managing temporarily the contradictory practices by generating Strange Schemata. Secondly, the transformation may be progressive if practices, although being different, do not entirely contradict the central core. Thirdly, a brutal transformation of representations in which there is an inexorable rupture with the past. Here, the central core is directly affected and the periphery is not able to mobilise schemata to face the challenge.

An additional aspect of the periphery must be mentioned in order to discuss its operation. This is that the core may assign the function of a part of the periphery to a peripheral substructure due to cognitive economy (Flament, 1994b). These substructures group peripheral elements and make an ensemble of contents of the representation accessible to a particular group when practices demand the continuous activation of specific elements of that representation.

Although the actions of the periphery have been more detailed as a result of the research conducted the organisation and the prescriptive role of the periphery is not well understood. A clear definition of the peripheral system is needed and methodological problems for the identification of peripheral element remain as a result of this relative obscurity. These problems will be evinced in chapter 5, which will be dedicated to the methodologies and techniques needed to access the structure. It is pertinent to cite Sá in relation to this lacuna:

“A problem with the definition of social representations by a central and a peripheral system, (...) is that peripheral elements have continued being 'the leftovers' of the research on the central core”  
(1996, p.174, my translation).

### *3.2 A Theoretical Re-Examination of The Distinction Between Core and Periphery in The Study of Social Representations*

The structural perspective arises as a complement to the general theory of social representations. It offers a particular model to understand how the elements in the representational field are organised and how this organisation determines social practices. In this section, I will argue that the structural perspective shows ruptures and articulations with the general theory. The points of convergence and rupture must not be seen as a divorce between the two models but as an opportunity to clarify some notions of the central/core structure and as a rapprochement between social representations and social cognition. In addition, some critical aspects of the structural perspective will be considered.

There are a number of factors which merit serious consideration in relation to the model proposed by the structural perspective. This perspective, in a sense, recapitulates some of the mistakes made in the history of the study of attitudes. Firstly, because the emergence of the structure has not been studied, the developmental component in the dynamics between core and periphery remains static. It would be interesting to know how the core becomes so stable and rigid, supposing it is, and what the processes are of its transformation in relation to historical events. In other words, it is important to consider the longitudinal dimension in the evolution of social representations.

The elaboration of a social object in the public scene is what Bauer and Gaskell (1999) have been investigating in their studies on biotechnology. They advocate the need for longitudinal studies in social representations as part of the methodological implications of their research paradigm. Their paradigm outlined two major components: a) interaction, as the space of communication and b) time. The latter is a frequently overlooked dimension in social representational research.

Longitudinal analysis brings out the need to consider the context. The experimental work restricts the study of social representations because the experimental scene is a particular one. One cannot generalise from the laboratory to the social scene. Abric sought to provide a scientific confirmation for research on social representations through the use of experimentation (cf. Abric, 1987). In doing so, he gave the structural view a positivist base with the methodological implications of quantification and experimentation. I am not against the employment of any particular methodology in social psychological research but in favour of their critical application.

Secondly, the structural approach must be oriented towards the creation of a cumulative tradition. Although the model comprises two elements, core and periphery, the empirical findings of authors are rarely integrated into the general framework of the model. The bi-dimensional model by Moliner (1995), for example, was the result of a specific investigation, whose confirmation or rejection has not been expressed by others. Even in the definition of the representation it is possible to include a wide variety of notions, from the purely cognitive, as in Flament (1994a), to the more socialised, as in Abric (1994a).

Thirdly, currently, in the structural approach, there is a serious mismatch between theory and method in the exploration of the structure. The methodologies are not distinguished from those used in classic attitudinal scaling. This fact should be explicitly recognised due to the important theoretical implications and the possibilities to develop better ways of accessing the structure of a social representation. One of the possible implications of such measurement is that it would deal with the attitudinal component of the social representation and not with the whole structure.

In this section, I examine the structural perspective and propose some key points in re-establishing the social intensity of the structure. The notion of culture is a necessary component in this enterprise. It should be clear that central core theorists do accept the importance of history and of culture in their approach, but, in practice, this acceptance is kept at a distance. Although this research makes a cross-sectional analysis of the structure, the comparative analysis could be seen as a first step for a more comprehensive study of it.

### **3.2.1 A Theory in Search of Identity: Crossing the Psychological and Sociological traditions of Social Psychology**

Previously, I have stated that conventional research on attitudes rests on a psychological, rather than a sociological form of social psychology, emphasising individual processes and experimental and quantitative methodologies (cf. Farr, 1996). The issue of consistency is treated within this tradition as a simple, unidirectional cause-effect process, where attitudes are the triggers of behaviour. Contrary to this view, the theory of social representations assumes a sociological perspective, stressing the conflict between individual and society and the notion that contents and practices are complementary rather than separate entities. According to the theory of social representations, social phenomena do not occur as something outside the individual but within a dynamic process of interaction and communication.

The structural perspective developed by Abric and other authors of the Midi Group combines theoretical elements from both traditions of research: psychological and sociological approaches to social psychology. Although researchers in the Midi Group advocate formal rejoin in the study of social representations, their methods of research locate this perspective within the mainstream of attitude research, thus creating an inconsistency between theory and method in the study of social representations. Researchers within the structural perspective have been tempted to conceive the social individual as an information-processing machine in the framework of the study of what has been called 'cold' cognitive structures. The fact that one can view the work of the structural perspective embedded within the framework of associative learning models and common traditions in traditional social cognition points out a rupture with the theory proposed by Moscovici (1961/1976).

However, this rupture is not complete. The influence of cognitive psychology in the development of the theory of social representations acts as a link between the general framework of social representations and the specific assumptions of the structural perspective. This refers mainly, but not only, to the idea of an internal mental representation, impregnating both formulations with traces of social cognition. I maintain that the theory of social representations has several analytical perspectives, some of which emphasise its constructivist basis more than the others. But even in the

most constructivist approach, the content and process of cognitions are explored provided one assumes a broader notion of cognition.

In this exploration, communication through the medium of language appears as a central element. Language is important in the construction and re-construction of reality as representative thought and language acquisition appear simultaneously. The signifiers are the mediators in the representation of the reality; in other words, language is both source and product of representations. I concur with some ideas from the sociology of knowledge in the sense that reality is a social construction (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1967). But at the same time, I defend the existence of a reality in itself beyond language and the representation of that reality, the discovery of which is the ultimate goal of scientific undertaking. Due to its complexity, this reality is hidden and difficult to grasp. The constructed reality, as commonsensical knowledge, on the other hand, advocates its pretended truth.

In addition to the social cognitive perspective, there are other points of convergence between the general theory of social representations and the structural approach. I am referring to phenomenology, in which inter-subjective experience is the source of knowledge. But it refers also to the consideration of the historical, ideological and economical conditions which intervene in the genesis of a given representation. I will refer to the opportunities created for the development of a new elaboration of the structural perspective. Preserving the heuristic value of a central/peripheral distinction of the structure and the impressive contributions of social cognition theories, I propose a re-development of some basic assumptions of the central core theory, basically with reference to the conflictual character of the structure.

This re-examination is an attempt to bring together all the positive features of this formulation and to inscribe the structural perspective in the realm of conflict and culture. But also, I propose to argue that some common aspects of both psychological and sociological forms of social psychology create a fertile ground for the notion of a social-psychological social psychology. In other words, there are more convergent than divergent points in the contemporary traditions of the psychological and sociological forms of social psychology. Pretending that there is an impassable gap between them is to ignore the developments of the psychological science.

I shall centre the discussion on three general aspects:

- (a) The complete focus of the structural approach on how the cogniser structures the representation. There is a need, here, to broaden the notion of cognition in social psychology.
- (b) Aspects common to both the structural perspective and the theory of reasoned action within a framework of the mainstream study of attitudes.
- (c) The cross-fertilisation of methods used by the structural perspective with elements of conventional psychometrics.

### **3.2.2 The Cognitive Revolution in Social Psychology and the Notion of the Representational Structure**

During my presentation of developments in the history of attitudes (chapter 2), I emphasised the cognitive revolution. I consider that no one can deny the importance of this revolution in social psychology. Its effect has been a conception of social psychology and cognitive social psychology as nearly synonymous (Markus & Zajonc, 1985). Nevertheless, the term cognitive revolution is a generic notion applied to a long and varied traditions of research. Current contributions from social cognition claim the relevance of symbolic factors, the social basis of cognition, the importance of the subjective experience and the key role of communication and interaction.

At this level, the similarities point to the coexistence of psychological and sociological forms of social psychology. The difference might be more at the level of analysis, the first being more oriented in a framework of methodological individualism and the second more concerned with the distinctive character of the social. In fact, there are attempts to integrate some classic notions of social cognition with the theory of social representations (cf. Augoustinos & Innes, 1990). Current forms of social cognition research are not too far away from the theory of social representations.

I can justify the need to exercise the study of cognition in social psychology. The cognitive has become a pejorative term for many of those engaged in a more sociological approach to the discipline. However, it is not cognition per se that constitutes a barrier for a more heuristic view of social psychological problems. It has to do fundamentally with the paradigm from which we understand cognition. My proposal



is to re-think the structure from the realms of conflict, culture, ideology and communication. To assume their significance is not enough. It is necessary to reflect on how these dimensions influence the genesis, dynamics and change of the representational field and at the same time, to reflect on how the study of the structure helps us to explain the phenomena that created it.

In relation to this view of social cognition, the position of the structural perspective can be challenged. According to the notion of representation expressed by some authors from this perspective, the cognitive remains anchored to an information-processing paradigm. The representation is seen as an organised ensemble of cognitions (e.g. Flament, 1994a; Rouquette, 1994)), with no reference to their communicative, interactive and historical aspects. This allows me to place most of the research conducted under the structural approach under a classic paradigm of cognitive psychology, emphasising aspects such as: Experimentation, *cold* information-processing (codification/retrieval), structure in terms of schemata, insufficient consideration of dynamic aspects, and a lack of emphasis on overt behaviour.

The notion of a structure of social representations came from the idea of a structural organisation of attitudes and schemata. The study of attitudes as organised structures has been present in the contemporary history of attitudes but especially in the past twenty years in what McGuire called the attitude structure era (McGuire, 1986, see chapter 2). The notion of schema arises as a connection between the structural view and classic social cognition. The notion of structure in social cognition came from Gestalt psychology, a common root for both perspectives.

From the structural approach, social representations can be considered as groups of schemata. The concept of schema has been fundamental in studies about cognition, as in the work of Piaget and his followers. The idea of a structural organisation was definitive for the formulation of theories of schema in such a way that is difficult to separate the conception of a structure and the notion of schema. The structural view of social cognition has been conceived in terms of schemas (e.g. Neisser, 1976), scripts (e.g. Schank & Abelson, 1977), frames (e.g. Minsky, 1975), theories (e.g. Epstein, 1973), categories (e.g. Rosch, 1973), and prototypes (e.g. Cantor & Mischel, 1977).

According to the formulations of cognitive psychology, schemata influence the entire processing of information (Markus & Zajonc, 1985). From encoding and organisation, through inferences, and finally retrieval, schemata would have a decisive role in influencing overt behaviour. Several characteristics of schemata serve to parallel the formulations of the structural perspective. The similarities can be identified as follows:

a) The idea that knowledge of the structure (its elements and their organisation) allows us to understand social behaviour. A description of such structure would be a prerequisite to explaining social behaviour. b) The key role of individual memory processes. Those elements which played a key role in the creation and organisation of the structure will have differential access to a more complete encoding, retrieval and recognition. c) The impossibility, for the individual, to have conscious or complete access to the entire range of contents of a given structure. d) The recognition of schema-inconsistency phenomena. e) The differentiated nature of schemata in terms of stability-mobility and generality-particularity. f) The view of the structure in static terms and the preservation of the notion of a 'cold cognitive paradigm'.

In the structural approach, social representations are schema in at least three aspects: 1. Central core elements are schema in general terms, in a conception very close to the notion of authors like Anderson and Bower (1973)<sup>6</sup>. 2. Peripheral elements are schema in a more specific manner. They are conceived of as scripts organised around a central core<sup>7</sup>. The particular feature of scripts is the organisation of actions in a sequence. 3. The inconsistencies are also schematised, i.e. Strange Schemata, which gives contradictions a structure of their own. These schemata play a fundamental role in the transformation of a social representation.

### 3.2.3 The Structural Perspective and the Theory of Reasoned Action

In the general tradition of associative learning models, the attitudinal structure is conceived of as propositional networks (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). From this standpoint, propositions are linked to generate concepts, which at the same time link to each other

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<sup>6</sup> For Anderson, schema are groups of tied propositions that form cognitive units treated on an all-or-none basis.

<sup>7</sup> Let us remember that this script comes directly from the notion developed by Schank and Abelson (1977)

in a network form. The idea came from cognitive psychology, particularly from studies on memory. The frequency of activation of a given concept or node increases their accessibility in memory and makes the concept more readily available. The more activated is the concept, the more strengthened is the association and therefore, the consistency between attitudes and behaviour is more likely. In the specific field of attitudinal research, the theory of reasoned action represents a version of such network-like models. This theory emphasises the propositional nature of belief by conceiving it as an association between the attitude object and its characteristics and attributes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). It follows that the attitude toward an object is determined by beliefs about that object.

However, not every belief determines the attitude. Only salient beliefs determine the person's attitude. The salient effect corresponds to the constant activation of specific associations in particular situations. The authors of the model stated that:

“In order to understand why a person holds a certain attitude toward an object it is necessary to assess his salient beliefs about that object” (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, p. 63). And they added: “Since salient beliefs are upper-most in the individual's mind, we can assume that the first five to nine beliefs he emits are his salient beliefs about that object” (ibid. p. 64).

Regarding the structural perspective, its notion of representation is subsumed under a classic version of network-like models marking a point of convergence between the structural approach and the theory of reasoned action and other attitudinal models (e.g. Fazio's processual model, Fazio, 1986). This would make the structure of social representations functionally equivalent to attitudinal models and would portray the representation as associations between objects stored in memory. The idea that the structural approach follows an associative network model came from two sources of evidence: a) the definition of representation, and b) its methodological procedures. In definitional terms, the representation is devised as a structured grouping of cognitive elements (Flament, 1994a; Rouquette, 1994).

Methodologically, the use of procedures such as Basal Cognitive Schemes (BCS, *schemes cognitifs de base*) exemplifies the application of an associative network model in the research on social representations (the reader may find a complete description of this procedure in chapter 5). The idea behind this method is that a representation is organised according to cognitive schemata, which are basically lexical structures. In a

similar way to a network form, the procedure identifies elements called *cognemas* and the relationship between them via operators called *connectors*, which are formal expressions.

Briefly explained, the association is expressed in terms of proportions (rates) that the authors called *valences* and the centrality expressed in terms of the strength of the association. The valence is the measurement of the degree of activation of a particular schema. A schema in the BCS approach is a stable, primitive group of operators, e.g. association or attribution. The application of the analysis of similitude is another testimony of the reproduction of network models in social representations. The relation of similitude is a symmetrical non-transitive relationship, which manifests the association between cognemas. This association is expressed by an index of distance conceived of as co-occurrences. A social representation is thus conceived of as a group of cognitions linked up by their relationships.

In being framed by associative network models, both the structural approach and reasoned action theory view beliefs as hierarchies of elements whose hierarchical aspect is given by the relative importance of that element in the structure or network. In their own words:

“Associated with a person’s attitude is a set of beliefs about the object of the attitude. In our consideration of learning theory we have suggested that these beliefs form a hierarchy in terms of the strength with which they are held. This hierarchy may be viewed as a person’s belief system with respect to a given object or issue” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p.99).

Since memory processes are an important element in network models, the issue of salience reflects the strength of the association between the more frequently activated elements in a belief. In his study on the social representations of the artisan, Abric (1989) showed the prevalent effect of central core elements in memory evocation and recognition. Because the theory assumes that core elements are activated instantaneously before the object of representation, then these would be the more salient elements and would show the strongest connections. In other words, associative strength is a major characteristic of core elements. The differential activation of cognitive elements responds to the hierarchical order in which beliefs are organised.

In a previous section I showed how this idea of a hierarchical order comes from Gestalt psychology. Asch (1946) established the primary role of central traits in impression formation in terms of salience and the meanings that attach to the remaining elements. The primacy effect described by Asch refers to the greater effect of the first evoked or presented items in a list of personality traits. This notion is related in the structural approach to the differential weight of central core elements in a social representation. The same phenomenon is described by Vinokur and Ajzen (1982) in terms of causal-primacy effect.

In principle I do not see any problems in applying network-like models to the research on shared beliefs. Theoretically and methodologically it is a coherent framework that has provided a consistent background for most of the research conducted in social psychology. However, in the theory of social representations the application of the model is not enough. One reason is that it reduces the representation to semantic associations, missing its symbolic components. The representation would be no more than associative connections.

Vygotsky (1996) established in his experiments that concept formation is a complex process which involves interaction. The *functional moment of mutual understanding*, an expression coined by Dmitri Uznadze and cited by Vygotsky, emphasises the importance of interaction and development of meanings in concept formation. Meanings are, of course, socially created. This view opposes a mechanistic model of the process of abstraction in terms of associations. Vygotsky (1934/1996) stated that:

“The process of concept formation, like any other higher form of intellectual activity, is not a quantitative overgrowth of the lower associative activity, but a qualitatively new type. Unlike the lower forms, which are characterized by the *immediacy of intellectual processes*, *this new activity is mediated by signs*. The structure of signification, which plays a formative role in all higher types of behavior, does not coincide with the associative structure of elementary processes. The quantitative growth of the associative connections would never lead to higher intellectual activity” (p. 109, italics in the original).

According to Vygotsky, associative complexes are just one stage in the several steps leading to concept formation. Here the relationships between elements and the nuclear object, i.e. the stimulus object, are established in terms of similarities or contrasts. In the later stages of development, the individual produces new complexes, e.g. connections, chains and pseudoconcepts, before reaching the formation of concepts as such.

Vygotsky maintained that this is a dynamic and dialectical process which moves toward more mature forms of thinking, drawing, at the same time, previous forms in a passage from the concrete to the abstract and from the abstract to the concrete. One of the most fascinating consequences of Vygotsky's formulations is the insertion of this development in the cultural and historical processes.

### **3.2.4 Psychometrics and the Structural Perspective: Social Representations Research or Attitude Scaling?**

The structural approach follows traditional scaling methods common to many psychometric procedures. In fact, the idea that attitudes could be measured (Thurstone, 1928) characterised the first period in the study of attitudes as an individual phenomenon and was in part responsible for the first decline in the history of their study (cf. McGuire, 1986). As an example, the method of paired comparisons, used in the central core approach to study the connective properties of the elements of a representation, follows classic psychological scaling procedures. The method is based on the law of comparative judgement (Thurstone, 1928). For its explanation, I refer the reader to any textbook of psychophysics or psychometrics.

The method of paired comparisons is one of several proximity techniques used in attitudinal scaling. In this method, also employed within the structural perspective, scores in an attitudinal scale can be converted into distance matrices to draw a map of the attitudinal structure. The mapping is possible if we conceive the structure as associations in a psychological space. The analysis of similitude is another technique frequently employed to study the structure of social representations following the same rationale, as does the use of multivariate techniques. This method is described in chapter 5.

Multidimensional scaling is a multivariate technique of increasing popularity in research on social representations. The structure is depicted as distances between objects or cases, dissimilarity data, where the dissimilarity is the expression of judgements people make about, for instance, a pair of (psychological) objects. The structure is then displayed in a dimensional space as a geometrical picture. The presentation of the structure of a social representation as distances, proximities between elements, in order to form a cohesive organisation of its cognitive components, is an

additional feature of the assimilation of network-like models by the structural approach. The incorporation of these assumptions marks common points not only with the theory of reasoned action but also with structural views of social cognition. As indicated by Markus and Zajonc (1985), all propositional theories of cognition, e.g. schemas, treat the structural dynamics in associative terms.

The question which immediately arises regarding these statistical procedures is to what extent do these maps of data actually reflect the structure of a social representation? I previously pointed out that the association of elements is just one component in the development of a concept. I consider the analysis of interaction and communicative processes to be vital if we really want to depict and to understand the phenomena of representation. By insisting on conversation as the very essence of social representations, we should recognise those functional moments of mutual understanding, to borrow the expression from Uznadze, as a rich opportunity for research.

Before considering the use of scaling procedures to investigate social representations, we should ask ourselves another important question: Are we just studying the attitudinal component of a social representation? I would say no. The fact that scaling procedures have been used extensively in attitudinal research does not mean that they are inherent to attitudinal theory. We have seen that the study of attitudes is such a complex field that it cannot be reduced to one of its methodological procedures, although on some occasions this has been done. But the question is still relevant in the sense that if both constructs use similar techniques, then what is the difference between them?

Moliner and Flament would answer that the structural approach contemplates the symbolic value of the representation, a characteristic that is not present in models of attitude (Moliner & Tafani, 1997). The difference between the concept of attitude and social representations is portrayed by Moliner and Tafani, in terms of the wider scope of the concept of representations, i.e., attitude as a component of a social representation, and in the flexible character of attitudes in opposition to the rigidity of their central cores.

We have seen that this rigidity does not necessarily characterise the concept of attitudes. The difference, in my view, has to do more with the amplitude of one concept over the

other. But this amplitude or wider scope is the result of the genetic process of representing. Attitudes as the primary component of a social representation were termed *la clé de voûte* of a social representation by Moscovici (cf. Abric, 1987). He recognised in attitudes not only the most frequent of the basic dimensions of a representation but also their determinant role in its formation (Moscovici, 1961/1976). Not surprisingly then, an attitude can function as a core element in the structure of a social representation (Abric, 1987). An important difference to acknowledge is the way by which the structure is conceived in attitudinal and in social representations theory. While in the latter the structure corresponds to a collective creation, in attitudinal research attitudes has been devised as an organisation of elements in individual's head.

Central core theorists assume the symbolic value as the *sine qua non* characteristic of a core element. Its presence allows the subject the immediate recognition of the representation and gives it a homogeneous character. As I previously pointed out, this qualitative characteristic is explored within the structural approach as consensual in statistical terms. Accepting that there is a distributional property, the creation of consensus, which is an active process, is not completely understood if we fail to consider the role of meanings and the collective level of analysis. We must turn again to the issue of conversation and interaction in the study of social representations. In the following section, I propose three important aspects to complement and enrich the study of the structure.

### **3.2.5 Re-Considerations**

In defending the need to see social representations from a social cognitive perspective, I emphasise the call for a paradigmatic change in the way cognition has been conceived. This would be, in terms of Condor and Antaki (1997), a move from a mentalist social cognition to a social cognition that underlines the social construction of knowledge. One can make the transition by adopting a sociology of knowledge, e.g. the theory of social representations. Since the structural approach has remained within a mentalist social cognition paradigm, my proposal is to move it towards a social cognition that reflects the social cultural conditions of creation and transformation of thought. That is to say, an inclusion of the sociocultural determinants of the human mind.



The re-considerations I would like to propose turn on three basic issues: a) the social cultural and historical aspects of human cognition; b) a dynamic view on the organisation of elements in a social representation; and c) the importance of periphery.

### **3.2.5.1 The Social Cultural and Historical Aspects of Human Cognition.**

Categorisation is a requisite process in the formation of concepts. I have argued that the process of representation is inherently social since it is created through communication and interaction. Language is a primary element in the development of representational thought. Neither concept can be conceived of without the other. In the same way, it is necessary to think of categorisation as an inherently social issue. The idea that categorisation is socially based is not alien to cognitive social psychology (Markus & Zajonc, 1985).

I emphasise that the processes of categorisation and, consequently, of representative knowledge are not only socially based but also culturally and historically determined. This became obvious during the process of collecting data for this study. During the second stage in the application of questionnaires, I noted something that caught my attention immediately: the distinctive manner in which subjects assembled concepts and assigned them a name, according to their group affiliation (urban/rural). I realised, then, that what I found in 1998 in the plains of Northern Colombia was similar to what Vygotsky and Luria found in 1930 in Uzbekistan (Luria, 1976), though with some important differences. The distinction lies in the peculiarities of contemporary societies where the mass media diffuse opinions and ideologies, 'globalise' world views which shock and interact with local systems of knowledge. Not surprisingly, elements pertaining to the central core of the urban elite are also to be found in peasants with low levels of education.

In the studies conducted by Vygotsky, the process of categorisation took two forms. One, a concrete categorisation based on the physical characteristics of the object and the other which followed more abstract forms of classification, where the concept had never been seen by the subjects. The findings were extended, in the work of Zhodzishina Shift, to educational settings, where the abstract, scientific, concept derived from classroom instruction and the concrete, spontaneous, concept derived from everyday events (see

Vygotsky, 1996). The results of these experiments were banned from publication in the context of the Soviet revolution, as they seemed to perpetuate class differences.

Far from qualifying these processes in terms of lower and higher mental functions, we should emphasise their differential character. They are different though interrelated. One is more closely related to written traditions in society; the other arises in the context of practical activities and oral traditions. One uses abstract verbal concepts to categorise experience, while the other employs complex visual categories to deal with objects in their everyday life. The existence of variations in the patterns of cognitive abilities according to ecological demands were shown from a neuropsychological framework with samples of illiterate and professional Colombians (Ardila, 1995). In my own experience of observing the work of peasants, I noted how they could name colours in hens and cows that I was unable to distinguish; they could recognise a particular cow in a group of several and tell its history in terms of diseases and deliveries. These complex categories were ready for use in everyday interaction.

But what are the consequences for the analysis of the structure of a social representation? Firstly, the emphasis that should be placed on culture and history. The wide range of investigations conducted under the structural approach has been carried out mainly with samples of students. It is only possible to visualise the complexities of social cognitive processes when the effects of these two dimensions are fully appreciated. Secondly, the process of anchoring needs to be understood in its full meaning: as the complete appropriation of events in the lives and experiences of those who share them. By conceiving the structure as schemata in a traditional way, we continue to emphasise processes of memory evocation and recognition. It is the meaning assigned to and received from structural elements that rescues the symbolic character of a social representation. In that sense, we must turn to the communicative aspect of social cognition, not just to observe the activation of core elements in context but also to understand the dialogical essence of life in society.

In doing so, we learn about the conflictual aspects of social representations. We convert the structure from being static to being dynamic. In interaction, through variations in positions, the defence of arguments and the formation of strategic alliances, we recognise the social individual. The structural elements are not merely imposed on our inquisitive individuals; beyond coding/retrieval/recognition processes, we should

understand the meanings attached to structural elements. Through the meanings, the subject questions, re-creates and characterises the central core elements of a representation.

### **3.2.5.2 A Dynamic View on the Organisation of Elements in a Social Representation**

Previously I explained that, according to the structural approach, a social representation is organised through two quite distinct systems: a central system, i.e. the central core, and a peripheral system. These would account for two apparent contradictions in the structures of social representations: The consensuality and individual variation on the one hand and the stability and flexibility, on the other. The central system was defined by its coherence, rigidity, resistance to change and lack of sensitivity to the immediate context. It was conceived of as linked to collective memory and as definitive for the homogenous character of the representation. This conception corresponds, basically, to a descriptive view of the structure, where the model sticks to a cold cognition paradigm. Par contra, the dynamic nature of the structure must be highlighted. The elements in it are not just semantic units or complex sets of propositions; they are basically symbolic elements charged with meanings.

Authors such as Bartlett (1932) and Neisser (1976) pointed out the dynamic properties of schemata. According to Bartlett, schema are never final versions; they are engaged in an active process of construction and reconstruction. From a similar point of view, Neisser reacted against a too narrow approach to cognition, the submission of cognitive processes to mechanistic models of information processing. He maintained that "Perception and cognition are usually not just operations in the head, but transactions with the world" (1976 p.11). Neisser presented an interesting approach in the study of schema, albeit framed within an individualistic perspective. He recognised the importance of cultural factors and more importantly, maintained a notion of schema not as a terminal but as a permanent process in which the perceiver is changed.

Schemata should refer not only to products or structures; they should also be seen as processes constantly mutating and conveying messages and changes, no matter how small. This vivid character responds to the changing nature of the social environment and to the conflictual essence of beliefs. Unlike cognitive consistency theories, there is no need to insist on a call for their resolution. Ambiguity emerges then not only as a

motivational force but also as a structural property. Conflict is then conceived of as the motor of the system and not as a noxious state. Emotions and feelings impregnate the elements, which are never neutral.

Rokeach (1968) suggested an interesting definition of value systems from where we might extract some ideas to enrich the structural view of a social representation. Rokeach devised value systems as an organisation of beliefs. These beliefs are values, characterised by an enduring and changing character; the one ensuring a necessary stability and the other social change. The absolute character of values is expressed when they are appreciated in isolation. But when these values join to form a hierarchical system, they acquire a new meaning through their attachment to other values though preserving, at the same time, their original expression. Notwithstanding the relative stability of the elements and their meanings, the system as a whole undergoes constant re-organisation.

The notion of a structure 'in the making' contrasts with the static character attributed from the structural approach. In adopting a dynamic view of schema and value systems, the heuristic possibilities of the central/peripheral organisation increase. My proposal is to add some dynamic considerations to the structure, while still maintaining its basic assumptions, such as that the elements in a representation are organised in a hierarchical manner. This hierarchy, however, is never a complete or finished product. A particular hierarchical configuration is relevant in one specific context but not in another. We can visualise, metaphorically, the system as elements moving in an abstract space. They link to others forming clusters in the sense outlined by Rokeach. The clusters give a meaning qualitatively different to the meaning derived from the elements considered in isolation.

An important aspect to consider from the perspective of a dynamic view of the structure is the focus on functional characteristics. According to the structural perspective, the central core has both normative and functional aspects, the first linked to evaluation and judgement, the second to the orientation of actions. Abric referred the functionality to a structural property: "If the central system is essentially normative, the peripheral system itself is functional" (1993, p. 76; for a different view see Moliner, 1995). This position could be complemented by viewing the periphery (internalised practices) as prescriptive and the core (meaning generator) as legitimising. Both systems, however, are strongly interrelated to such an extent that the activation of one function also activates the other.

A very provocative idea is the consideration of ambivalence as a structural property. This notion could be related to the co-existence of positive and negative meanings within an element. There are suggestions in the sense that affect often precedes cognitive responses in attitude formation (Edwards & von Hippel, 1995). Symbolic constructs may not only contradict each other but also be in conflict with the information constructed. Kajanne et al. (1996) showed how the controversies on issues such as food safety led to coexisting contradictory perceptions and competing explanations. Instead of describing the conflict provoked by contradictions through the notion of abnormal structures (Strange Schemata), it would be more appropriate to assume the dynamic properties of ambiguity as part of the everyday act of communication.

In the current state of knowledge there is no consensus concerning under what conditions the core or the periphery activate specific practices. I believe this result arises in part from the primacy given to method over theory. In the structural approach the methodology has prevailed over the development of a complete model of the structure. In my view, the interest of central core theorists has been to provide the theory of social representations with definitions and procedures where the general theory has been, perhaps, too versatile. Although it is true that this has permitted the progress and expansion of the theory of social representations, it is no less certain that it can constitute an obstacle to its further progress.

### **3.2.5.3 A Call to Recover the Importance of Peripheral Elements.**

If peripheral elements are the point of contact between representation and reality, their significant role in the representational structure should be salvaged. The periphery cannot be seen just as a point of contact; it is where the representation is lived, in terms of habits and practices. The representation of healthy eating exhibits the menus and food habits through their periphery. For Moliner (1995) the periphery is the operational part of the social representation. This system represents the internalisation of social practices in a schematic form; they function as scripts (Flament, 1989). If the notion of periphery is amplified, we could approach it not just as a sequence of actions structured by a central core but as complex systems of cognitive elements which relate to cultural

practices. It is a flexible system which permits us to deal with complex conditions but which, in my view, can be as enduring as the core.

### 3.3 *Summary*

After presenting a detailed review of the structure of social representations as conceived by the structural perspective of social representations, some theoretical and methodological shortcomings were reviewed. Basically it is suggested that the structural perspective employs methodologies that depart from the original assumptions of the theory of social representations and makes it functionally equivalent to conventional attitudinal models. Moreover, the notion of representation is turned schematic in a sense similar to that of traditional social cognition, which contrasts with some dynamic views of schemata, e.g. Bartlett (1932), Neisser, (1973).

Drawing from Vygotsky (1934/1986) and the sociocultural basis of knowledge and on Rokeach (1968) on value systems, a dynamic view of the structure is advocated. The new perspective must consider the social, cultural and historical aspects of human cognition and the importance of the periphery, for it is in the concrete and paradoxical that we live our socially constructed representations. The next chapter reviews the problem of the links between concepts and practices, focusing on the problems of rationality and consistency. A new perspective to an old problem is suggested from the theory of social representations.

## 4 THE LINKS BETWEEN CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

### 4.1 *General Overview of the Relationship Between Concepts and Practices*

Previously, in the introduction to this study, I pointed out that the relationship between knowledge and action has been a perennial problem in the social sciences. I argued that this relationship has been worked out in social psychology in terms of consistency between attitudes and overt behaviour. Some of the proposals to explain the relationship were presented, and upon their failure to offer a heuristic model of how to understand the links between knowledge and actions, the need to consider alternative views of these links was made explicit.

In this chapter I will present one such alternative view. It is the elaboration of some theoretical proposals and empirical findings in relation to the association between concepts and practices. This elaboration follows the investigation into social representations and specifically the structural perspective, which is the theoretical ground for this project. However, as the reader will find, it is not a finished product but a proposal that integrates some previous findings and explains the data collected in this study. The ideas are open to discussion and debate, as criticisms are an invaluable medium for improvement.

This research on healthy eating originated from an empirical question: How to change food habits in a community. This preliminary question changed upon consideration of the complexities surrounding the issue of eating. If practices are part of a collective knowledge, it is more appropriate to investigate the mechanisms that structure, empower, and transform collective views about the world. I strongly believe that social psychology, as a discipline, must give answers to practical questions, as part of its disciplinary competence and social relevance. In the call for a social psychological analysis of socially relevant issues, integrative frameworks are needed. That is to say, in order to answer such practical enquiries, a model, or models, of action ought to be developed, as it is the world of deeds as much as the world of speech that comprise the central elements of social psychological phenomena.

Some models that take into consideration the developments of social representations theory have been proposed from action psychology (Von Cranach, 1992). However, the

study of overt behaviour and social practices in social representations has been derogated despite its enormous theoretical importance and the implications for social intervention. I think this is partly related to the appalling experience gained from the study of the relationships between attitudes and behaviour, an experience that most social psychologists fear to repeat. Still, there are a few studies dedicated to the matter, either presenting a conceptual clarification for the relationship between representation and behaviour or reporting empirical findings (e.g. Echebarría & González, 1993; Thommen, von Cranach, & Amman, 1992; Wagner, 1993).

The work conducted under the structural perspective of social representations has produced a number of empirical works on the relationship between representations and behaviour. The study of this relationship originates with the work of Abric (1987) on the representation of a situation of interaction and the behaviour of co-operation/competition. There are other studies such as the one on the social representations of proper role among nurses, in relation to the transformation of a representation (Guimelli, 1994). But these are just two examples of the investigation of behaviour from a structural perspective. More importantly, the structural perspective provides a model for the analysis of social practices. The model is reviewed in this chapter.

My intention is to examine the structural perspective and to present it in the light of cultural issues. This perspective is not a model of action. It is a framework for understanding how a social representation is organised and the relationships between representations and behaviour. The structural perspective is a contribution to the study of social behaviour but it lacks a cultural dimension. Culture is a basic component of social psychological enquiry and its inclusion in the analysis of the relationship between concepts and practices has important consequences.

It is not my intention to theorise about culture but a clarification of my understanding of culture seems necessary before advancing further in this enterprise. I understand culture as a system of values, ideologies, beliefs, customs, and practices that identify and orient a given society. Farr (1998), an Irish social psychologist whose work on social representations is widely known, acknowledged the importance of the study of culture in contemporary social psychology.



Farr (1977) began his return journey to collective representations more than two decades ago with his review of Herzlich's *chef-d'oeuvre* on health and illness. In that review Farr referred to collective representations and not social representations, perhaps because the theory of social representations was not very well known by British social psychologists at that time. What was evident, however, was his fascination with the concept of collective representations in the full Durkheimian sense: myth, language, religion and customs. Most social psychologists have not fully realised the importance of recovering this concept in the current framework of the local/global dynamics. I will return to these thoughts when presenting the issue of eating while devoting an entire section to cultural issues and social transformations.

The idea of a cultural approach to the analysis of the relationship between knowledge and actions compels me to clarify the terms. Ideas are conceived here as concepts. In relation to actions, these will be conceived as social practices and assumed as part of the representation. Action is a multi-level phenomenon, a more basic concept not necessarily chained to collective knowledge. Practices, on the other hand, are understood here as systems of action framed by the pre-established norms and values of the group to whom the individual belongs. This is an eminently social cultural concept embedded in historical processes<sup>8</sup>.

The conceptualisations I will present require three elements: On one side concepts and practices and on the other, the context<sup>9</sup>. I argue that these three elements are interdependent, inextricably linked to each other in a dynamic relationship. The concept and the practice are conceptually united as we learned from genetic psychology. In a broader sense, representations are internalised actions. The context refers to cultural, social, political, economic and historical elements. All these affect practices, as they are affected by situational contingencies beyond cognitive factors.

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<sup>8</sup> I make a distinction between actions, behaviour and practices. Action is an intentional and goal-oriented phenomenon. Practices refer to the social construction of reality. Practices encompass sets of public actions which are meaningful in a cultural-historical context. It is not meant to be a mere addition of actions. It is the continuous organisation and re-organisation of systems of actions. Overt behaviour is the individual expression of collective practices before context demands. Although in this work I will refer to practices and their expression, social (overt) behaviour, the analysis is oriented primarily to the study of practices.

<sup>9</sup> Socially constructed knowledge implies not only the concept but also the practice. From a genetic epistemological point of view, the splitting of these constructs is unfeasible.

The other concept that needs to be clarified is that of consistency. I concur with Salancik (1982) on the need to redefine the problem. He referred to implications, which are social expectations giving meaning to actions. There may be different implications for a single attitude and they can even be contrary to each other. Variations in the context lead to variations in the implications and the consistency is assured from his point of view by the existence of some implication. This is a different interpretation of the attitude-behaviour relationship, which has a very important consequence: the notion of consistency moves from a phenomenon between a particular attitude and a particular behaviour to the multiple ways by which attitudes influence behaviour in a given context.

A direct, ballistic relationship between knowledge and action has been left behind. We are moving in the marshlands of a dynamic relationship as opposed to a mechanistic directive. But this does not mean that the relationship between representations and practices is chaotic and completely random. It is a relationship of mutual generation and interaction, purposeful and rational. We are not confronted by the mechanistic subject, the data-processing individual or the cognitive miser. Here we have *the astute*, a subject who is not dubious about playing the right card given the demands of the context. The astute is the epistemic individual of this research, who is able to bear contradictions, to justify violations of norms and to adapt rapidly to changes in his/her environment. It is not a universal subject; it is the particular subject of the contemporary world, or post-modern society if you prefer this term.

The idea of the astute is especially relevant in our individualistic societies. Firstly, because the astute are engaged in systems of economic relationships. Consumerism has become a powerful trend, limited by monetary constraints. Individuals compete to reduce these constraints in order to increase their satisfaction. The process occurs in a context of a loss of collective values. I am not overemphasising the role of the relations of production in the determination of human behaviour but pointing out the decisive role of economics in the orientation of social practices in the framework of an economic sociology.

Secondly, the astute do not blindly believe in institutional arrangements. They are aware of the imperfections of social institutions and are highly critical of them. In the past the individual was afraid of transgressing social norms because the punishment of gods and

divinities. In the contemporary world, the astute can cope with and negotiate the disobedience of social norms. These ideas do not neglect the altruism and collective nature of the human being. Finally, astuteness is a fundamental element of human cognition. As such, astuteness should represent a major focus of study not only in research on consistency but also in the development of a theory of mind<sup>10</sup> in relation to issues such as anticipation. In my view, the astute should be the subject of a psychological inquiry in contemporary accounts of social psychology. In Colombian culture this central feature of mind is partially represented in the notion of *indigenous slyness (malicia indigena)*.

After these considerations, the notion of consistency should be reviewed and rescued from the mechanistic perspective where it has been placed. Conflict should be an essential component of any revised notion of consistency. Consistency could be conceived of as a component of the wider notion of rationality but is not necessary to it. It would exist at different levels: at the intra-belief level; at the inter-belief level; and at the inter-dimensional level, that is, between conceptual structures and practices. Instead of referring to consistency in terms of logic, we should refer to it in terms of the meanings attached to practices within a specific cultural environment. Formal logic is not an appropriate framework for the study of social representations.

In traditional research on attitudes the notion of consistency was too restrictive; it was reduced to a correlation coefficient. Consistency was useful because of its implications for the prediction of behaviour. Besides the need to broaden the notion, its utility may also be questioned. Is the concept still necessary if the view of a causal direct relationship between representations and practices is avoided? In other words, how can the notion of consistency be assumed when there is not necessarily a direct causality between representations and actions? My answer is that it is a necessary notion if we

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<sup>10</sup> The theory of mind supposes the basic cognitive ability to represent the representation of the other within attributional –and communicative- processes (cf. Camaioni, 1996). Though it assumes innate mechanisms and evolutionary processes, a theory of mind marks, in my view, a fascinating point of convergence between biology and social psychology, for it offers valuable insights in the study of social interaction. Having application in clinical areas (e.g. autism), the theory of mind may prove to be useful in areas such as group dynamics, organisations and economic behaviour, among others. It supposes basically the ability to interact based on the competence to meta-represent, using intelligence, among other functions, to cheat and to lie. Yet I consider the ‘machievellian intelligence’ (Byrne & Whiten, 1986), not only an evolutionary product but also a product of sociocultural practices.

are to be able to interact and to communicate, to deal with expectations and to give meaning to our behaviour and that of the others.

If the notion of consistency is broadened, then it may be conceptualised in terms of the correspondence between practices and collective knowledge. There is no reference to consistency in the theory of social representations but the term is found in the work of Moscovici on active minorities (Doms & Moscovici, 1985). Doms and Moscovici referred to consistency as part of the behavioural style of influential minorities, where the act follows a given schema, i.e. a collective theory. But this consistency must be perceived as such outside the minority group. More importantly than the act itself is the interpretation of the act, the meaning attached to it in accordance with cultural codes. This adds another key word to the study of social practices: *the meaning* attributed by actors to such practices.

The notion of consistency, closely linked to the history of social psychology in the United States, is not longer central in the alternative view of the theory of social representations. Under this new conceptual umbrella it is more interesting to see how the relationship between representations and practices can be described. Also, what are the consequences for social intervention? The unity of cognition and practices and the acceptance of the conflictual character of social representations offer a conceptual solution to the problem of consistency in social psychology. There is no cause-effect process between concepts and practices because both are part of the same system.

The theory of social representations offers a wholly new and more complete standpoint from where to analyse the relationship between concepts and practices. It must be clear at the outset that social representations are not mediating or intervening variables between a stimulus and a response. Social representations define both the stimuli and the subsequent response and they do have a function of mediation. But this is a different mediation, because it takes place between the individual and his/her social world. Moscovici (1961/1976) stated that classical psychology considered representational phenomena as mediating processes between concept and perception, but now it is time to investigate their cognitive and sensorial properties.

Within this framework, Lipiansky (1991) noted that representations are not misconceived images of objects through common sense, as the existence of these

objects is just that conferred by the representation. As he pointed out, the representation creates the image and the referent at the same time. The object is not a copy of the external reality. They allow the individual to integrate his/her unique experiences into the social knowledge, to form theories with which to organise reality. This is the social constructivist component of the theory.

Because social representations allow not only the organisation of reality but also the orientation of behaviour and communications it is important to emphasise several aspects of this relationship. First of all, as I shall discuss in more detail later on in this thesis, this relationship is not directly causal. I propose a change from a deterministic to a probabilistic view of the relationship. Secondly, and related to the former point, it is not that simple. That is why it is said that social representations orient behaviour; they do not determine it. And thirdly, social representations are, to a certain degree, rationalising constructions. It is not only that social representations may precede actions, but also that action can be followed by cognitive processes of sense-making, rationalisation and justification (Laroche, 1995).

The relationship between concepts and practices is conceived here within a social representational framework around the following points: a) they comprise part of the same system, embedded in cultural-historical processes. Practices become internalised systems of action which transform the representation. In short, social representations are social practices and social practices are social representations. b) Social representations orient behaviour and communication. They are normative and instrumental. The association between representations and behaviour is not unidirectional. c) The subject is rational in acting on the basis of a collective knowledge; that is to say, they act on the representation. On the basis of this collective knowledge it becomes possible to respond to novel demands in a rational manner. d) The subject is consistent, because his/her behaviour has a meaning-in-context. The consistency is assured by the interpretation of the act. If others cannot interpret the act, the subject is incorporated within the social categories available and the inconsistency explained. e) When there are inconsistencies, the subject may still justify his/her behaviour by appealing to collective knowledge. Social beliefs are conflictual and usually contradictory, facilitating this process. In other words, social representations are not only rational but also rationalising systems.

The analysis of practices and their relationship with concepts includes two important aspects, on one hand the issue of rationality and, on the other, the characterisation of the association between representations and practices. The next section focuses on the analysis of this problem. After this, I discuss the possible effects of structural ambivalence on practices, and finally, I finish by explaining in more detail why I am referring to practices from the structural point of view and what the elements are that can be derived from it.

#### 4.2 *Consistency and Rationality*

A complete chapter of this work was dedicated to presenting the evolution of the concept of attitude in order to be able to follow the developments of the study of consistency. The study of consistency between attitudes and behaviour has been an unfruitful theme in social psychology. It is clear enough that the predictive power of attitudes is not perfect and that a direct and simple line cannot be drawn between attitudes and behaviour. That is something important to be learned after years of continuous research.

The relationship between one dimension which might be called the *world of ideas* and another which might be named the *world of actions* has been approached through one of the most difficult concepts to grasp in the social sciences: rationality. The concept of rationality has been used in several senses but is intended mainly to qualify this relationship. A rigid qualification would oppose the perfectly rational to the perfectly irrational, the utopian to the chaotic. However, it is possible to conceive the rational/irrational as concepts within a historical and cultural organisation, engaged in a deep and complex dynamics.

The expectancy-value model is a particular approach to rational action from a 'rationalistic' perspective. Other notions in social psychology such as that of script captures the idea that acting can also be an automatic process where no detailed consideration and processing of the information available is done. Perhaps the answer is neither rational nor completely irrational. Authors such as Kruglanski and Klart (1985) have pointed out that action is neither thoughtless nor fully rational. It is then that it becomes important to refer to notions such as that of the context where the activation of a particular element of the structure is more likely.

Traditional attitudinal research has considered the relationship between beliefs and actions as something causal, i.e. attitudes cause actions; a sort of logic-rational process, i.e. a coherent non contradictory knowledge as the basis for action; as something a-historical, a non-cultural process, and as explicable by some variables which appear to be good predictors of this relationship, such as are expressed in the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). I will argue against all these assumptions by showing the uniqueness of social representations in the study of social behaviour.

The link between concepts and practices is very complex, not only due to the difficulties involved in conceptualising this relationship but also due to the problem of its operationalisation. Operationalisation refers not only to the relationship but also to the meaning of action and social practices. I will refer to practices and not to actions. As stated before, action is a much more basic concept. It may range from motor programming in order to execute a movement up to a very complex series of acts. The use of the notion of practices is linked to an attempt to rescue the cultural dimension in social psychological research.

The idea that behaviour in relation to a particular social object is based on how that object is represented has already been discussed. The representation includes more than the information about the object because there are elements such as norms, values and emotions which affect its creation. As one of their functions, social representations have a role in forming and orienting behaviours and social communications. Jodelet (1986) has stated that social representations link symbolic processes with behaviour. Social representations are, at one and the same time, both forms of knowledge and practices; there is no a clear border between them.

The experimental work on social representations has devoted much of its effort to understanding the association between representations and behaviour. In the theory of social representations a phenomenon of circular influence is expressed, where representations and behaviours are mutually affected. This idea is captured by the structural perspective. However, the central core view of social representations favours a deterministic model of the association between concepts and practices. Before discussing this in detail, some aspects in relation to rationality and causality should be addressed.

### 4.2.1 The Phenomenon of Rationality

Two notions have been the focus of attention in this chapter: Consistency and rationality. Consistency has been generally considered to be the stability of preferences over time (Lea et al., 1987). However, data from psychological experiments have shown the flexibility of preferences (see Lea et al., 1987 and Valencia & Elejabarrieta, 1994) and the fact that people may show intransitive preferences and modify their preferences in the sense of greater congruence once it is drawn to their attention. In conceiving consistency as constitutive of rationality, the notion of the rational should be the general concept from whence to understand the association beliefs/practices.

I do not intend to provide a conceptual framework for the issue of rationality. My intention is much more modest: to include the issue of rationality in the study of the relationships between concepts and practices which has been studied in research on attitudes in terms of consistency between attitudes and behaviour. Rationality is understood here in terms of the operation of a collective knowledge, emphasising that this knowledge is not rigid but flexible and deeply embedded in processes of communication and interaction.

Valencia and Elejabarrieta (1994) presented a typology of approaches to rationality. They distinguished three classical conceptions: cultural-ideological, formal logical and the theory of games. The first one is a culturalistic approach to the notion of rational choice. This is a contextualised notion of rationality where cultural values shape practices. From this perspective rationality must be understood in the context of actions as shared codes for defining the meaning of actions.

From a different perspective, expectancy-value models present a more rationalistic approach – as opposed to a culturalistic approach - to rational action within a social psychological framework. In this perspective we find the theory of reasoned action which follows the idea of a unidirectional causal explanation. Rational choice processes should not be considered outside a process of historical development within a particular culture. The expectancy-value models is part of a classic approach to rational action theory.



Classic rational action theory is not a single concept. In a recent article Goldthorpe (1998) advocated the relevance of rational choice theory in sociology (for a different view, see Zafirovski, 1999). He stressed the variability of rational choice theory in opposition to a single notion, depending on rationality requirements. The strong version of rational choice is the pillar of economics. From this point of view rationality might be considered as the appropriation and use of the necessary information in order to act. This rationality would be considered as a tendency, by the average consumer, and would not be rationality for everybody at all times.

This rationality is equivalent to perfect knowledge. Goldthorpe (1998) himself questioned the applications of these strong versions of rational choice to sociology but argued in favour of a weak version of rational action theory. As experimental psychology has questioned the assumptions of a strong version of rational action theory, the maximisation of a utility would be unrealistic as well as irrational. The idea that the subject tries to satisfy, instead of maximise, is central to the proposal of Simon (1983) in his model of bounded rationality. This notion forms part of a weak version of rational action but adheres to an information-processing paradigm.

In the same perspective is the conceptualisation of Boudon (1986). Drawing from Weber (1968), who distinguished several types of rationality, Boudon defends the view of a subjective rationality. Perfect knowledge is, according to Boudon, unfeasible. The individual acts on the basis of the knowledge available to him/her in a particular context. The meaning of the action is understood as rational as far as the observer can represent the position of the actor in the context in which the action is carried out. Yet lying on positivism and on one of its products, methodological individualism, the perspective sustained by Boudon diverges from that defended by Durkheim (1912/1995) in relation to the distinctiveness of the collective, beyond the aggregation of individual actions. However the weak versions of rational choice have far more applications to sociological issues than the microeconomic versions.

The strong versions of rational choice have poor applicability in the study of social issues as the *Homo economicus* of microeconomics is closer to the optimal than to the effective subject. If the individual has to consider the particular context of his actions, a contingent rationality should be supposed. The proposal by Goldthorpe (1998) relates

to the application of a subjective view on rational choice, i.e. the notion of a contextualised process of action. From this perspective preferences are not necessarily transitive and knowledge is not perfect. The concept of good reasons appears in the framework of a subjective rationality, which I consider to have similarities with the view assumed by the structural perspective of social representations.

Several factors compel me to affirm that the notion of 'perfect knowledge' is unrealistic. Firstly, because following the terms of microeconomic theory, the information may be incomplete or asymmetrical. Secondly, information is particularly affected by interests and dominance relationships via ideological processes which may disguise a notion or an interpretation of a particular event. And thirdly, because the possibilities and their probabilities may tend to infinitude. The other category in the typology presented by Valencia and Elejabarrieta (1994) is game theory (Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944), where the concept of rational is put in interactive terms ('strategic rationality' in Goldthorpe's terms). The actions of other actors would influence the action of a particular individual.

Unlike these conceptions, the cultural-ideological notion of rationality argues that shared cultural and social codes influence human practices. This approach is opposed to a classic rational choice paradigm. The difference between this and a rational action view could be translated into a distinction between rational action and traditional action. This distinction, however, is not useful. Traditional action, even though being rational, may turn into an irrational one when the systems of beliefs fail to cope with new demands. In other words, the practices would remain stuck to old traditions limiting the development of new ideas and of the society as a whole. More importantly, a cultural-ideological view of rationality rescues the importance of power relationships in acting on the basis of knowledge. My intention is not to get involved in the complex discussion on rationality but to define the application of the concept in the context of this research.

#### **4.2.2 A View on Rationality**

The debate on rationality in social psychology has left some lessons to be learnt. On one hand, the notion of rationality has been obscured by the different meanings assigned

to the concept. On the other, as Markus and Zajonc (1985) have shown, in the history of our discipline the issue of rationality has followed an oscillatory trend:

“There seems to have been a cyclical series of swings peculiar to social psychology, from the view of the individual as a rational and efficient cognizer to one where the individual is irrational and quite imperfect” (Markus & Zajonc, 1985, p. 176).

A new approach to the topic of rational behaviour is considered by the theory of social representations. From its paradigm, the theory of social representations embodies the rational and irrational aspects of human nature. The subject is then not only a rational but also a rationalising being. Valencia and Elejabarrieta (1994) pointed out that:

“Social representations must be viewed as rationalisations of previous social practices and as transpositions of previous values and ideologies held by individuals and groups” (p. 174).

The context of a decision impregnates this new notion of rationality. More importantly, it rescues the social cultural nature of cognitions. Cognitive psychology sees the human information processing prone to biases at the input and inference levels. Some of these biases are, however, not errors *per se* but part of the social and cultural character of human cognition, e.g. the fundamental attribution error.

I concur with the position of Wagner (1993) in the sense of viewing rationality as acting on the basis of a collective knowledge. This is quite different from viewing rationality as a concept involving the maximisation of utilities. This optimisation treats the information as clear and objective; the information would be available and the individual would have use of it. I argue that the information is constructed and affected by diverse interests. Moreover, social knowledge is controversial which questions the whole idea of a perfect knowledge.

By stressing the cultural and ideological character of rational behaviour, the theory of social representations favours a cultural approach to rationality. In this order of ideas, cultural research makes an important contribution to the study of rationality. The differentiated character of social thought in relation to scientific thought should not be seen as a distinction between the rational and the irrational. If this were the case, the difference would be erroneously understood in terms of inferior and superior ways of

thinking. What is important to understand is the qualitative divergence between both forms of knowledge. The variation might be qualified in terms of the difference between pure cognition and social cognition.

Since social representations are different from scientific discourse, they have their own logic, which is not free from contradictions. As a consequence the association between representations and practices cannot be considered from a rationalistic perspective or expressed in terms of formal logic. Moscovici has been a defender of the distinctive characteristics of social representations ; (Moscovici, 1961/1976; Moscovici & Hewstone, 1984a). Put in Moscovici own words:

“The non observation of logic’s rules in conversation, newspapers or interviews, as well as its rigid application, does not indicate, as believed, a degradation of reflection, an absence of value from the knowledge and objectivity point of view,(Moscovici, 1979 p. 176, my translation).

Social representations can be thought in terms of common sense or natural thought and as a sort of *philosophia plebeia* (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1984a). The contradictory knowledge often found in social representations is not a demonstration of its shortcomings, but a proof of its differentiated nature. The rationality of a social representation is given by its consensual character and not by the canons of science or formal logic.

### 4.2.3 The Issue of Causality

One of the main questions in action psychology has been that of the transformation of knowledge into action, or at least into the intention to carry out a particular behaviour. The theory of reasoned action solves this problem, introducing the concept of behavioural intention. This intention is the result of beliefs and would represent the motivational component in the model. However, we know that this intention is not the behaviour in itself; it is just a proxy variable as the realm of overt behaviour most often escapes the control of cognition and motivation. Moreover, this intention is viewed in the model only as an objective fact, when it is also - I would say mostly- a social fact (cf. Malle & Knobe, 1997).

The theory of reasoned action conceives the relationship between attitudes and behaviour in a directly causal and unidirectional way. From this point of view,

cognitions are the triggers of actions. From the theory of social representations, the relationships between representations and practices are not a cause and effect process. The theory of social representations states that the relationship between representations and behaviour is not directly causal but circular, in the sense they are mutually affected.

The phenomenon of causality has been the object of an interesting debate in two journals of social psychology between Von Cranach and Wagner (*Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* vols. 24, 25, 1994-95; and *Papers on Social Representations* vols. 3, 1994). The debate was more related to methodological issues than to theoretical considerations, but it was interesting in drawing two complementary approaches: 1) social representations as determinants of behaviour (e.g. Abric, 1994b; Von Cranach, 1992); and 2) knowledge and practices as components of the same underlying representation (e.g. Duveen, 1994; Wagner, 1994). Both positions accept the mutual influence between representations and behaviour.

The conceptualisation of Von Cranach (1992) is basically oriented by and towards a psychology of actions. Von Cranach considered the relationship between knowledge and action as a multi-level phenomenon, where the main function of knowledge is to orient action. According to the author, there is a dynamic relationship between knowledge and action. The two components are mutually affected by each other in the sense that knowledge steers action and is changed through it. But the transition from knowledge to action is a far from automatic process. For von Cranach, knowledge is transformed into and by a multitude of operations, namely cognitive, affective and motivational processes, which will try to adapt to every specific situation. On the other hand, actions must be evaluated in terms of memory, goals, execution and effects, all in consideration of external circumstances, in order to become knowledge.

For Wagner, verbal behaviour and action are an expression of the knowledge of the group, so it is possible to access social representations via either verbal data or actions (Wagner, 1994). To explain why we are tempted to consider the association between representations and actions in the causal sequence: verbal data – inferred representation – behaviour, Wagner referred to the notion of folk psychology, which is the causal linking people use to connect actions and beliefs. In the same sense as impression management theory, individuals want to be seen as rational beings, acting according to the knowledge they have. This way of thinking would be an essential feature of

Western societies. The attribution of intentionality in terms of causal-explanatory processes would be a strategy employed by the individual to interpret his and the other's actions. Some models, such as the theory of reasoned action, apply this belief-desire framework of folk psychology to understand social behaviour.

Wagner identified a rival view of the conceptualisation and the operationalisation of the relationship between social representations and actions (Wagner, 1994). He stated that, even though at the conceptual level there is no causal relationship, at the operational level researchers have followed a model of causal thinking, and the relationship is investigated in terms of independent/dependent variables as shown by the temporal sequence in their assessments. This distinction between the dependent and the independent variables would contradict the assumption of the reunion between beliefs and behaviour.

This critique is answered by Von Cranach from his model of action psychology (Von Cranach, 1995). He looked at the relationship between social representations and action from a multilevel perspective. According to him, we have social representations as forms of organised knowledge, which are acquired by the individual via socialisation processes. By these processes the social representations are transformed into individual social representations, which guide the action-related cognitions and emotions that steer actions in the form of overt behaviour.

We come back, here, to the idea commented on at the beginning of this thesis, which is the possibility of looking at verbal behaviour and overt action as different segments of the same act in progress. Von Cranach developed his theoretical model as a multi-level process, where the events are conceived at different levels. If this sequential order is part of the investigated reality, as Von Cranach stated following the psychology of actions, this is how the sequence should be researched. These assumptions, based on everyday psychology, do not contradict -at least theoretically- the unit belief/action, but affirm a sequential order in knowledge construction.

Wagner (1993) in his analysis of the relationship between social representations and behaviour stated that social representations could not be considered as explanations of behaviour but as descriptions of it. This idea comes from the conceptual impossibility of separating representations from actions. Because representation and behaviour are

part of the same unity, they are not conceivable in terms of a cause-effect process. The use of social representations as explanations of behaviour would bring back the idea of a causal relationship between representations and behaviour. This causality would be represented in a linear relationship between representations as causes of behaviour. Moreover, the association between concepts and actions cannot be causal, for actions are essentially *meanings* that need to be understood, not causally explained. Since meanings are contextual and negotiated, that is, products of culture and history, they require particular creations and re-creations.

There is a final point I should like to raise in relation to causality and consistency. It has to do with the course of practices that cannot be verbally expressed<sup>11</sup>. This would support the idea that, even though practices and ideas are expressions of a representation, they are not the same expression. In other words, the theoretical notion that unifies beliefs and practices should be seen within a conflictual system. In the next section I shall present the explanation for this phenomenon from the structural perspective. Other psychological theories explain this in relation to the unconscious as a mental category. Psychoanalytic theory, for instance, proposed the existence of unconscious determinants of behaviour. Some technical terms such as *acting out* refers to the passage of contents from the unconscious directly to the act without symbolic

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<sup>11</sup> Echabarria and Gonzalez in an article published in the Journal Papers on Social Representations (Social knowledge, identities and social practices, 1993, vol 2, pp. 117-125) adopt an interesting stance on the relationship between social representation and social practices. They tried to parallel the concepts of declarative and procedural knowledge in social psychology to the study of those forms of social knowledge that are expressed exclusively through practices. This is in line with Guimelli's (1994) idea of accessing procedural knowledge via declarative processes using BCS techniques. In my view the concept of declarative knowledge has a very different connotation, very difficult to apply to the study of practices. In cognitive science the concept of procedural knowledge refers basically to knowledge which is automatic and not mediated by language, such as visual motor tasks. Social practices, in my opinion, are always mediated by language. A different issue is to understand why some contents of collective knowledge appear in structured practices and not in discourse. It has to do mainly with ideologies, power and all that is collective in the social, those 'shared secrets'. It is possible, however, to verbalise those contents, to create awareness about the *social* that we believe is the *natural*. We may call the process deconstruct ( e.g. Parker, 1990; Parker & Spears, 1996; Shotter & Parker, 1990) or unmask (e.g. Martin-Baro 1985), but this is different from looking at the issue in terms of procedural knowledge, which is a term with greater relevance in cognitive neuroscience. The 'whys' of these shared secrets are not in the individual's mind, although the problem can be approached from an individual level, but in the collective. In that point I agree with Echebarria and Gonzalez in relation with the importance of the study of social memory.

mediation. Although this is a process generated by the power of drives unsuccessfully repressed or managed throughout any of the ego-defensive mechanisms, the idea of acting out could be successfully applied to some social phenomena such as deindividuating.

The concept of habitus in Bourdieu is similar to that of practice I previously introduced. For Bourdieu (1985) *habitus* is a reproduction of regularities (structure), cultural and historically engendered, adjusted to context demands (conjuncture). As Bourdieu suggested, the *habitus* turns history into nature, the ideological into the taken-for-granted and that, I consider, it would highlight the essential historicity and hermeneutic task of the social psychological analysis. It is the 'naturalisation' of history that would respond to the question of the automated in social life.

#### 4.3 *Belief Ambivalence: Stretching the Possibilities of Practices*

A main contribution of the theory of social representations to understanding the link between representations, in the form of specific ways of knowledge, and practices, is that it accepts inconsistency in the representation itself. Inconsistencies, or contradictions, can be found within the structure of the representations or between belief systems. Inconsistency is not a weakness; it is a feature of humanity and even more, a condition for social change. As Duveen put it:

"Beliefs may include inconsistent and mutually contradictory elements: and in analysing social representations we cannot assume from the outset any primary motivation for logical consistency in the expression of beliefs" (Duveen & Lloyd, 1993, p.91).

The property of ambivalence has impressive implications for the study of the relationship between concepts and practices. One reason is that it introduces the notion of conflict within the structure, assigning it a dynamic function. Another is that it maintains the relevance of the context to an understanding not only of the genesis of a particular practice or behaviour but also of its meaning. Another implication is that the individual is conceived of as highly flexible, capable of accommodating variations in the environment. It reflects the astuteness of the subject in responding to social demands.



In the modern world, where political correctness has become a vital issue, the subject, every time, is more reticent to express his/her private views when these challenge the social expectations or values of a given culture. The public and private dimensions of life become split and behaviour and practices must respond accordingly. However, in my view, this is not the end of the process. As I stated before, the adhesion to ideologies occurs not only through imposition. The individual appropriates these ideologies as a member of a given culture or group thus restricting the gap to certain extent. Competing ideologies, beliefs, practices and norms, ensure that the closing is never definitive. Different possibilities are, then, available to our astute and intelligent individual, who responds to demands, rewards and pressure as and when necessary. The astute, I should add, have also the ability to pretend. The 'politically correct' entrails the risk of denying, instead of reconstructing, the beliefs held by groups that other more dominant groups judge as unacceptable.

Different perspectives in social psychology have recognised the phenomenon of variability and apparent contradiction in social beliefs. From a discourse analytic perspective, Gilbert and Mulkey referred to the mechanism of *Truth will out device* by which scientists explained contradictions in their discourse (cf. Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In their research on scientific discourse, Gilbert and Mulkey distinguished between the empiricist repertoire related to the formal context of science, and the contingent repertoire, related to informal settings. In the account by Potter and Wetherell, they stated:

“Gilbert and Mulkey’s contingent and empiricist repertoires are two highly contrasting ways of making sense of scientific actions and beliefs. On the whole these repertoires were kept separate in time and space. The contingent repertoire was rarely used in formal papers and although both were drawn on in interviews, most of the time they appeared in different passages of talk or, as in error accounting, were applied to very different topics. However, there were occasions in interviews when the two repertoires appeared together and were applied to the same class of events” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 153).

A similar view is presented by rhetorical psychology with reference to the mechanism of *taking the side of the other*, in which changes in arguments follow changes in the context of controversy (Billig, 1991). The contradictions in patterns of talk would relate, from this position, to the explicit and implicit features of attitudes (ibid.). The idea of stable attitudes is successfully challenged from this perspective, which criticises the notion of an internal consistency in attitudinal systems.

Within a social representations framework, Farr and Marková pointed out the complexities of these inconsistencies. They declared: “Common sense is characterised by the co-existence of representations many of which are incompatible with each other” (Farr & Marková, 1995b, p.94). Inconsistencies should explain not only variability in speech but also rationalisation as a prevalent mechanism in everyday life.

Attitudinal theory is orienting its efforts in the same direction as well. Ambivalence, that is, the possibility of holding inconsistent views in relation to the attitude object, is conceived of by some as a structural property of some attitudes (see Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). This would represent a new conception in the study of cognitive consistency and represents in my view a promising area for future research. However not every model of attitudes emulates this view. From the reasoned action point of view an inherent consistency is assumed (Ajzen, 1988).

An interesting interpretation from the structural perspective is given by the hypothesis of conditionality. For Flament (Flament, 1994a) the phenomenon of inconsistency is not between cognition and behaviour but between cognition and discourse. According to this hypothesis, even though cognitions are conditional, that is, they are taken into account as the context demands, they appear in discourse as absolute and unconditional (that is, they refer only to the general case). Thus, when an individual is in a particular situation, he/she behaves according to his/her conditional cognitions, which are not incorporated in to their discourse. Notwithstanding, variations in discourse pose a fundamental challenge to this notion.

#### *4.4 Social Concepts and Social Practices: A Proposal Following Some Considerations of the Structural Perspective*

A study of the relationship between concepts and practices includes a macro level analysis since that relationship cannot be reduced to an individual psychological issue. In other words, there are many components in this relationship beyond psychological processes and practices are greatly affected by situational contingencies. Someone might say that even though there might be a good number of non-psychological factors in this relationship, as social psychologists we should focus our attention on those factors related to our discipline and leave the remaining to the experts in the appropriate

areas, e.g. economics. I emphasise my opposition to reducing the interests of social psychology to the study of individual phenomena and to explaining social behaviour by reference solely to cognitive structures. In conceiving a broader framework in the study of social practices, the theory of social representations embraces the micro and macro components of human behaviour.

By emphasising a macro perspective to social psychological research, the theory of social representations acknowledges the complexity of the systems within which the individual is embedded. This responds to the isolation of the experimental subject and adds a conceptual solution to the consistency controversy: the practice is a component of the representation and it is shaped by many other factors, mainly of an economical type. The relationships between representations and actions are in a context. The context here refers to two different levels: the first one is the social, historical, cultural and ideological context where social representations are embedded. The second is the context of interaction that gives different meanings to actions.

Based on these distinctions, we can say that consistency as a representation is not a universal but a cultural phenomenon, which differs in both individualist and collectivist cultures (Kashima, Siegal, Tanaka, & Kashima, 1992). Farr (1997) would explain this in terms of individualism as a collective representation. Farr has maintained the idea that individualism is a collective representation that has to be studied within a social psychology of the individual, which differs from an individual social psychology. According to Farr, the representation of the individual is embedded in complex ideological systems, one of which is that the individual is responsible for his or her actions. Likewise the meaning of actions is quite sensitive to variations in the context and so is the perception of the consistency or inconsistency of a given practice (Read, Druian, & Miller, 1989).

In his foreword to Herzlich's work on health and illness, Moscovici made an explicit reference to variations in context. He stated that when people are interviewed, they express their ways of seeing things by giving a message to the interviewer. These messages are not constant but subject to variations according to changes in the context. These variations are a way of adapting to the specific changes and characteristics of every particular situation of symbolic interaction. Individuals can define every situation

in a different way. Thomas's Theorem states that "If people define a situation as real then it is real in its consequences" (Thomas & Thomas, 1928).

Two specific functions of social representations must hold our attention in this section. One is the function of orientation, which has to do with the direction of behaviour. The other is the function of justification, which allows actors to explain behaviours retrospectively. In other words, the rational and rationalising components of human action translate the consistency/inconsistency dynamics.

From the structural perspective, practices are determined by the representation. Within its framework, the behaviour of the individual is determined by the representation of the situation and not by the objective characteristics of it. Methodologically, the representation is the independent variable; for Abric, representations precede actions (Abric, 1989). According to Abric, this direct determination appears in experimental and natural settings as well (Abric, 1994b). The notion is similar to that expressed from a traditional social cognitive view. The current approach to behaviour from this view is expressed as Organism – Stimulus – Organism – Response. This means not only that the individual's representation mediates between the stimulus and the response -the heritage from the cognitive revolution- but also that the individual defines the stimulus (Markus & Zajonc, 1985). It follows that an understanding of the structure allows for an understanding of the behaviour.

With specific reference to the structure, core elements are the determinants of the practice (Abric, 1994b). Following social cognition assumptions, these elements direct overt behaviour upon their activation. The activation responds to context changes and demands; the relationship between representations and practices is then characterised by the existent conditions. It is thought that the relationship flows in the sense representations to practices, either when the situation demands the acting of completely prescribed practices or when the individual has a more autonomous role<sup>12</sup>. However the model also asserts that the practice affects the representation.

The latter situation happens when a situation of constraint obliges the performing of practices which are in strong opposition to the representation. In this situation, the

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<sup>12</sup> Abric made this distinction in terms of *pratiques signifiantes* and *pratiques non contraignantes* (Abric, 1994c).

practice determines the representation in two ways<sup>13</sup>. If the situation is perceived as reversible, the contradictions are absorbed by the periphery. On the contrary, if the situation is perceived as irreversible by the individual, the transformation may occur in a progressive, resistant or brutal manner.

From the structural perspective the existence of descriptive and prescriptive elements are assumed in the structure of the representation. It is also theorised that the prescriptions are conditional in the periphery and absolute at the core. What is not clear enough is under what conditions does each system orient practices? In his research on career decisions by nurses, Guimelli found the central core to have a decisive role<sup>14</sup>. He pointed out that

“It is the central elements and not the other aspects of the representation, which intervene massively and in a decisive manner in the orientation of action” (Guimelli, 1993, p.91).

This leaves open the question of what specific situations are served by the periphery. The food choice process incorporates conscious thinking and automatic decisions based upon the context in which these decisions are made. It could be argued that when the decision process is automatic, that is, involves habits, these decisions would be mediated by the periphery. When involving more detailed and complex thinking, the central core would govern the process. However, there is no confirmation for this supposition.

In the model of reasoned action, attitudes are intervening variables. The causality between attitudes and behaviour is direct: “Just as attitudes are said to flow reasonably and spontaneously from beliefs, so are intentions and actions seen to follow reasonably from attitudes” (Ajzen, 1988, p. 33). This notion presents some similarities with the central core view of social representations. From the structural perspective, representations determine actions (Abric, 1989).

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<sup>13</sup> The transformation of the representation was presented in Chapter Two. A brief recount seemed necessary here.

<sup>14</sup> Abric concurs in attributing an essential role to the periphery in the prescriptions of behaviour and practices (Abric, 1994a). However, Abric also attributed a role to the periphery for the prescription of behaviours (Abric, 1994b).

#### 4.5 *From Practices to Healthier Practices*

Most campaigns for the promotion of dietary change and healthy lifestyles submit to a knowledge/cause-behaviour/effect model, which has been criticised in this work. In following the model, the marketing strategy has assumed the form of 'provide knowledge and wait for the result'. In a research on the interpretations of healthy eating in England, (Povey, Conner, Sparks, James, & Shepherd, 1998) found that lay notions of healthy eating appeared to conform to dietary guidelines. They pointed out the need to consider economic and psychological constraints in the promotion of dietary change and to pay attention to group differences in the perception and behaviour of healthy eating. I consider that the proximity between these lay understandings and nutritional guidelines is the effect of several factors, including informal communication and media messages not necessarily intended to promote healthy eating but conveying important ideological elements. Without dismissing the importance of the provision of data, this is clearly insufficient.

Another important issue raised in the research conducted by Povey et al. has to do with the symbolic components of beliefs. One of the factors produced by the principal components analysis conducted in their research defined healthy eating in terms of consuming traditional English food as opposed to foreign food. This component shows how the semantic universe of eating is not just about connections between words in the memory, but also about structures charged with symbolic meanings that allows functions like this one in relation to identity. On the other hand, the issue of meaning is relevant to understanding how the group anchors experiences. The evocation of a notion does not tell us anything about how this notion is actually used by individuals as members of a group.

The attempt to study the relationship between concepts and practices in the field of health from the point of view of the theory of social representations has two major applications. On one side, it provides elements to conceive the contents and the structure of the representations of health in order to understand the manner in which we make sense of its reality, which has implications for marketing health. As Farr has noted: "Health professionals ought to take into account people's conceptions of health and illness before devising their campaigns" (Farr, 1993).

On the other hand, by studying the relationship between the concept of healthy eating and its associated practices it is possible to approach the problem of its consistency from a different research tradition, which has effects on health policy and its implementation. I would like to cite Deutscher here when he asked the following question:

“Can we assume that if we are attempting to alter behaviour through a training program, and educational campaign, or some sort of information intervention, a measured change in attitude in the “right” direction results in a change in behaviour?” (Deutscher, 1975, p.83)

Deutscher words certainly call to mind what is under discussion in this thesis: As the relationship between concepts and practices does not necessarily show consistency, changes in any of the components of the process do not automatically imply changes in the other.

In her classical study on the social representations of health and disease (Herzlich, 1973) referred to the moot question of the association between social representations and individual health behaviour. Do representations determine in certain sense the behaviours of individuals as constructions of reality, or are they just rationalisations about behaviours? After almost 30 years of the publication of her work *Santé et maladie, Analyse d'une Représentation Sociale* in 1969, these questions still disturb the spirit of social psychologists. I am inclined to think that both processes occur, if we consider it at the individual level, though I think of it in terms of orientation rather than determination. Here, however, I am dealing with the concept of action at the collective level, the practice.

The relationship between concepts and practices in the field of health has been traditionally considered from conventional attitudinal perspectives. The use of the concept for applied research in fields other than social psychology has put aside the criticisms and problematic aspects of it. The popular KAB surveys (Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviour) are one of its methodological products, and assume a sort of horizontal and straightforward relationship between knowledge and behaviours. However, the complexities of the process by which specific knowledge turns into defined practices are not that simple. The assumption that unhealthy practices are somehow a reflection of an incomplete knowledge is one I have criticised in this thesis. From this assumption the practical effect would be that providing people with ‘the right

knowledge' would modify people's behaviour to healthier practices. My first concern had to do with the type of knowledge we would be evaluating.

Usually such knowledge is evaluated through questionnaires containing 'rights' and 'wrongs' answers from the point of view of the professional who carries out the research. Even though we can understand these answers either as right or wrong from the perspective of the up to date professional knowledge, this does not tell us anything about the particular knowledge constructed by the lay individual and we would forget the interactive aspect in the sense of the encounter of two types of experience.

The categories used to evaluate this knowledge have been in most cases decided *a priori* without considering the categories of the individual being evaluated. In the case of food, the knowledge is cultural and deeply ideological. Besides, eating habits are strongly affected by economic variables beyond individual's control. Even understanding the knowledge purveyed, individuals do not necessarily modify their eating habits. On the other hand, the KAB model does not consider the interrelations between knowledge, attitudes and behaviour and how each one affects the other. Thus, we would have fragmented pieces of information without a clear comprehension of the process's dynamics. If we are to avoid this simplistic view, it is important to contemplate the overlap between systems of representations and its position in wider frameworks of reference, as well as the double-way by which the process functions.

Social representations do not exist in a vacuum, isolated from the other social constructions. Social representations are interrelated; they overlap, being mutually shaped by one another in a constant interplay. In studying the social representations of health and illness, for instance, Herzlich (1973) had to refer to the concept of way of life, which was one of the principal determinants of disease for the population in her study. The urban way of life was associated with pollution and the artificial. Fantasies about moving to rural, quiet and natural places came to the mind of the individuals interviewed. She was certainly correct in asking herself if there was any intention of these individuals of translating these thoughts into actions, of realising their talk.

Herzlich (1973) also referred to food as a main component of the way of life. The alteration of the natural character of food products makes them less genuine, artificial, forced products causing 'toxicity', one of the mechanisms by which illness is produced.



It comes clear that the social representations of health and illness are not isolated but strongly related to other systems of representations such as way of life and food. The perception of food as home-made and natural refers us to a broad conception of what is considered a proper way of life in western cultures.

We can also think about other systems of representation, such as the social representations of technology and how this affects the representations of healthy food, or the social representations of the body. The issue of genetically modified food, for instance, might conform to a particular representation and is perhaps very closely related to the social representations of health, food, and technology. These representations are framed by ideology, which make it possible to find common elements in all of them, such as moral concerns.

According to Herzlich, the social representations of health and illness expresses the conflict between individual and society (Herzlich, 1973). In this conflict, the result either of health or disease, is manifested via activity or inactivity and bring integration or exclusion from society. The relationship between these representations and behaviour takes place through social practices, some of which are institutionalised, such as hygienic practices or eating behaviours.

The meaning of health and illness can be understood only in the light of each other. They are complementary concepts, where the existence of one of them reveals the existence of the other. In Herzlich's work we can observe how individuals organise the information they have created to orient themselves and to give meaning to their behaviours. Herzlich expresses the ambivalent character of health behaviours in the 'health paradox', in which the individual follows unnatural and constraining practices in response to the unhealthy and constraining way of life.

Attitudinal models are not the only ones applied in the study of food and eating. Some studies have applied a constructionist orientation in food choice (e.g. Furst, Connors, Bisogni, Sobal, & Falk, 1996). In their model, Furst et al., have considered the influence of several factors including past experiences, historical contexts, beliefs, resources, availability, taste, health, and food quality. All these determinants would not affect every single food choice event in the same way and nor do all of them need to be

present or accessible because the choice process is not always reflective as we do not always make systematic use of the information available.

The complexity of the decision process has shown many of its particularities in qualitative research. I find that the research using qualitative methodologies and theoretical models from sociological perspectives that tend to integrate the complexities of the process tries to respond to the simplistic and mechanical way research on nutrition has been conducted in conventional studies. They do this by considering the wider social context in which food choices are made. Food choice is a process that combines cultural beliefs and previous personal experiences. As well as this, it considers the economic context, and takes into consideration food availability, convenience, and monetary factors. It is very clear that the food choice process involves individual and social aspects at the same time. As social psychologists we ought to return to culture in order to understand these aspects of contemporary everyday life.

#### *4.6 Summary*

In this chapter I have shown the distinctive framework of the theory of social representations for the study of social practices, which assumes consistency and rationality in cultural ideological terms. I have also presented the formulations of the structural perspective as a complement to the general theory. These formulations build up a model not very different to current notions of social cognition. My intention is neither to dismiss nor to detract from these notions, whose contributions to social psychology have been definitive. However, I argue that in following a schema/behaviour relationship, we risk a regression to the same kind of concerns we found in the attitude/behaviour relationship.

To prevent this from happening, the structural model should appreciate some basic notions from the general theory of social representations: the conceptual link between representations and practices. I would conceive this linking in the wider framework of genetic epistemology. It is the internalisation of practices, their appropriation by the individual, along with what he/she read, hears and communicates, that constitutes

complex representational systems and creates a marvellous human product called culture.

## 5 METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 *The Multi-Method Perspective*

Having defined the theoretical background and essential conceptual elements for researching social representations, this chapter introduces the methodological framework employed for data collection and analysis. Most empirical studies within the perspective of social representations employ a range of methodologies, from questionnaires to ethnography. The use of a multi-methodology aims at the interpretation of the results through the comprehensive application of methodological procedures. In the light of previous analysis, new interpretations turn the research practice into a process of circular developments. The multiplicity of methods, or perhaps more exactly, the application of an inter-methodology, allows us to explore the components of the representational field, including the symbolic order of social knowledge.

The procedures employed in this thesis to capture the social representations of healthy eating followed three general methods. Firstly, an observational study that included field dairies, documents, and photographs. Secondly, a multi-level content analysis of formal (mass media) and informal (focus groups) communications. Finally, the analysis of the structure carried out employing word associations and questionnaires. The analysis confronted the results obtained in the several procedures to validate the inferences and to enhance the application of findings. The data collection and analysis proceeded by moving from less structured (i.e., observation), to more structured (i.e., questionnaires) methodologies, each set of results enriching previous ones, and, at the same time, corroborating new findings.

Since references for the methodological procedures employed by the Midi Group are scarce in the English literature, a complete description of them is in order. This also allows illustrating some of the claims made in chapter 3 in relation to the inconsistencies between theory and method. The thesis includes all the four necessary steps suggested by Abric (1994c) to explore the contents and the internal structure of a social representation, namely: a) the collection of contents; b) the exploration of the structure; c) the verification of the centrality; and d) the analysis of the structural elements in discursive productions.

This chapter begins introducing the methodologies employed by the Midi Group, followed by a description of the specific methods used in this thesis, including participant populations, instruments, and procedures. The description of methodologies follows the order of presentation of the empirical results, that is: a) the observational study, b) the content analysis, and c) the methods to explore and to verify the centrality of the elements of the representational structure.

## *5.2 The Methodological Tools of the Structural Perspective*

In spite of the theoretical contributions of the structural perspective to the theory of social representations, the methodological procedures that it employs are grounded within a classical research tradition within psychology. Experimentation and quantitative methodologies are not always adequate methods to study psychosocial phenomena as they miss the complexities of shared beliefs. These methodologies, however, offer valuable insights when combined with other types of methods such as ethnography and content analysis, which makes quantitative and qualitative techniques complementary.

Several methods to study the central/peripheral dimensions of social representations have been developed. These methods follow the theoretical distinction between content and structure. According to the structural perspective, access to the content does not suffice to understand the ways a social representation operates. By understanding its internal organisation, it is possible to analyse its conformation and eventual transformation. From the structural perspective, natural discourse is far from disclosing the complexities of social representations (Flament, 1994b). For Flament spontaneous discourse is not the social representation since in discourse people only show the unconditional prescriptions of cognition (Flament, 1994a). Conditional prescriptions are not in discursive practices, which shows a gap between the social representation and the discourse.

The core/periphery distinction is the result of the hierarchical structure of social representations. The hierarchy of elements follows the importance of each element in the representational field. Methodologically it is possible to recognise that importance through the analysis of frequency, ranks, and associations (correlation and proportions). From the point of view of the structural perspective, the analysis of contents follows

techniques commonly used in qualitative research (e.g. interviews). The structural analysis, on the other hand, follows theoretical considerations such as the distinctions between central and peripheral systems, and therefore it requires special methods. The first part of this presentation introduces those methods.

The methodological taxonomies I will present follow the descriptions developed by Abric (1994c) and Moliner (1994). The two accounts are particularly useful to understand the techniques used by researchers of the central core, describing the complete range of procedures available. Abric's description is a complete methodological synopsis of the required steps to explore the structure. Moliner's description is more specific and focused on the specific methodologies to locate the central core.

For Abric the *voie royale* to study social representations is the monographic approach, which, inspired by anthropological methods, combines ethnographic techniques with sociological surveys, historical analysis, and direct observation of behaviours and interactions. The study by Jodelet (1989) on the social representations of mental illness is an example of this combination of methods. However, the application of this approach is not always possible due to time and budget constraints, among other possible reasons.

### **5.2.1 Methodologies to Explore the Content of the Representation**

In the exploration of the content, Abric distinguishes interrogative and associative methods. Among interrogative methods, in-depth and structured interviews are the most frequent methodologies (Abric, 1994c). Interviews provide access to the ample universe of beliefs and to its manifestation in natural language. However, the submission of natural language to the rules of social discourse and its accommodation to social demands make interviews masked products because of the activation of psychological mechanisms such as rationalisations, need for coherence and rectification.

Questionnaires are another major technique to study the contents of social representations. According to Abric, questionnaires allow the employment of quantitative methodologies and standardising procedures to favour reliability and to compare groups. Questionnaires also allow researchers to reach bigger samples more economically. However, there is the problem of limiting individual expressions and

imposing research questions. Additionally, questionnaires are a complementary methodology because their design must consider a previous exploration of content via either interviews or media analysis.

Another interrogative technique comprises the use of inductive drawings and graphical designs. However, inductive drawings are difficult to interpret as this method is based on projective techniques. On the other hand, graphical designs employed as stimuli may convey information not considered by the researcher but able to produce answers in the study population. Yet, the use of inductive drawings and other graphic designs may offer valuable information not available from verbal data. Inductive drawings make possible the analysis of social representations in terms of images (e.g. De Rosa, 1987).

Another technique to analyse the content of a representation is the associative map. According to Abric (1994c), this technique allows analysing the context of semantic productions. In associative maps, the free association results from an inductor item. A second procedure of association follows each item produced, and then a series of associations are successively registered. The method allows an elaborated ensemble of associations and its analysis is similar to the analysis of the free association, considering frequencies and ranks and determining correlation coefficients. Additionally it is feasible to conduct a categorical analysis of the corpus. This technique can be problematic when attempting to analyse several associative maps due to the submission of semantic associations to statistical procedures.

The methodological approach suggested by Abric is essentially multi-methodological. Table 5.1 presents the classification of methods according to each step in the study of the internal organisation of a social representation.

### **5.2.2 Methodologies to Explore the Structure**

In order to access the internal organisation of a social representation it is necessary to employ several techniques in sequential steps. The reason for using several procedures follows the conceptualisation that the central core has quantitative and symbolic characteristics that make certain techniques more suitable to investigate each particular aspect. The determination of the centrality of an element or cognition follows primarily its frequency, a quantitative characteristic. The initial orientation changed because, as Moliner (1994) pointed out, an element is central not because it is strongly linked to

other elements, it is linked to others because it is central. Quantitative properties are not proof of the centrality of an element as the function of a central element is mainly symbolic.

Based on these different aspects of the central core, Moliner (1994) distinguishes methods of identification and methods of exploration. The central core cannot be determined solely in terms of its salience or associative power. According to Moliner (1994), four properties characterise a central cognition: its symbolic value and its associative power, which are qualitative properties; its salience and its strong connection with the structure which are quantitative properties and a consequence of the symbolic properties.

Salience is the frequency and rank of a given cognition, designated by their verbal label. Connective is the proximity, i.e. distance, between elements. The associative power, on the other hand, is the ability to associate to other elements. The symbolic value is the aspect that gives meaning to the representation by integrating the elements in it. Following these distinctions, Moliner (1994) proposed a methodological classification to explore the central core. Each method takes into consideration the particularity of each property and its distinction as qualitative or quantitative.

The methodology comprises two groups of methods: 1) Methods of lifting to explore the salience and the connectivity of the elements. This is the initial step to begin the exploration of both systems. 2) Methods of identification to analyse the symbolic value and the power of the associations. The methods are summarised in table 5.2.

#### **5.2.2.1 Methods for Lifting the Central Core**

The initial methods to explore the central core of a social representation are oriented to the formulation of initial hypothesis about the structure of the core. The first part of this exploration considers the frequency with which elements appear in a production. Theoretically, elements that are part of the central core have greater salience than elements forming part of the periphery. Likewise, central elements try to group other elements of the representation.



**Table 5.1 Methodologies to study social representations (Abric, 1994c).**

A. Exploration of the content.	A. Interrogative methodologies	a) Interviews b) Questionnaires c) Inductive drawings d) Designs and graphic supports e) The monographic approach
	B. Associative methods	a) Free association b) Associative maps
C. Methods of exploration of the organisation and structure of a representation.	A. Methods of exploration of the links between elements	a) Constitution of pair of words b) Pair comparison c) Constitution of groups of words
	B. Methods for ranking items	a) Successive hierarchies b) Successive choices by blocks
D. Methods for controlling centrality.		a) Calling into question b) Induction by ambiguous scenario (IAS) c) Basal Cognitive Schemes (BCS).

**Table 5.2. Methodologies to access the central core of a social representation (Moliner 1994). (In parenthesis the interpretation of each property in operational terms).**

Quantitative properties	A. Saliency (frequency) B. Connective (grouping)	<b>Methods of lifting:</b> <u>Saliency:</u> a) Free association b) Hierarchy of items c) Successive hierarchy triads d) Successive choices by blocks <u>Connective:</u> a) Construction of pairs of words b) Method of paired comparison c) Constitution of groups of words d) Analysis of similitude
Qualitative properties	A. Associative power (relations) B. Symbolic value (meaning)	<b>Methods of identification:</b> <u>Associative power</u> a) Basal cognitive schemes <u>Symbolic value</u> a) Calling into question b) Induction by ambiguous scenario

However, these criteria allow only a preliminary analysis of the internal organisation of a representation. The description of the procedures available to lift the elements presumptive of being part of the central core is presented in the next session. Assessment of frequency and rank is the common feature of these methods, but again, this provides only an indication of possible centrality.

### **1. Methods to Study Saliency**

Saliency is the frequency and order of evocation of semantic elements in discursive productions. Due to the symbolic value of a social representation, saliency is associated with the central status of an element. However, saliency is not a unique criterion for the determination of centrality since a peripheral element may be as salient as a central one. A possible explanation, according to Flament (1994a), is that a central element can be actualised in the periphery for several reasons. A salient peripheral element obtains its saliency from its direct link with the central core and its peripheral character is due to their conditional aspects.

According to Vergès (1994a), frequency is mainly a collective dimension. It reflects the contents circulating in society. On the other hand, median rank is a more individual dimension that refers to the order given by the individual to his/her production according to personal experiences. The combination of these two criteria in a 2x2 table allows the identification of the most frequent elements with the lowest average rank, which are possible components of the central core .

#### **a) Free association:**

This technique employs an inductor item, which is usually the same verbal label of the representation. Participants must list the words that come to their minds evoked by the inductor word, allowing access to the semantic universe of the social representation under study. This technique permits to bring up latent elements denied or masked in speech. It also permits an easier access to the semantic universe of the representation.

For the analysis of words association, Grizé et al., (1987) proposed a technique based in two different stages. The first stage is the analysis of the content. A second stage is the analysis of the elements that organise the representation according to three indicators: frequency, ranking (mean rank), and the characterisation of the two most important

items. Frequency and ranking are indicators of centrality and a significant correlation between these two components is an additional confirmation of the central character of some of the elements.

Abric (1994c) has questioned the assumption that the most important items from a list are mentioned first. It is possible that the elements appearing first in a list are not necessarily the most important. Using methods such as continuous decision can solve this problem posed by the use of ranking by blocks (the method is described later in this section). However, Abric himself regards the use of mean ranks as a more acceptable when the order of the semantic production is employed only as a complementary indicator.

The analysis of similitude, and multivariate techniques such as multidimensional scaling, are other possible methods for the exploration of the structure. There are several multivariate techniques for the statistical analysis of words associations. Cluster and factor analysis and multidimensional scaling have been profusely used in research on social representations (cf. Doise, Clemence, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993b). Nevertheless, a particular problem associated with word association is the loss of the semantic context. Consequently, it does not permit the analysis of the interaction between elements. The associations (distances) are estimated in relation to their frequency. For this reason, it is important to consider additional procedures to complement the data analysis.

## **b) Hierarchy of Items:**

In this method, participants must choose from a list of words, developed previously and based on exploratory interviews, the most characteristic terms of the object of representation. For Abric (1994c), this method permits the formulation of an initial hypothesis about the internal structure, avoiding the problem of considering the order of evocation as an indication of the centrality. This technique has two variations:

### **1) Successive Hierarchy Triads:**

In this procedure, participants receive a list of items (e.g. 32) taken from previous interviews, and must separate the words in two blocks, the sixteen most frequent and the sixteen least frequent. They must continue doing this characterisation until all the elements in the list are included. This is essentially a procedure of clustering. According

to Abric (1994c) through this procedure we obtain a classification in order of importance and that a positive correlation between frequency and median rank allows identifying the central elements of the representation.

## **2) Successive Choices by Blocks:**

In this method, an index of distance measures the proximity between elements. This intends to be not only a relation of similitude but also of antagonism. The procedure groups word selections by blocks according to the relative importance of the words. From 20 items participants have to choose the four most important, which receive a score of +2. Then the four least important, which receive a score of -2, and so on until including the last four elements, which receive a score of zero. The complete range of items is displayed in a scale from -2 to +2, allowing the calculation of a distance index.

## **2. Methods to Study Connective Properties**

These methods to access the internal structure of a representation rely on the function of organisation of the central core (Abric, 1994c). The techniques allow the study of the connections central elements have with other elements of the representation. The common procedure to all of them is to request the participant to group his/her own production.

### **a) Construction of Pairs of Words:**

From a corpus produced by the participant, the method requests that participants pair the words they perceive as going together. There are several ways of doing this task. One is the method of pair comparison. In this method, participants receive a list with all the possible pairs of a corpus, and classify each pair in a scale rating from very similar to very dissimilar. The analysis employs similitude matrixes using multidimensional techniques. Another strategy is to group the words. This technique follows procedures of categorisation. Participants are required to group the items of their production according to the similarity of the words. After questioning the reasons of their assemblages, the participants must title the groups formed.

## **b) Analysis of Similitude:**

This is a main technique to detect the degree of connection between elements following common procedures to the methodologies already described. It is based on a notion of social representations as “A group of cognitions linked up by their relations” (Moliner, 1994, p. 216). This technique has the following assumptions: a) a representation is a group of *cognemas* organised by multiple relations. b) these relations can be of implication, causality, or hierarchy, or symmetrical (equivalence, similarity, antagonism). c) the relations are not transitive. Thus, the relation of similitude is a symmetrical non-transitive relationship, which manifests the association between *cognemas*.

To find the relation of similitude, we need to compute the index of similitude for every pair of words, based on the words produced by the participants. The index of similitude is an index of distance. The simplest form of these indexes is the relationship between the number of co-occurrences, which is the number of links between two specific words over the number of subjects involved. With the index of similitude calculated for every pair in the corpus, elements and indexes are plotted in a tree diagram (*árvore maxima*) which shows the values of similitude.

The indexes with the lowest value are eliminated until only those with the highest similitude remain in the model. This procedure of elimination does not follow any pre-established criteria and it is up to the researcher to decide the cut off point. As with the other techniques to evaluate the connective properties of the central core, the analysis of similitude gives only preliminary indications of centrality.

### **5.2.2.2 Methods for the Identification of the Central Core**

#### **1. Methods to study the symbolic value**

These methods question the central character of previously identified elements and test initial hypothesis about the centrality. The rationale of these methodologies follows the function of generation of meanings in the core. Consequently, the questioning of a central element of a social representation do not allow the recognition of the object of representation. Let us retain that symbolic value is the property the elements have to give meaning to the representation.

**a) Induction by Ambiguous Scenario -IAS (Induction Par Scénario Ambigu).**

This technique allows the lifting and the identification of the central elements. The initial procedure is to make an initial exploration of possible core elements by asking the participants to write a text about the object of representation. This allows carrying out a content analysis to find common elements in the definition of the representation. A second step implies the production of an ambiguous scenario in such a way that there is no explicit reference to either the object of representation (e.g. healthy eating) or to the elements considered characteristic of the representation. In a third step, the presentation of the scenario to the participants follows two modalities, one that denies and the other that affirms the object of representation. Finally, participants must say if the elements correspond or not to the scenario presented.

The items selected under both modalities are peripheral because they are not essential to the definition of the representation. The items selected only under the modality that affirms the object of the representation are central elements. They are central because they give the meaning to the representation, which is not recognised in the absence of the central elements.

**b) Calling into Question.**

The method relies on a list of elements considered as part of the central core. Subjects receive an inductor text that describes the representation, followed by the presentation of novel information that calls into question the representation; the participants must decide if the representation changes or remains invariable. When calling into question does not produce any change, that is the representation is recognised, the elements are peripheral.

**2. Methods to Study the Associative Power**

Associative power is the property of an element to associate other elements, modifying the meaning of the words to which it is linked. Associative power is a qualitative characteristic of central core, which differs from connective, which is a quantitative

property. Let us bare in mind that connective is a property based on the proximity between two elements. This is the rationale for the use of the analysis of similitude and some multivariate techniques such as multidimensional scaling. The associative power is the specification of the relations among elements. More specifically, the connective aspect refers only to a general category of these relations or similitude. The methodology to analyse the associative power attempts to describe the same relations in more detail, specifying those links in formal terms. The methodology to study the associative power is known as Basal Cognitive Schemes.

**a) Basal Cognitive Schemes – BCS (Schèmes Cognitifs de Base, SCB):**

This method is based on a conception of social representations as “*a structural ensemble of cognitive elements*” (Rouquette, 1994, p.153). It follows the idea of the organisation of the representation according to basal cognitive schemes (BCS). BCS are formal lexical structures in which the structure is independent from the content, the components are lexical and can be identified and named (Guimelli, 1994). In this method, we have two lexical items related by an operator as follows: inductor item – operator – inducted item. Both items are called *cognemas* and the operator is a connector.

These operators are identifiable in a finite number, organised by stable primitive groups called schemes. There are five schemes: Lexical, Association, Composition, Praxis, and Attribution. These schemes group the operators and explain the relation between two *cognemas*. Formally, a basal scheme is defined as:

$$\forall (\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B}) \in \mathbf{V} \times \mathbf{V}, \exists \mathbf{c} \in \mathbf{C}, (\mathbf{A} \mathbf{c} \mathbf{B}) \text{ (Rouquette, 1994, p. 158).}$$

Here  $\mathbf{C}$  is the basal scheme or hyper-connector, for instance, the lexical scheme;  $\mathbf{c}$  is an operator in that scheme and  $\mathbf{V}$  is the set of semantic elements. This scheme groups a number of operators  $\mathbf{c}$ : Synonym, definition and antonym.  $\mathbf{A}$  and  $\mathbf{B}$  are *cognemas*. The relationship between *cognemas* as mediated by an operator can be expressed as follows:

$$\forall (\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B}) \exists \mathbf{C}_x \mid (\mathbf{A} \mathbf{C}_x \mathbf{B}).$$

Thus, the relation between two *cognemas* may become operational and formal by means of connectors. According to the assumptions of BCS, the relation, in quantitative terms valence, an element has with other elements is an indicator of centrality.

This methodology implies three parts: (1) Free association: From the inductor item, the individual is asked to produce three words: R1, R2, R3. This is not a rule, but as we will see the use of more words can make almost impossible the collection of data because the BCS process may become tedious for the study population. (2) Justification of answers: For every answer (R1, R2, R3), the subjects must explain the reasons they had to choose the words (e.g. I answer...because...). (3) Analysis of the relationship between inductor and inducted.

After the presentation of twenty-eight operators (plus a null operator) of relation, the participant must decide if the expression inductor–operator–inducted (or *cognema*–connector–*cognema*), reflects the relationship between the inductor and the inducted word. In other words, if the operator in question is appropriate. The participant must reply yes, no, or maybe, for every word (R1, R2, and R3) mentioned. The procedure includes the calculation of an index of valence for the 84 items (28 operators x 3 associations). This index of valence is the property for a given cognitive element of establishing a number of relations with other elements. The valence constitutes an indication of the associative power of a given *cognema*.

Valence is defined as "The property of an item has of being in a number more or less important of induced relations" (Abric, 1994a). As a central element gives meaning to other elements of the representation, its valence must be higher than the valence of the peripheral elements. As a measure of association, the valence is actually a proportion with nominator equals number of positive answers to a specific operator or scheme and denominator total number of answers. For a particular scheme, the valence equals the number of positive answers over the number of total answers (yes+no+maybe) to that scheme.

Originally the difference between a central and a peripheral element was thought to be associated with the strength of the association (Flament, 1994a). A valence greater than .50 indicated a central element whereas a valence of less than .50 referred to peripheral element. This initial assumption changed since, according to Flament (Ibid.), what



valence measures is the degree of activation of a particular scheme, and not necessarily the distinction between central or peripheral elements.

### 5.3 *On The Methodological Procedures of the Structural Approach*

The methodologies developed by the structural perspective are complex and varied as evidenced in the presentation above. There is no consensus about the best way of analysing the core and peripheral elements and certainly no golden rules to approach their dynamics. In that diversity, however, it is possible to find some commonality. Methodologically, the structural perspective employs traditional psychological scaling methods. The rationale of these procedures is the analysis of beliefs in terms of associations. Since the distinction between core and periphery follows the 'importance' of an element for the meaning of the structure, the perception of that importance must initially become operational throughout scaling. Frequency, ranking, and pairing are examples of operational definitions of salience and connective. Table 5.3 presents a brief summary of scaling techniques to use in the initial exploration of the central core.

**Table 5.3. Scaling techniques to lift the central core of social representations.**

Property	Definition	Technique	Analysis	Statistics
Salience	Frequency Ranking	Word association	Multivariate 2x2 frequency and rank	Similarity (Distances) Averages
	Common themes	IAS	Content analysis	
Connective	Clustering Ranking Rating	Pairs of words Paired comparison Sets of words Similitude analysis	Similarity	Proximity: Distances Correlation (Kendall's      Tau)

The techniques used to lift the core combine different procedures. For the analysis of free association, either the combination of frequency and ranking or the use of multivariate techniques are valid alternatives. For the study of connective, geometrical distances express associations. Thus, similarity is a basic notion for the analysis. Similarity between elements is defined therefore, as the frequency with which two words, x and y, are found in the same groups divided by the number of subjects. The objective is to determine the distance between elements by using common formulae such as Euclidean Distances. Other measures of proximity such as the Pearson Product

Moment Correlation, or Kendall's Tau for rank order distances also measure associations.

There are several methods to determine the associative power. The method of pair comparison is a scaling procedure to measure comparative judgements. Along with rank orders and rating scales, these methodologies are popular in psychometrics and in questionnaire surveys. Each method involves specific tasks such as grouping, categorising, ordering, or a combination of tasks. Grouping is an essential feature in the assessment of connective properties. However, a connective property, which intends to be an indicator of the ability of an element to group other elements of the representations is based on frequency.

The application of classic psychometric techniques in the structural analysis of social representations manifests advantages and disadvantages. As for advantages, it favours the use of standardisation procedures; it also allows reaching larger segments of population and the possibility of doing cross-cultural and inter-group comparisons with clearer criteria to compare. It is also useful to conduct follow-up studies. There are also several disadvantages, but those related to the general theory of measurement in psychology are beyond the scope of this research. I will refer instead to the particular problems posed by these methodologies in the study of social representations.

A first problematic aspect has to do with the arbitrariness in the identification of elements. Whether frequency or ranks are indicators of possible centrality, there is not a cut off point to decide the property of a given element. The decision in relation to this point is arbitrary, even using averages to make the selection. The methodological imperfection is the result of theoretical flaws in relation to the definition of periphery.

But not only the analysis, also the data collection is somewhat arbitrary. In the case of word association, the number of words is frequently restricted and sometimes imposed. These restrictions relates to the need of not increasing too much the amount of data to be collected in order to keep valid results, ensuring the attention of the participant. Let us consider the case of BCS. In this method, a simple increase in the number of words from three to five, would represent the analysis of one hundred and forty categories instead of eighty-four. In other cases, restrictions obey to previous experiences such as that people rarely evoke more than seven words in a free association (Wagner, 1997).

This arbitrariness brings out another important problem in relation to the conceptualisation of the periphery; this conceptualisation is done by exclusion. This problematic aspect rises the issue of the poor conceptual definition of the periphery, and highlights the need to perform more studies in order to delimit both dimensions.

The emphasis in the methodology at the expense of conceptual development also rises important issues. Although the theory of the central core acknowledges the symbolic aspects of the central system, the operational definition continues to be statistical. In the case of methods such as in the calling into question the central elements, the theoretical ground refers to the symbolic aspect of these elements. It is unfeasible to recognise the representation when the core elements are absent. However, it is the percentage of agreement or disagreement what determines the distinction between core and periphery. In a study conducted by Moliner on the social representations of the ideal group, seventy eight per cent of the subjects rejected the idea of a hierarchical ideal group. This percentage confirmed, statistically, the centrality of the element 'non hierarchical' in the definition of the ideal group.

Although it is true that the main issue here is not about statistical procedures, we may ask what happens with the smaller percentage of people who do recognise the representation even in the absence of a central element. Are they members of a different group whose representation structures around different elements? Is it too naïve to expect hundred percent agreement? Central core researchers confirm the centrality through significance tests to prove that the difference is not by chance but we must also recall that significance values can depend on sample size.

Basal Cognitive Schemes may be an option to study relationship between elements without relying on frequencies. For the enemies of numbers is perhaps disappointing to know that this methodology employs rates. However, the methodology of Basal Cognitive Schemes is problematic because it conceptualises the relations between elements in formal terms. The consideration of Basal Cognitive Schemas as formal structures has important implications in the conception of social representations.

Moscovici and Hewstone (1984a) in their analysis of the relations between science and common sense declared how, as social individuals, we are far from thinking and

behaving according to the rational and logical standards of science. This consideration draws previous ideas from Moscovici's work on the social representations of psychoanalysis in relation to natural thought (Moscovici, 1961/1976). Moscovici advocated the relinquishment of the distinction between the rational and the irrational, stressing the specifics of natural thought.

In order to adapt the formalisation to the particular characteristics of common sense, Guimelli proposed an integration of formal and natural logic (Guimelli, 1994). The first linked to mathematical demonstration and independent of context, the second related to social knowledge and determined by the social context. In other words, to establish a connection between the optimal subject and the social (effective) subject, the latter thinking and acting in interaction. Guimelli considers social representations a sort of knowledge determined by natural logic. The integration would make possible the specification of formal rules in common sense.

To begin the discussion on the assumptions of BCS, let us consider first the formalisation of the relations between *cognemas*. First, from the starting point, to define a social representation as a group of *cognemas* is to reduce the concept of social representation to its purely cognitive dimension. This would be a return to previous conceptions. It would mean to deal with social representations as mere cognitive systems in a restricted sense of cognition. Accepting that a representation is a cognitive system of reconstruction of reality, we must retain that the process of representing something is a social and communicative enterprise. The consideration of a limited number of words out of context linked by five general concepts of semantic association to access the internal structure of a social belief is debatable. In the current state of knowledge, there is not clear basis to make an analysis of social psychological phenomena in terms of logic despite several attempts (cf. McGuire, 1960).

To summarise, in this section I introduced the methodologies employed to study the structure of a social representation according to the structural perspective. I discussed some problematic aspects related with those methodologies, showing that most of the techniques employed follow traditional scaling methods. Accordingly, the methods rely on frequency, ranking, and rating and the analysis follows measures of associations such as correlation and similarities. Finally, I commented on the arbitrary distinction between core and periphery and the controversial issue of the formalisation of schemata in social representations. In the remaining of the chapter, I will introduce the specific

methodological procedures employed in this research for data collection and analysis. The methodology follows the procedures suggested in the structural perspective in order to continue the critical evaluation of the theory, combined with qualitative techniques of data collection and analysis.

#### *5.4 Description of the Methodology Employed*

In this section, I will describe the three methodological perspectives employed to study the social representations of healthy eating, namely, the participant observation, the content analysis, and the structural analysis. The order of presentation includes a brief account of each methodological procedure, the presentation of the study population, and description of the procedures followed.

#### *5.5 Observational Study*

The use of observational methodologies to study social phenomena has gained popularity, in particular the practice of participant observation. Specialised literature is widely available (cf. Jorgensen & Paakkanen, 1989; McCall & Simmons, 1969). The study of practices in natural settings employing participant observation methodologies provides a rich description of the interaction between the group and the object of research. The open and receptive character of the participant observation allows us to confront our interpretation of the situation with that of the actors, an eminently inter-subjective task. As researchers, we can analyse the interpretations having into account the categories the actor employs to deal with the situation of interest.

Social scientists usually follow participant observation methodologies that emulate procedures and strategies derived from anthropology. The basic idea behind this participant observation is that of the researcher as an outsider that approaches the community and gains its trust. In doing so, the researcher establishes a close relationship with some individuals who play a 'key' role in the life of the community and become informants. Because the participant observation occurs along an extensive period, this ensures a relative good involvement in the life of the community.

There are two main points that prevented me from following such a model of observation. Firstly, in research, time is a valuable commodity and the researcher may not have months or even years to conduct the investigation, which can be especially

problematic in the case of studies that include more than one population. Besides, social problems require timely interventions, which demand the provision of research data. Secondly, this research deals with a special subject: *the astute* (see chapter 4). The observational process is not only about rapprochement but also about closing up, not only about trust and confidence but also about distrust, suspicion, and incredulity. Such assumptions need an appropriate methodology, which is in this case closely resembles an investigative observer (cf. Weick, 1985). According to Weick:

“The investigative observer presumes that people hide and lie, suspect and are suspected, and that those who cannot stand to lie and conspire tend to lose the competitive struggle in our society”. (p. 576). In addition, he added: “To invoke these assumptions is not necessarily to moralize about mankind. Rather, it is to recognise that ambivalence may be the optimal compromise in a world where individuals are complicated, capable of generating psychological opposites (e.g. love-hate, warmth-coldness) closely attuned to situational nuance, and vastly different in their skills at marshalling and using power” (p. 577).

Investigative observation demands the use of several sources: published reports, interviews, documents, and observations. The process of data collection does not necessarily differ from common participant observation. The observational method employed in this thesis combined the receptiveness of the participant observation with the confrontational character of the investigative observation. I opted for the role of the observer as journalist. The investigative model views the activity of observation as a double-way process in which the observer is also an actor and may become object of suspicion.

During the observation, confrontation was regularly employed. In interpreting the data, I requested the help of the people confronted. How could they make sense of the contradictions and ambivalence? Above all, which factors maintain such conflicts and contradictions in an apparently harmonic picture? The answers of the participants allowed thinking on the rational and rationalising features of social representations to which I referred in chapter 4. The practices reflect not only the materialisation of collective knowledge but also the material conditions of production in a given society.

In order to favour the comparison, I stressed the differences between groups by selecting two opposite environments, the rural, and the urban, from two educational groups, professionals, and non-professionals. In short four different groups. The groups are described in Table 5.4. The intention was to collect data in extremely different

socio-economic scenarios in order to maximise variation. The data was collected from four complementary sources of information: 1) field dairies, including annotations of the observations; 2) interviews, lasting in most cases no more than five minutes; 3) photographs, used as 'evidence'; and 4) documentary evidence, i.e. magazine's articles, leaflets and cook books. All documentary evidence and photographs are available on request.

**Table 5.4. Group participants**

<b>GROUP NUMBER</b>	1	2	3	4
<b>GROUP AFFILIATION</b>	RURAL NON-PROFESSIONAL	RURAL PROFESSIONAL	URBAN NON-PROFESSIONAL	URBAN PROFESSIONAL
<b>SETTING</b>	ARAUCA	ARAUCA	BOGOTA	BOGOTA

### 5.5.1 Research Settings

Arauca characterised the rural scenario and Bogotá the urban scenario (see the Introduction). Since both scenarios involved towns, it seems important to specify the criteria for distinguishing the urban and the rural scenarios. The first and most important criterion was population density. The second criterion was the predominance of agricultural activities. In Arauca the economic activity has concentrated around cattle raising with a small agglomeration effect, which is the demand for complementary services produced by an economic activity. Most of the population earns its living from primary activities (i.e. agriculture), moving constantly between the farms and the town. The town is the centre to sell products, to buy provisions, and for banking transactions. Given the small size of the city and the fact that there is not a clear separation between high and low class sectors, no geographical divisions were established. Moreover, local people know each other and therefore information on their educational and occupational backgrounds was available in advance.

In Bogotá, because of its size, it was necessary to select two specific sectors of the city: a middle-upper and high-class sector and a 'working class' sector. Bogotá is spatially represented in a rich north and a poor south (Mohan, 1994). Socio-economic strata runs from one (the lowest) to six (the highest). The non-professional participants lived in strata one and two while the professional participants lived in strata five and six (see

map appendix 2). In this way, equivalence between professional level and socio-economic status was achieved. In the strata one and two the observation included a low-income population, mainly working in informal jobs. Yet, there are income variations within a same strata; I did not assume complete homogeneity, i.e. that there are not professionals living in strata one and two. For this research, however, all participants from strata one and two were non-professionals and from strata five and six, they were professionals (the criteria for distinguishing professionals from non-professionals was the presence or absence of university education).

This basic economic segmentation of the city correlated with the spatial representation among the population. The border between *cities*, north and south, is established at the 72nd avenue. The media follows this segmentation, as seen in one of the newspapers articles included in the analysis (*El sabor de los apetitos congelados*<sup>15</sup>, El Espectador, 17 August 1998). For research purposes, the study divided the city into two broad geographical areas. The non-professional area comprised a sector in the south of the city between Bosa and the *primero de mayo avenue*. Because the area was so large, the study was focused primarily on Bosa, a large sector of the city inhabited mainly by working class people.

The fieldwork extended to the south up to include some sectors of Soacha. Administratively, Soacha is not part of the district of Bogotá; it is a different municipality. However, there are not clear boundaries between both. As any other megalopolis, Bogotá has extended to neighbouring towns, some of which have remained administratively independent. Soacha, for instance, has become part of Bogotá in a functional sense. Its inhabitants work in Bogotá and use the service infrastructure of Bogotá. There was no reason beyond bureaucratic conventions to assume this sector was different. The professional area, on the other hand, included a large sector in the north of the city. The study included the area between the 72nd avenue and the 140th avenue and between the north highway up to the east (*Carrera primera*). This is an affluent sector where middle and high-class people live. Personal safety and transportation were taken into account in the selection of the areas.

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<sup>15</sup> The taste of the frozen appetites



### 5.5.2 Procedure

The observation took one and a half-months, between December 1998 and January 1999, with an average of one week per group. Appendix 3 indicates the different processes involved in food consumption observed in the four groups; the observation focused on eating. The coding of data followed the identification of the general dimensions involved in eating, namely, the site of observation, the time of data collection, and the content of menus. These categories were re-grouped in three general codes: space, time, and menus (see appendix 3). According to Lofland (1971), it is possible to identify codes from a general scheme that includes broad categories. From that scheme, codes that are more specific may emerge.

In order to confirm the observed phenomenon that the ideals of healthy eating expressed in informal conversation conflict with the actual practice, I invited a group of urban non-professional participants for lunch in a restaurant in Soacha. The participants chose the restaurant. In this case, participants did not face any kind of budget constraint as I told them I would pay the bill. The information they had was that I was interested in knowing people's opinions about eating. Informal conversations before, during, and after the lunch were all tape-recorded for later transcription. The results of this field experiment complement the data of the participant observation. Budget constraints did not allow me to replicate this experience with the other groups. A selected group of photographs is shown in appendix 4.

### 5.6 *Content Analysis*

Content analysis is a widely used methodology for the analysis of documents and other types of 'discursive data'. It includes several analytical perspectives, instead of a single procedure, the selection of which depends upon the research question. Bibliographical references for content analysis are widely available (cf. Krippendorff, 1980). In this thesis, the analysis aimed at the re-construction of meaningful categories about healthy eating. Following the proposal by Bauer and Gaskell (1999) of a research paradigm to investigate social representations, the analysis included formal (media) and informal (focus groups) communications to interpret different modes of expression of social representations.

## 5.7 Media Content Analysis

### 5.7.1 Study Population

The newspapers content-analysed were *El Espectador* and *El Tiempo*. They characterise the Colombian establishment, having a significant influence in the social and political life of the country. Both newspapers describe themselves as Liberals and have a nation-wide circulation. The analysis included the supplements *Revista del Jueves* (*El Espectador*, out on Thursdays) and *Carrusel* (*El Tiempo*, out on Fridays), featuring fashion, beauty, health and modern life. *El Espectador* has a weekly circulation of 155,545 copies and of 178,600 copies on Sundays. *El Tiempo* has a weekly circulation of 257,492 copies and 481,980 copies on Sundays.

The analysis included forty articles that appeared in both newspapers between June 1 1998 and October 31 1998 (see appendix 5 for the list of articles). All articles are available in Spanish on request. The articles selected had as main topic healthy eating and eating (*comer saludablemente, comer sanamente, and comer*). The following criteria for exclusion was applied: (1) articles that dealt exclusively with food prices; (2) articles that dealt exclusively with indicators of supply and demand in the food market; (3) articles devoted solely to present financial comments and analysis on the situation of food companies, including food manufacturers and retailers; (4) articles dedicated exclusively to the presentation of recipes for the preparation of foods and drinks. Though all these topics may give important evidence regarding the eating practices within a society, the limitation obeyed mainly to practical reasons, such as the need to constrain the universe of articles. Moreover, the research question was specifically focused on healthy eating and not on eating in general, i.e. how is healthy eating expressed in the media.

### 5.7.2 Procedure

The initial procedure included an analysis of the corpus using the program ALCESTE 4.0. (Reinert, 1990). The program determines the patterns of word distribution of a textual corpus, identifying the most characteristic words of a text. The corpus is partitioned into groups of words with similar lexical content following procedures of classification. ALCESTE also allows executing multivariate techniques such as Factor Correspondence Analysis.

The corpus contained 26,849 occurrences and a vocabulary of 5,970 words. The analysis identified five classes: tradition, organism, illness, tendency, and processes. The classes obtained constitute the main categories for the analysis; conceptually these classes were conceived as frames<sup>16</sup> (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Through a hierarchical decreasing classification, ALCESTE divides the text into smaller units, which are grouped according to semantic similarities and differences in a classical process of categorisation. These categories offer a reliable starting-point to initiate the codification of the text. The initial classes extracted from ALCESTE were employed to build up a coding system using the program NUD\*IST version 4 for Windows (Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty Ltd & La Trobe University., 1997). The categories and their operational definitions are in appendix 6; the index tree appears in appendix 7. For coding purposes, the text units were paragraphs.

The inter-coder reliability determined for a sample of twenty articles randomly selected and following a procedure of alternation was eighty-eight percent. The reliability was determined by dividing the number of agreements by the total number of agreements plus disagreements and expressed as percentage. Inter-coder consistency is one of the methods to assess reliability and to conduct quality control in qualitative research. In order to calculate the percentage of reliability, the material sampled was coded separately by the researcher and another PhD student from Colombia.

### 5.8 *Focus Groups*

Focus groups have become a popular methodology for data collection in the social sciences and are widely employed in market research. The procedures on how to conduct focus groups are not standard or rigid, although the methodology assumes a few considerations regarding group size and composition (Krueger, 1997). In this thesis, focus groups allowed gathering basic categories in the definition of healthy eating.

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<sup>16</sup> A Frame is defined by Gamson and Modigliani (1989) as organising ideas that helps to structure media discourses in interpretative packages. Frames are conceived in this thesis as interpretative assets that help the structuring of discourses.

### 5.8.1 Study Population

Five mixed groups (male and female) form part of the analysis: two urban groups, two rural groups, and one group of participants with rural origin living in the urban setting. All participants were contacted telephonically by the researcher through acquaintances. The participants in the non-professional rural group (group 1) were all locals (seven participants, average age 33.4 years, range 27-40), one had secondary education, and the rest had only primary education. The participants in the rural professional group (group 2) were all natives of Arauca (7 participants, average age 33 years, range 29-38). All had university degrees and had enrolled a university program for at least five years, time during which they had lived in Bogotá.

The participants in the non-professional urban group (group 3; six participants, average age 30.5 years, range 21-42) lived in sectors from strata one and two, none of them had university education and four only had primary education. Only two participants were born in Bogotá. The others were born in other cities but they had been living in Bogotá for the last fifteen years. The participants from this group were the only receiving payment for their attendance. The payment intended mainly to cover transportation costs.

The participants in the professional urban group (group 4; five participants, average age 30.2 years, range 25-34) were born and lived in Bogotá at the time of the interview. All had university degrees and had enrolled a university program for at least five years. They lived in sectors from strata five and six. The participants from rural origin living in Bogotá (group 5; seven participants, average age 30 years, range 23-45) were all born in Arauca but they were living in Bogotá to complete their university studies. In one case, a participant had already received a professional degree. The participants from this group use to travel constantly between Arauca and Bogotá. My interest in including this group was to explore the perception of healthy eating when it is necessary to adapt eating practices to a different context.

The urban and rural professional groups included two dieticians among the participants graduated from the same university. Although some concern emerged from mixing experts and non-experts, the combination of expert and lay knowledge did not affect the participation of either group. The polemical character of healthy eating makes no right

or wrong answers. The fact that eating is an activity seen as personal and as part of the everyday life in which everybody has something to say allowed a high participation among assistants.

### **5.8.2 Procedure**

All five focus groups discussions lasted ninety minutes and were taped recorded using a flat omni-directional microphone for later transcription. Transcriptions are available in Spanish on request. The general categories to code the text of the focus groups follows the four topics of the discussion: a) Definitions of healthy eating (i.e. How would you define healthy eating?); b) Practices of healthy eating (i.e. What can you tell me about the way you eat? Do you think you eat healthily?); c) Barriers for healthy eating (i.e. What do you think is preventing people from healthy eating?); and c) Strategies to promote healthy eating (i.e. Which strategies do you consider as relevant for promoting healthy eating?). A matrix created to compare definition of healthy eating and group affiliation is in appendix 11.

The codes and their operational definitions are in appendix 9; the index tree appears in appendix 10. Each intervention in the conversations was registered as a paragraph and considered as a text-unit for coding purposes. The coding system was created in NUD\*IST version 4. The estimated intercoder reliability was of eighty-five percent. The reliability was determined by dividing the number of agreements by the total number of agreements plus disagreements and expressed as percentage. Only the first three pages of each focus group transcription were considered in the calculation of reliability.

### *5.9 Structural Analysis*

Following the methodological procedures to determine the central core of a social representation, the analysis included two basic steps. The first step was the exploration and the identification of core elements. In this step, the data collection followed a procedure of free association. The second step was the verification of the centrality. The verification comprised direct questioning on the relevance of a list of words, ratings, and categorisations.

A categorical analysis of the association task, using the program ALCESTE 4.0, complemented the 'Aix-type' methodology. The categorical analysis included all the words regardless of their frequency and the results displayed in a dimensional solution using Correspondence Analysis. Subsequent Correspondence Analysis run in SPSS 8.0 (SPSS Inc., 1998) included only those words identified as possible core components.

The translation of the word associations from Spanish into English ensured working systematically with the same database. The author and another Colombian psychologist with full command of English conducted the translation separately and the versions compared. Because the translations were literal, that is, each original word was translated from Spanish into its English equivalent, there was total agreement between translators. This warranted complete reliability. Since the units of translation were single words and not lexical structures, the literal translation kept the meaning of the original words.

The following is the complete list of procedures employed in the structural analysis:

1. **Exploration and identification.** It includes the analysis of the complete corpora and the procedure for the determination of possible core elements according to the criteria frequency by mean order of evocation.
2. **Rating procedure.** It compares the evaluation of a selected group of words in a rating scale. The analysis includes the study of the association between the rating and group affiliation.
3. **Categorisation.** It includes a task of categorisation employing the same set of words as in the rating procedure.
4. **Verification of the centrality.** It confirms which of those possible elements are actually recognised as core elements following a variation of the calling into question.
5. **Correspondence analysis.** It maps out the association between group affiliation and the semantics of healthy eating. The first analysis maps the association in the original corpora (all words included). The subsequent analyses present only the association between group and possible core elements.

Geographical boundaries and common memories (migration, settling, urban changes, and cultural traditions) defined the groups. The urban and rural milieus were the basic

contrast. University (professional) and non-university (non-professional) education completed the segmentation. The settings for data collection were the same as in the observational study.

The criteria to be considered an urban or a rural inhabitant was:

1. To have lived in the urban or in the rural area delimited in the study during at least fifteen years.
2. To be living in that area at the time of answering the questionnaires. This was not a problem with both rural groups because all were locals. The professionals had lived for at least five years in an urban centre to complete their university education, usually Bogota, but all of them were born in Arauca and returned as soon they completed their studies. In the urban groups, some subjects were born elsewhere in Colombia but had lived in Bogota for at least fifteen years.

To include a subject as professional the following criteria applied:

To have a university degree in any area or being currently attending university courses to get a professional degree. All the professionals with complete university education had spent between four and five years in a university. Those who had studied two and three-year technical courses were not included as professionals. Subjects with only primary or secondary education were considered non-professionals. The demographic characteristics in table 5.5. may have an overestimation of participants with secondary education, as some people found it embarrassing to disclose their actual educational level.

### *5.10 Exploration and Identification of Core Elements.*

#### **5.10.1 Study Population**

Two hundred subjects completed the free association task, fifty subjects in each group. The characteristics of the groups for this first procedure appear in table 5.5. The average age in the group of urban professionals differ from the other three groups (One-Way ANOVA<sup>17</sup>,  $F = 9.129$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). However, the analysis did not consider the effect of age for several reasons. First, the selection of respondents did not follow statistical segmentation, which views the group as an aggregate of variables. The selection of respondents favoured other criteria such as identity, habitat, and common past. Second,

the younger age in urban professionals is part of the identity of this group as young, educated, urban professionals. Third, research has reported a stronger influence for educational level than for age in the perceptions of health (Margetts, Martinez, Saba, Holm, & Kearney, 1997).

**Table 5.5. Study population: exploration and identification of core elements**

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
<b>Average age</b>	34.9 (20-56)	34.8 (17-60)	34.4 (18-64)	26.6 (17-40)
<b>SD for age</b>	10.0	9.6	10.5	6.7
<b>Education</b>	36% primary 62% secondary	University	38% primary 64% secondary	University
<b>Percentages male/female</b>	45/55	38/62	32/68	46/54
<b>N</b>	50	50	50	50

### 5.10.2 Material

The free-association questionnaire consisted of a page of paper entitled **Time to Eat** (see appendix 12). After a brief written introduction, participants wrote the ideas, words, and images they thought of when they heard the expression **Healthy Eating**. There was no limit in the possible number of words but the questionnaire included only ten lines to write the association.

### 5.10.3 Procedure

The author approached the participants at their homes (Arauca), and in the street and other public places, such as shopping malls (Bogotá) and asked them to complete the questionnaire. Only a few refused participation. After the data collection, the words were listed alphabetically. There was not any categorisation of data as to avoid undue influence by the researcher in the semantics of each group. The words were taken as they were but a standardisation procedure was applied in order to reduce non-relevant semantic variations. The following criteria applied:

- (a) Homogenisation of plurals and singulars: e.g. *carne* and *carnes* [meat], *queso* and *quesos* [cheese], etc.
- (b) Homogenisation of gender (e.g. *balanceado* and *balanceada* [balance]), except when the difference was significant in terms of food (e.g. *pollo* and *gallina* [chicken and hen]).

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<sup>17</sup> Age by group (1,4)



- (c) Quantity was not considered in cases where it did not add a different meaning to the concept (e.g. *agua* and *mucha agua* [water]). However, it was included in those cases when was part of the concept (e.g. *bajo en grasa*, *bajo en sal* [low fat, low salt]).
- (d) Forms of preparation kept separated as in meat and grilled meat, leaving open the possibility of creating new variables through combination.

The author is aware of the arbitrary character of the standardisation procedure. However, the homogenisation of concepts was minimal in order to prevent any loss of relevant data. After applying the criteria mentioned above, the variables were listed in terms of frequency of evocation and order of evocation in a scale from one to ten. The calculation of the average frequency and the average order served to establish the cut-off point determined as the scores above and below average. The combination of both criteria frequency and order of evocation was the method used to explore and identify possible core elements. This method is very convenient to explore centrality in questionnaires and allows formulating initial hypothesis about the possible components of the central core.

### 5.11 Verification of the Centrality

#### 5.11.1 Study Population

Eighty participants answered the questionnaire, twenty for each group. A description of the participants is in table 5.6. Although both professional groups appear younger than the non-professionals, the difference of age was not significant (One-way ANOVA<sup>18</sup>,  $F= 1.059$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 5.6. Study population: verification of centrality**

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Average age	31.9 (17-55)	29 (21-37)	31.7 (20-52)	28.4 (22-35)
SD for age	10.9	4.4	9.6	4.0
Education	20% primary 80% secondary	University	30% primary 70% secondary	University
Percentages male/female	40/60	35/65	45/55	45/55
N	20	20	20	20

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

### 5.11.2 Material

The participants answered a questionnaire entitled **Time to Eat** (see appendix 13). After a brief introduction explaining the objectives of the research, participants completed the tasks divided in three different sections. The first two sections were similar for all the groups. In section one, the task was to rate a list of twenty words in a scale from one (not important at all) to five (very important), according to the importance attributed to every element of healthy eating. The words were randomly selected from the list of possible core elements in the four groups. In section two, the task was to group the same set of words as in the rating procedure in clusters between two and five words. Finally, the procedure demanded that participants give a title to each group or the reason for the grouping. The following list shows the words presented:

*eggs, vegetables, fat-free, salads, tranquillity, fruits, juices, light, rice, clean, low-fat, dairy products, cereals, chicken, delicious, fish, meat, tasty, regularly, nice.*

The third and final section contained the procedure of verification. From a list particular to each group, according to the list of possible core elements identified in the previous procedure, participants should answer if each element was essential for healthy eating. The possible answers were: yes, no, or maybe.

### 5.11.3 Procedure

The questionnaire was applied in the participant home or office. The author was present while the participants answered the questions. In order to make tasks one and two easier for some non-professional participants with low educational level, the words appeared on cards. These tasks were particularly difficult for those in the rural non-professional group, who received the instructions orally due to their difficulties in reading texts. None of them, however, was illiterate and they had no problems in reading the words on the cards except for the word *light*. The procedures for the analysis of each section will be presented in the following order: (a) rating; (b) grouping; and (c) verification. All computations were conducted in SPSS version 8.0.

### 5.12 Rating

The analysis began with the calculation of the average rating for each word in each group. A MANOVA procedure tested the statistical significance of differences between groups. Although the number of respondents in each group was small, which could have a large effect size, a Pillais trace tested the multivariate difference. This is the most robust criterion produced in SPSS. The results were subsequently run in a Factor Correspondence Analysis and mapped in a dimensional solution.

### 5.13 Grouping

From the same list as in the rating procedure, participants grouped the twenty elements in cluster of between two and five words. Later they assigned a title to each cluster. This task, originally conceived to test the links (connectivity) between the elements of the representation, was transformed in this thesis to study the process of classification. According with the suggestions made in chapter 3 on the cultural and historical determinants of the cognitive activity, categorical thinking on healthy eating is more likely to follow situational, concrete thinking, mostly in rural and less educated populations.

The elements listed in each group of words were compared with the title assigned. The categorisations achieved were considered in four categories: not available, concrete, semi-concrete and abstract. The operational definition for each category is in appendix 14. The scores for an individual category ranged from zero to three, where zero is the score for the 'not available' category and three the score for the 'abstract' category. The maximum possible total score is 240; the minimum is 0. The intercoder reliability was seventy-five percent. The categories and the scores are listed in annex.

### 5.14 Verification

In relation to the confirmation of the centrality, the procedure followed a direct questioning of the relevance of those elements considered as probable core units. The direct questioning is a modification of the *calling into question* procedure in which questions are in a double-negative format. Because populations with low educational backgrounds were included in this research, double-negative questions were avoided. Double negatives imply greater cognitive effort, which may increase biases and errors in recognition. In the verification procedure the frequencies of “yes” answers was

compared with the frequencies of “no” answers (no + I do not know) and the difference tested by a binomial distribution.

Those elements with a  $p$  value  $< 0.05$  were identified as the core elements in each group. This intended to be an ‘objective’ measure of centrality. The rhetoric of facts is still widely dominant in social psychology, and therefore I preferred to describe a clear point to decide on the centrality of the elements tested.

### *5.15 Correspondence Analysis*

To map out the representation of healthy eating and to offer a clear picture of the relationship between elements and groups, a Correspondence Analysis was included as a complement to the information provided by the procedures described above. Correspondence Analysis is a multivariate technique that allows the exploration of cross-tabular data, depicting the relationship between two categorical variables in a multidimensional space. Widely employed by French social scientists, the technique is being used in countries other than France and it is a promising method to explore data in social psychology.

In the specific domain of social representations, some authors have used this technique to explore semantic differences in distinct national groups (Wagner, Valencia, & Elejabarrieta, 1996). Bibliographic material is readily available in the Anglo-Saxon literature (Greenacre, 1984; Greenacre, 1994). The technique is accessible from popular statistical packages (SPSS, SAS, BMDP). For the present purposes, all data were run in SPSS for windows version 8.0.

Two main questions were posed: 1) Are there differences in the semantics of healthy eating across groups? If so, 2) are there patterns or semantic classes of healthy eating characteristics of particular groups. Correspondence analysis allows the answering of these questions by creating a perceptual map of the associations between row and column categories. For a very clear explanation of how chi-square measures of association are transformed into distances, the reader is referred to Greenacre (1994).

The word associations produced a relatively big set of variables measured in a nominal scale (binary codes absent-present). For each case (subject) the information on words

were entered as well as some basic demographic information (age, sex, and education). Only sex and education were considered for the analysis. Besides education, gender seems to have a notable influence in the perception of healthy eating (Margetts et al., 1997). The indicator matrix was transformed into a correspondence table in order to perform the calculations.

It should be noted that two different versions of the correspondence analysis were performed. The first encompassed the complete corpora and obtained through ALCESTE (version 4.0). The second was run in SPSS and included only those word presumptive of being part of the central core. In both occasions the data was obtained from the same individuals (N=200). Although it is possible to analyse the categories directly from the indicator matrix using programs such as HOMALS (Homogeneity Analysis of Alternating Least Squares), I was not interested in single individuals but in groups as the unit of analysis. (For an interesting view on consensus that emphasis individual variation the reader might consult (Doise et al., 1993b).

The cross-tabulation matrix consisted of words (rows) and groups (columns). For the first analysis (all corpus included) the group categories were the four rural-urban, professional-non professional combinations. For the subsequent analysis, the variable sex was included. Eight groups were thus classified according to the combinations male-female, urban-rural, professional-non professional. The individual entries in that matrix were the frequencies for each word in every specific group.

The first analysis was produced directly by the ALCESTE Program, showing the projection of semantic classes in a dimensional space. For the second analysis (only words identified as possible core elements included), the normalisation method employed in the first place was the principal normalisation. This method allows examining the relationship between group and word categories separately. Then a symmetrical normalisation procedure was run to plot both variables (words and group affiliation) and analyse the association between them.

## 6 THE PRACTICE OF HEALTHY EATING IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS

### 6.1 *Introduction: Eating in the Context of Nutritional Transitions*

Since ancient times humans have believed that there is a strong association between food and health. In contemporary societies the association between diet and chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and different types of cancer is well known (Rimm et al., 1996; Willet & MacMahon, 1984). Although many other factors intervene in this association, such as heredity, nutritional habits seem to play a crucial role. The advent of new technologies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have made diets more varied. Access to food increased for larger segments of the population, whose possibilities to choose had been restricted due to mainly economic reasons. With the problem of finding something to eat considerably overcome, industrialised societies turned their attention to the preservation of health, apparently threatened by the same processes that procured its improvement, i.e. technology.

Although nutrition has always been on the public health agenda, the focus has changed, at least in developed countries, from nutritional deficiencies to imbalances and excesses. Whilst famines still affect parts of Africa, in other developing countries under epidemiological transition, excesses and shortages occur and many kinds of food remain inaccessible for large sectors of population. Wealthy societies, on the other hand, confront new challenges and nutritional policies are developed to the specific requirements of particular groups. In the United States, an example of a rich economy, obesity has become one of the main health problems for adults and children (Centers for Disease Control, 1994). At the time that there is an increase in overall weight, there are imbalances in diet, indicated by a decline in the intake of some minerals, while the consumption of some other nutrients are above the required levels (*ibid.*). This phenomenon probably exists in many other affluent western societies as well as in some lower-income countries (Popkin & Doak, 1998).

Many categories such as lifestyle and body images interact with nutrition, and the conception of healthy eating is subsumed under ways of life, philosophies and ideologies. Concerns about weight have affected eating practices, but at the same time the adoption of low-fat diet practices have not affected the increase in weight, which is

thought to be associated with a decrease in physical activity (Nicklas, Webber, Srinivasan, & Berenson, 1993). Health concerns have led the United States government to create national campaigns to face nutritional problems in children and adult populations. In the United States some initiatives included food choice strategies, to teach the children skills to make healthy food choices under the theme *Making food choices for a healthy diet* (Kennedy, 1996). A similar goal is pursued in other countries, as in England (Department of Health, 1992). In Colombia, the National Plan of Food and Nutrition 1996-2005 includes the promotion of a 'culture for a healthy eating and lifestyle' though the strategies to achieve the goals have been poorly set out.

Education, media-messages and healthy choices are on the menu of many governmental campaigns and become part of everyday life. Healthy eating has become a sensitive, politically charged issue, from which no one can escape. We are increasingly under pressure to assume the prescriptions of this new conception of eating. No wonder then that it is polemical. Healthy eating is the source of social representations; by that I mean that we need to construct a relationship with this new problematic object, a relationship that is not easy to establish. A book on obesity and eating practices in the United States unleashes criticisms and protests<sup>19</sup>; and an article on the genetic determinants of diet finds reasons to explain the poor impact of prescriptive advice about healthy-eating diets<sup>20</sup>. I will dedicate the second part of this thesis to the presentation of the empirical results. This chapter reports the analysis of the observational study. As a necessary step, I will draw the context of the topic in terms of its recent history.

## 6.2 *Dietary Changes: Historical and Ideological Elements in Food Choice*

The representations of food have been the product of a process that has evolved throughout history. The social representation of healthy eating is a contemporary creation, whose origins can be traced back to the early years of this century, when diets became a remarkable element in the popularisation of medical knowledge (Burnham, 1987). By the mid century, media emphasis on nutrition, physical fitness and exercise, plus a holistic approach to health, marked the main elements of healthy diets. Since then a 'culture of health' endowed society ways of thinking about eating, and ways of life were redefined and grouped as lifestyles.

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<sup>19</sup> Fumento, M. (1997) *The Fat of the Land*. New York: Viking. Cited in *The Independent*, October 22 1997, p. 10

The contemporary conception of healthy eating is a product not only of scientific developments but also a result of economic and technological improvements that began with the industrial revolution in Europe and were continued in subsequent years (Grigg, 1995). These have been termed nutritional transitions. In western Europe such a transition can be seen in the modification in the composition of diet, which passed from a diet rich in starchy staples that accounted for a high percentage of calorie intake in the nineteenth century, to a diet with a high consumption of livestock products as a major source of proteins. According to Grigg there was also an increase in the per capita consumption of fats, not only from animal origin but also from vegetable oils, when margarine became available as an alternative to butter. The increased consumption of vegetable oils was mostly a function of price. According to Grigg, "Before the 1960s the rise of the vegetable oils thus had little to do with health concerns, much to do with cost" (Grigg, 1995, p.255).

Prices played a major role in determining the content of diets. The consumption of sugar, for instance, increased considerably from the late nineteenth century. Its consumption was prohibitive in the early part of the century but once the beet industry and cane producers started to compete, prices fell and sugar became more available. The economic growth in western Europe positively affected people's income, which became high enough to assure access to many kinds of food. As a consequence, prices were not the powerful determinant of food consumption that they once were and started to share the scene with social and cultural factors, including health concerns. For Grigg the concern with health has become "the most important non-economic factor in deciding what is eaten" (Grigg, 1995, p.256) while the effect of income has decreased (Grigg, 1999).

Grigg (1995) suggests that western Europe is experiencing another nutritional transition since the sixties but that it is too early to characterise this change, which does not show a simple trend. The new stage in the transition would be distinguished by the co-existence of several patterns. Popkin (1993) for instance, suggested that different nutritional patterns overlap within a country. In Latin America this process of nutritional overlapping is characterised by the presence of both malnutrition and nutritional excess (see the Introduction). Colombia is a particular example (Universidad

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<sup>20</sup> The Times, March 7 1998 p. 17



del Valle, 1995). It seems to be the concern with health that is distinguishing the new world nutritional pattern (Grigg, 1999; Popkin, 1993), mainly in developed countries.

The possibilities for food choice have dramatically increased in the last few years, making the food market quite varied. The availability of food ready to eat so that we do not have to spend time preparing is the order of the day. Now it is called convenience food. Snacks like Muesli bars became famous for their intention to integrate taste with health. The bran impetus provided an easy and fast way to have a healthy breakfast to prevent constipation and to clean the bowels from toxicity supposedly related to colon cancer. Besides variety and opportunity, there are other factors influencing food choice such as cultural values, which determine what is considered ideal or improper within the group (Nestle et al., 1998).

Food choice is a process abundant in ideological elements. Germov and Williams (1996) argued how dieting practices among women, for instance, are deeply ideological. Dietary practices of women have been influenced by what they called *the culture of slimming*, which in a certain way determine the healthiness of dietary practices. Thus, a good food is one that produces weight loss. The culture of slimming provides body models to be followed in order to adjust to western standards of beauty. These models are not only in the feminine domain but also influence masculine perceptions of the body, where men are under increased pressure to assume the standards of good-looking appearances and athletic bodies. Advice as to losing the gut is available in magazines, and a market of products to improve masculine physical appearance following western ideals is expanding.

There is a complex discourse around food, health and beauty. Deviance from the norm, i.e. lack of fitness, is severely penalised through stigmatisation and blame, and overweight is something to be ashamed of. Some referred to *healthism* as an ideological product (Germov & Williams, 1996), a new form of morality in individualistic societies where the body's beauty becomes a supreme value. This way of thinking is taken as something natural as if it had always been as such. Even more, it is seen as a fact that does not correspond to specific historical moments of humankind. The discourse of health and food is ideological because it transcends the limits of any single social representation to impregnate the way we feel and the way we should think, the taken-for-granted. It is also a contradictory discourse because at the same time as it

emphasises the individual responsibility and freedom of choice according to the ideology of the new conservatism, it imposes limits to that freedom.

The discourses on healthy eating are structured around the challenge that both health and eating pose for contemporary societies. I consider that the relationship with this object of social representation is necessarily immersed in struggles and disagreements. In her seminal work on health and illness, Herzlich (1973) found an intense conflict between the individual, the bearer of health, and society, the bearer of illness. This dynamic was portrayed in the relationship between the rural, the natural, and the urban, the polluted. The investigation was conducted in the sixties in France, but the results remain valid. The healthy opposes to the altered, the latter always a product of human intervention. Since the relationship between the individual and society is framed in mutual distrust, the former doubts the ability of the latter to regulate effectively the scope of those interventions.

Contemporary societies undergo constant and rapid changes that are causing a complete transformations in the way we eat. The *Millenium* has become in itself a social representation that deals with the influx of risks and uncertainties. Kumar (1995) characterised modern societies around some central aspects such as the ecological crisis, the fragmentation of natural cultures, the persistence of religion and the decline of traditional political ideologies. Perhaps one of the most characteristic features of these societies is the development of global cultures. The phenomena of *globalisation* portray a new cosmopolitan culture and reflect asymmetrical processes of influence in which social inequalities are perpetuated. It is also a dialectical circumstance because of the interplay between the global and the local. In this sense Kumar (1995) suggested how in this process the cosmopolitan re-create the local and in the process, the consumption of the global following local standards transforms again the global into the local.

Global dishes clash with local cuisines resembling the conflict between integration and nationalism; the homogenisation of foodways portrays a new cultural order. The hamburger, for instance, is not just the global gastronomic speciality. It has become above all, a cultural representation that identifies contemporaneity, jointly with Coca Cola and fried potatoes. Fast food enters the global scene with an impressive force. A parade of products move along exhibiting colourful combinations: fried noodles, tacos, tandoori chicken or pizza are eaten in London as in New York, Buenos Aires or Cairo.

The global product is then also local when is consumed according to regional characteristics. It is not only that these new foods are transformed by the culture where they are consumed but also that they transform that culture.

Fantasia (1995) conducted an interesting investigation on the incursion of fast food in France. He pointed out a number of factors that have caused the increase of this industry in France, particularly the weakening of family ties, increased urban traffic, working schedules and the increased number of women working. But Fantasia rightly suggested that the issue around such increase is not culinary. It has to do mainly with economic and cultural factors, where fast food is associated with the culture of informality and convenience; in short, with a cultural representation of Americanism. Fantasia declared: "By the time it entered the French market in the 1980s, McDonald's basic policy was not to adapt to foreign cultures, but to change the cultures to fit McDonald's" (1995, p. 230).

In this process there is an inevitable shock between local cuisine and global diet. The confrontation is not about taste. It is mainly about the preservation of local identity threatened by American fast food. The following comment appeared in a British newspaper: "A legal struggle against McDonald's demonstrated that there was a substantial body of opposition to the relentless onwards and upwards of American fast food culture"<sup>21</sup>. In France the defence of the culinary patrimony led to the creation of the National Council of Culinary Arts. But as Fantasia stated: "Attempting to defend traditional cultural forms against 'cheap commercialism' while simultaneously encouraging 'market forces' as the only logical arbiter of human affairs is a losing game" (Fantasia, 1995, p.233).

In the process of accessing wide segments of population, the fast food industry recognises the prominence of healthy eating as part of its marketing strategy. Although both are perceived as antagonistic concepts, the tactics lies in linking them to get a 'delicious', 'balanced diet', with all the paraphernalia of ecological militancy. Take as an example all those convenient, ready-to-eat cereal products, that make part of the 'global breakfast' for middle and upper class urban people all over the world. These products, completely inserted into the ideology of *healthism*, materialises the concept of

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<sup>21</sup> Burger Kings march on UK stomachs: Fast food chains plan huge expansion, in The Guardian, December 31 1997.

healthy eating evoking notions such as equilibrium, symmetry, optimality and balance in complete accordance with the fascination of the Western culture for Oriental philosophies. The best option is then the use of such concepts to name products and to transmit the message to all that buy them. The Kellogg Company, for example, has given its products names such as 'Healthwise Bran Flakes'; 'Healthwise Sultana Bran'; 'Optima Fruit 'N Fibre'; 'Common Sense Oat Bran Flakes with raisins & apple', and 'Just Right, Not too heavy, Not too light'.

### *6.3 Eating Healthily and The Observed Practices*

Contrary to eating, healthy eating cannot be observed directly. It has to be interpreted, for it is not about the action of chewing the food but about the meaning attributed to the food and to the act of eating in the light of cultural values. Though several observers may agree on the fact that the person is eating, they may disagree about the healthiness of that eating. To the extent that observing is interpreting, I supported my observations with the accounts of some of the actors and on documentary sources, i.e. magazines, which describe the eating in Colombia. The results describe eating in general and not healthy eating. To be interpreted, healthy eating needs to be reconstructed, and that it was precisely the intention of this first methodological approach.

Comparing distinct milieus, I approached the re-creation of eating and the different ways of dealing with the changes in the re-construction of food. While globalisation and societal transformations, such as urbanisation, influence the collective construction of eating, neither the degree nor the benefits of these influences are uniform across the different groups that constitute the Colombian society. Rampant inequalities in the distribution of wealth mark the multifarious character of the access to food. The group weaves the representation negotiating the economic conditions and the axioms reproduced by health professionals and by the media.

The observation of eating practices took into account this duality by emphasising the rational/rationalising components of the representation. In order to fulfil the double function, the groups would re-define the sense of the representation when appropriate. They would define healthy eating in terms of what is good for the body, the 'physically healthy', when the practices were consistent with the axiom, or in terms of what is good

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for the spirit, the 'psychologically healthy', when practices were inconsistent. This is an old philosophical dilemma in the realm of common sense.

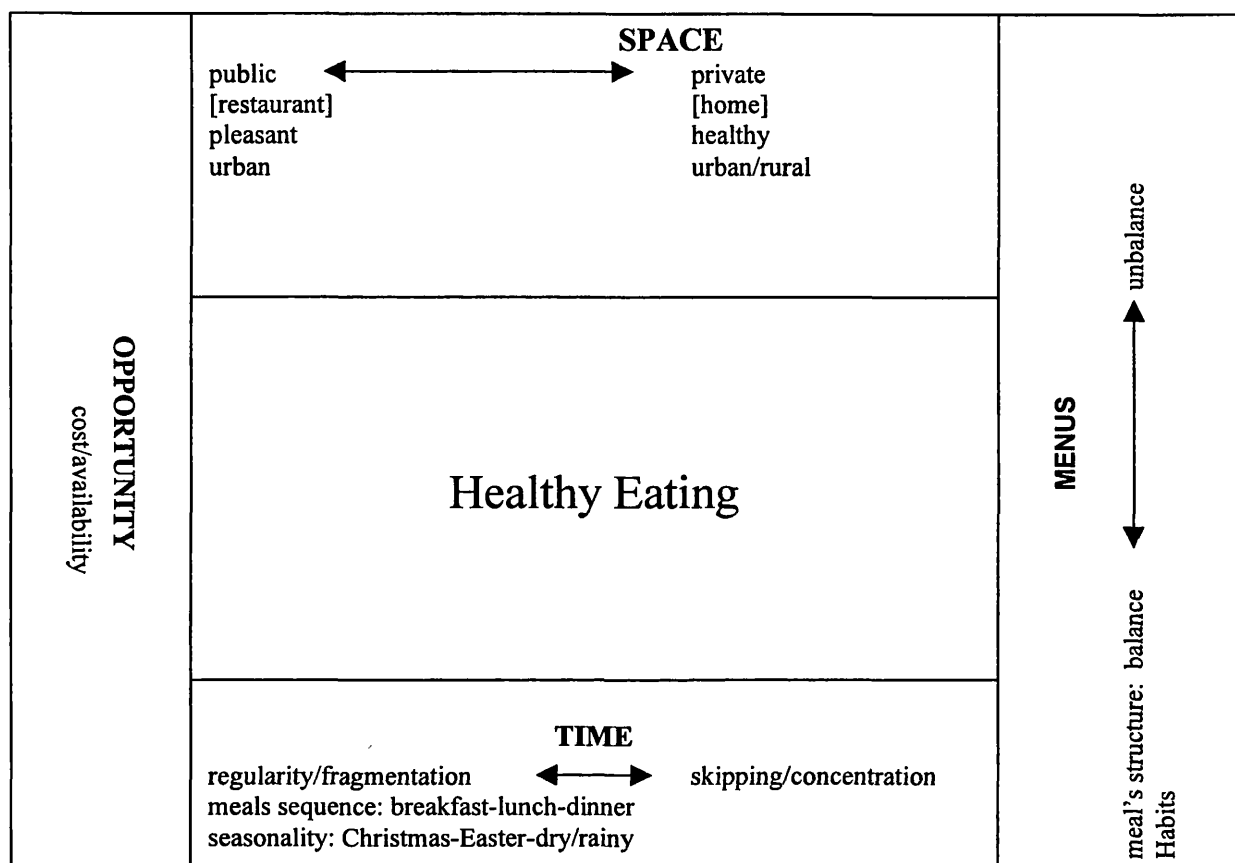
In addition to the eating, the observation included, the process of purchase and preparation (see appendix 3). All the information collected was codified and interpreted in the four dimensions that define eating: opportunity, space, time and menus (see Figure 6.1). The codification was illustrated with photographs (107 photographs), some of which are presented in appendix 4. In general, opportunity and habits were referred to as the most important factors in deciding what to eat. As suggested in Fig. 6.1 the dimensions of eating allows us not only to define what we eat but also to defend the choices we made. The evaluations are never made on an all-or-none basis but always in relation to the context where the choice is made.

As Fig. 6.1 suggests, the space of healthy eating is almost invariably home, the 'private' space of everyday life. The term *home-made* typifies the conceptual relationship between home and health; home serves as a protective space against the impurities and toxicity of the outside, the street. Home-made food opposes street food, the reservoir of contamination. The preparation and consumption of foods at home contrast with the public consumption in restaurants, an eating to socialise. Eating out is a phenomenon on the increase and typically urban. Between these two poles, the home-made and the restaurant, we might find many possibilities and combinations.

Another dimension to consider is the time. Eating follows a daily sequence and seasonality. The daily sequence is familiar to all of us, breakfast, lunch and dinner, though the amounts and contents of each of these meals vary according to the social group. Seasonality relates to the influence of time in the availability of some foods; also to cultural norms, such as religious values, prescribing some foods at particular times or forbidding the consumption of others, and even commanding fasting. The consumption of foods and the healthy character of such consumption acquire a different meaning depending upon the seasonal context.

People have ordinarily three meals. The importance of this micro-sequence, as compared with the macro-sequence just mentioned above (i.e. seasonality), lies in the

**Fig. 6.1 Four components defining healthy eating in daily practices.**



notion of regularity, a key term for healthy eating. Regularity interprets the idea that the human being has a biological clock. The alteration of the regularity, that is, of the biological clock, through skipping meals or concentrating too much of the food in just one meal, is hazardous for the health. The healthy option is to have regular meals and to fragment the consumption of foods, that is, to eat small amounts at regular times when needed, as the body demands. Since there are not categorical but contextual clues to interpret the healthiness of the food in relation to the time when is eaten, the two poles of fragmentation and concentration are connected by an arrow, which represents the range of possibilities.

A third dimension is the menu. Here it would be two basic concepts, balance and habits. Balance was always meant as varied, not too much of just one thing; it reflects the structure of the meal, its composition. The concept of balance also implies the confrontation of forces, so if the unhealthy is consumed, the healthy would counter-effect the risk posed. Too much greasy food, for instance, can be balanced with a good portion of vegetables and fruits. Balance is a state of equilibrium, moderation might be a way to achieve it. The other concept is that of habit. Food habits resemble tradition, part of the group's identity. When the habit is part of what is viewed as a tradition of the group, it is reconstructed as healthy.

Finally, the model considers opportunity as another dimension to define and to justify healthy eating practices. Opportunity is re-constructed around cost, for example the price of food items and the time needed to prepare them, and availability. Availability has to do essentially with food supply, money, knowledge and skills that are accessible for the preparation of specific foods. These elements are taken into account in the process of choosing what to eat. The context of opportunity is important because it allows a particular configuration in the meaning of the representation. It is not uncommon for government campaigns aimed at improving the nutritional status of the population to emphasise knowledge and skills on how to prepare healthy foods without ensuring an appropriate opportunity context, e.g. an adequate supply and distribution of foods.

There is the perception that in Colombia we do not eat healthily (e.g. *Los peligros del chanchullo*, Cambio16, No. 174, 1996). The proliferation of fast-food venues, for instance, is seen as a fantastic business opportunity in a nation avid for fast-food (Hoy

X Hoy, No. 273, 1991) and as a sign of economic welfare when the fast food supposes the arrival of multinational food companies, mainly American, in times of economic openness<sup>22</sup> (Semana, Nov. 19, 1990). Fast food, the opponent of healthy food, entered the Colombian market by the mid-1970s. Though at the beginning it was a market oriented mainly towards the elite groups, those in lower incomes increasingly gained access to fast-food menus as they were the work-force of the industry (Hoy X Hoy, No. 273, 1991).

Yet, people have a good idea about what healthy eating is supposed to be, which seems to contradict the perceived practices. If there are changes in the ways Colombians are eating, these changes seem not to have a clear and absolute trend. The representation is then lived in the apparent or real contradictions and ambiguities that characterise the conditions of social life. In the next sections of this chapter, I will present the results of the observations in the space, time and menu dimensions of eating. The influence of the economic factors is all-pervasive, affecting where, when and what we eat.

### 6.3.1 Space

The space of eating is expressed in two domains, the public and the private. The private corresponds to the intimate practice of home meals while the public refers mainly to eating in restaurants, food stalls and other public places. Eating is not an unitary process but the result of a sequence that involves growing, producing, factoring, trading, buying and cooking; the variety of places where food is differentially consumed tells a lot of its representation. The sequences listed above differ in urban and in rural settings and according to social class. While in the urban sector actors participate only in some of the components of the sequence, in rural areas there is still an active involvement in the process of food production.

In general terms it is possible to state that the more educated urban groups live considerably further from the origins of food. In supermarkets and delicatessen the meat, for example, is bought already cut (i.e. in steaks or any other aesthetic form) and packed. Being frozen, the meat found in these places hides its essence: blood, nerves, connective tissues, fat and the odour of flesh. Supermarkets decorate the display of different meats (e.g. legs, ribs, fillets, etc.) by using parsley or pieces of orange or

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<sup>22</sup> The *apertura* policy.



lemon, the vegetarian touch, and present it as the product of a bloodless and aseptic process, breaking the chain between slaughtering and eating. The supermarkets visited (five) had in all the cases the display of fruits and vegetables by the entrance, at the right; we are confronted with the illusion of health. The meat is sold at the back. In most upper and middle-class homes, a domestic worker is employed to deal directly with the mass of muscles and do the cooking. The eater is thus barely faced with the process of transforming the raw into the cooked.

This dissociation of eating from production was not found in any of the three remaining groups. Though the urban non-professionals do not have an active participation in the production of food, they still keep contact with the land they left behind by buying their food in the markets. There, hens are bought live and the fresh products just arriving from the farms still have traces of earth and mud on them. Meat is 'more real' in these markets as in the *barrio* butcher' shops, where entire pieces hang from big hooks and the butcher cuts the piece the client wants to buy, manipulating the knife with incredible precision. The butchers display their distinctive white coats completely stained with blood, and the smell of blood and viscera is an integral part of the atmosphere. In contrast to the more 'civilised' world of supermarkets, this is the harsh world of raw food.

In Arauca, the population usually buys its food in local (usually very small) supermarkets, corner stores and in the town's market. This market, however, differs from the markets in Bogota because of the key role the market plays in the life of this small town. The market is then not only the place to buy food but the place to learn the latest news and events and still a place to socialise. The busiest hours are those in the morning, between six and eight, when people come to buy the food for the day's meals. The market offers fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy products, grains and fish, and although the quality of fruits and vegetables is not that of the markets of Bogotá, there is still a good variety on offer.

The market is supplied with fruits and vegetables three days per week: Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Most people go to the market to buy meat products. There are some stalls placed just in front the butchers' stalls selling traditional local dishes and typical dishes for immediate consumption. This is interesting inasmuch as the eating is carried out with the view of carcass and no attempt is made to conceal the palpable

anatomy of what is ingested. It is not uncommon for some local people to sell meat in their own houses when they slaughter a pig or a cow and inform friends, relatives and other possible clients. Though there is a more direct involvement with the food process, the participation in food production has decreased while the town becomes more 'urbanised'.

The most direct combination of producing and eating occurs with the rural non-professional inhabitants. It is when they are in their farms working, and not in the town, that we see the most basic and revealing aspects of eating. Although killing a cow is occasional, when it takes place it is an opportunity to prove the 'basic' skills every peasant in the region must have. The work starts very early in the morning (dawn) around four or five when the animal is knocked down. Someone with experience, usually one of the oldest or most experienced men, begins the ritual by plunging his dagger (everybody carries one) in the animal's neck. Immediately after the animal stops whining, the work of skinning begins by pulling the hide, which has to be preserved to make ropes. The ribs are separated with an axe, followed by the process of taking the parts of the animal out to be salted. Some parts, such as the intestines are thrown away but most of the animal is preserved for food. This is a job for the men, while the women wait for the meat in the kitchen to begin the cooking.

Pigs are killed in a similar way although the slaughtering has one more step. Before plunging the knife, the head of the animal is flayed with the back of an axe. After the flaying and when the animal stops squealing, the knife is plunged in the neck allowing all the blood to come out from the body, which is collected to prepare blood sausages. What for some other groups would be a barbaric act, cruelty against animals who have rights and deserve to be treated like humans (while sometimes treating other people like animals), for the peasantry it is still the way they deal with the everyday act of eating. These skills of slaughtering, to know how to quarter animals, is declining with every new generation. Some middle-aged and elder members of the community complained about the new generation that does not know how to carry out the activities every man in *The Llanos* must know.

The new morality of the relationship with animals has not yet touched these communities who still proclaim the domination of the human being over the rest of the creatures. During my observation I saw people slaughtering iguanas to take their eggs

for consumption, and killing small alligators for the flavours of their tails. No such things as an endangered species is recognised and I got the impression that these activities have to do not only with food and eating, but also with the need to dominate nature and not rarely with the expression of aggressive drives. The urban inhabitant, on the other hand, having lost contact with the 'natural' and aware of the detachment, seeks a new relationship with nature. Mother Nature appears as the long-suffering mother to whose lap he/she rushes to be nurtured, to get fresh air and to rest from the evil and harmful influence of the industrialised life. For the rural inhabitants, still living in harsh conditions of neglect, oversight and misery, the relationship with nature is one of struggle and survival. In that struggle the power of men and women is exerted over nature, who both intimidates and gives food, to finally surrender to the domination of the human being.

From the production/purchase we move onto preparation and cooking. From the integral kitchens of the urban elite, down to the rustic kitchens of the rural inhabitant, there are all kinds of spaces and atmospheres. In Colombia the kitchen is still the woman's space, although men are becoming over time more involved in the preparation of food. In rural life when the food to be prepared is not conventional (e.g. game), the man takes charge of the preparation.

Once the cooking finishes, it is put on the table for consumption. In some urban professional homes the space of eating is different for breakfast or everyday lunch, usually a small table in the kitchen, while the dining room is reserved for special occasions and/or when there are guests. Cutlery is displayed in the usual way as in any 'western' country, basically a spoon, a fork and a knife. For rural non-professionals the cutlery is reduced to forks and spoons. The men carry their own knives and meat is often eaten with the hands, holding the entire joint and pulling off a small piece with the teeth. Furthermore, bones may be gnawed and accumulated at one side of the plate.

The public space for eating is typically the restaurant. For the urban inhabitant with purchasing power the restaurant brings the flavours of the global cuisine. In Bogotá it is possible to find restaurants for almost every kind of food: Japanese, Arab, French, Italian, Tex-Mex, Chinese, to name a few. The working class does not have access to such a cosmopolitan world. The restaurants they frequent are mainly rotisseries and

*fritanguerías*<sup>23</sup>, which are visited on Sundays, the day for family gathering and outing. The big fast-food chains of hamburgers and pizzas do not have branches in the deprived areas. They are concentrated basically in the more affluent sectors of the city, where they offer among other facilities the *drive-thru* restaurants so people do not have to get out of their cars to buy food.

Travelling around the town of Arauca I noted a good number of places to eat. Bakeries, soda fountains and restaurants as such were all available. Though there is not the variety of the menus as in Bogotá, an effort is made to introduce some specialities under the label of *international dishes*. Global foods are available with a local touch (pizza, hot-dogs, hamburgers) along other more regional fast food (*arepas rellenas*<sup>24</sup>). In total, the space where food is consumed is very much related to class boundaries. Eating out, when eating becomes public, illustrates the very distinctive patterns of food consumption across classes. For the urban working class eating out, as the opportunity for gathering, participation, and communion, is immersed in the representation of healthy eating. In this group the practice of eating in a public place is also less regulated and less marked by convention, compared to the upper urban classes. The rural inhabitant, on the other side, is less likely to visit restaurants and his/her eating out experience is almost nearly reduced to food stalls and pedlars. Healthy eating has a relative space, meaning that it is not fixed, which is defined according to specific circumstances. Frequently the inside (home) is opposed to the outside (restaurant); the rural (natural) to the urban (contaminated); the refined (high cuisine) to the vulgar (fast-food venues).

### 6.3.2 Time

Eating is a regulated practice that follows a periodisation. While the timing of eating obeys the organisation of economic production, regularity is in itself a component of the representation of healthy eating. This timing differs between the rural and the urban in the number of meals and the hours at which is consumed. The times for eating are usually morning (breakfast), midday (lunch) and evening (dinner). Occasionally urban

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<sup>23</sup> Stalls where greasy food or *fritanga* is sold.

<sup>24</sup> Arepa is a cornmeal roll that can be eaten alone or filled up with chicken, shredded meat, ham or cheese, etc.

elites have *brunch* on weekends, which may be bought in hotels. The pattern breakfast-lunch-dinner is the usual organisation of meals, except in the very rural areas of Arauca, where lunch does not exist.

In these areas there is a distinctive pattern of breakfast by mid-morning (around nine o'clock) and dinner, early in the evening (around four or five o'clock). This distribution of meals adapts to work schedules. The people there usually get up very early in the morning (around five) to begin their daily activities. Women usually begin by setting the fire and preparing coffee for the men who are at this time milking or herding the horses. In the evening, because there is no electricity, people go to sleep very early (around seven or eight) and therefore the meal must be taken in the early evening. In periods of intensive work (e.g. branding), getting up is even earlier (around three o'clock), as early as possible before the heat of the day arrives, around midday, when temperatures may easily reach forty degrees centigrade.

In the town of Arauca the situation is much the same as in any other Colombian city. Breakfast around seven; lunch around one and dinner around half past six. The distribution follows the work schedule, which is interrupted by midday. Between twelve and two in the afternoon, the hours of more intense heat, offices and commerce close and people go home to have lunch and take a siesta. The next and final step is dinner, which closes the daily meal's cycle. Regularity means that this sequence is respected and is opposed to the unhealthy habit of skipping or concentrating meals. Concentration alludes to getting much of the food needed in just one meal, usually lunch. A dietician from Bogotá talked of 'fragmentation' as the act of keep eating small quantities of food as the person gets hungry.

Due to time constraints, skipping meals is not alien to the urban middle and upper classes. When the poorest skip meals they do so due to economic reasons, as when there is no food or money left. In Bogotá, the rush hour between six and eight every morning allow no time to sit and have a breakfast as people would in Arauca. Eating when not carried out according to the periodisation and time regulations imposed by society is perceived as unhealthy and linked to the stressful life in big cities. Calm, regularity and tranquillity are part of the social representation of healthy eating, at least at the axiomatic level. Tranquillity, for instance, seems to be an indicator of healthy eating for the urban inhabitant.

The importance of mealtime for the family to come together is diminishing. Economic reasons among other possible causes have led to this disappearance of dinner from many Colombian homes, at least during weekdays. Reinforcing this phenomenon, the temporal dimension of eating is undergoing a transformation in terms of the time devoted to it and the structuring of meals. The dinner, some time ago made of a typical combination of starchy staples, meat or chicken and juice, has given place to a cup of coffee with milk or chocolate and a piece of bread or croissant. Beyond the inconvenience of coming home and preparing a traditional meal, people justify this light dinner in terms of 'health': not going to bed too full. Convenience food fills the gap created by the transformations in the time spared for food consumption. The convenience comes from the lack of preparation needed for a range of frozen ready-to-cook products offered in supermarkets, which nonetheless are not particularly enjoyed by Colombians. Convenience is also represented in eating with the increasing consumption of fast food and take-away, very popular on Sundays in the afternoon.

But time refers to the sequence of presentation of dishes as well. The sequence roughly distinguishes between *sopa* and *seco* (soup and the main meal). Sometimes desserts are added to the sequence. This sequence is perfectly exemplified in the 'executive lunch', which copies the prototype of a proper meal. The 'executive lunch' is an urban invention to deal with impossibility for employees to go home and prepare lunch. In Colombia lunch is the most important meal of the day and Bogotá has many places offering such meals. Following urban expansion (which increases distances and reduce the time available for cooking), in Arauca the number of places where people can go and buy lunch is also increasing. The order of an 'executive lunch' is standard: Soup, then the *seco* (rice, a piece of meat or chicken or less frequently fish, accompanied by plantain, cassava or potato, with a portion of salad). In some places dessert is added to the menu. A fruit juice (the healthy choice) or a Coca-Cola, is very popular as food complement.

During the collection of data in Bogotá I had this type of lunch almost every day and had the opportunity of eating the same type of meal in Arauca. Differently to Bogotá, in Arauca many of the places where one can buy the 'executive lunch' are not restaurants but family homes where a monthly fee is paid to have lunch. The selling of food is an extra income for the limited pocket of many families. At the same time it offers

convenience food to the people with work schedules and those in the town on temporary basis. A computer engineer working with the local authority said that, for her, preparing food is boring and laborious and that she preferred to use her spare time for activities other than cooking.

The observations took place during a special part of the year: December. Christmas and New Year are good opportunities to see the preparation of traditional recipes, although such traditions are becoming increasingly ignored due to the pressures of the cosmopolitan life. Along *hayacas*<sup>25</sup>, *tamales*<sup>26</sup>, and *chicha*<sup>27</sup>, there was turkey, roast ham with plums and some brand of whiskey, varying according to the purchasing power (this combination was observed in educated rural inhabitants. The less educated prepared mainly traditional dishes). In Bogotá the culinary traditions are not as rooted as in Arauca, where the knowledge of how to prepare a traditional dish is an important component of local identity. Bogotá characterises the 'national spirit' with a population coming from every province of Colombia. Here the national overlies on the regional, and is reinterpreted as variety. The variety is reconstructed as national identity. By the time I began to observe the eating practices in Arauca, most people had *hayacas* 'coming out their ears'. Excesses are allowed at this time of the year and food is still shared more than in any other season.

### 6.3.3 Menu

Healthy eating marks a new relationship with food and illustrates the conflict between the individual, who wants to satisfy a need, and the norms and values that society imposes. It is certainly in this conflict that the individual (as member of a group) may exercise his/her ability to change the sense of his/her representation, strategically 'jumping', as it were, from one expressive configuration to another while keeping some congruence between the acting, the regulatory norm (the frame or collective knowledge) and the opportunity. It was obvious in the observation of what people actually eat that there is not a sharp consistency or inconsistency between discourse and deeds; I shall argue in favour of the interplay of meanings and circumstances that make possible

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<sup>25</sup> A traditional dish made of cornmeal with pork and vegetables wrapped in banana leaves, eaten in Venezuela and parts of The Llanos region of Colombia.

<sup>26</sup> Similar to *hayacas*.

<sup>27</sup> An alcoholic drink made from fermented maize.

negotiations and favourable outcomes. In other words, the interpretation of the implication is what ensures the consistency and rationality of the social practice.

The most relevant feature again is the class separation. On one extreme there is the fashionable urban elite that imitates international standards of food consumption and on the other the peasantry who remain attached to local patterns. Bourdieu (1989), the French sociologist, demonstrated the relationship between menu and class identity, where eating symbolically expresses class differences. These differences were expressed in menus across space and time. The variety of food found in the supermarkets frequented by the upper and the upper-middle classes contrasted with the more uniform options of the lower class. The first offer international brands while the second 'resign' to national products. This contrast applies to restaurants and in home consumption as well and was especially notorious in the urban world. Class differences in daily menus were almost imperceptible in the rural population.

Globalisation means the move towards the standardisation of eating within a culture of consumerism. But this global eating is not for everybody. At the same time that it homogenises the cosmopolitan world, it also puts some distance between the affluent and the needy separating the trendy from the traditional. Between both conditions (global-local) many situations may be found. In a visit to one of the working class neighbourhoods, the four years old child of a cleaner told me about his breakfast that day: *Arepa* and Kellogg's Corn Flakes. These patterns of consumption also follow ecological demands. While the urban inhabitant would be surprised with the amount and contents (including meat) of a peasant's breakfast, the latter would find the cereal option ridiculous. Obviously the needs for high-energy diets of someone whose work requires physical strength is different from the needs of a person who does office work.

Economic factors continue to be the main determinant of the diet. The world infant formula products create a need for parents to balance their babies' nutrition. The use of preparations and products for child nutrition are gaining currency in urban working class populations influenced by the media and the commercial promotion of child foods. Sometimes leading brands are unaffordable for those with low incomes, who alternatively buy products of questionable quality 'to restore' the nutritional equilibrium of their children. While exploring the diets I found many of these potions in the homes of those visited.



The consumption of food and its transformations reflect the historical and economic processes of a particular group. Laura<sup>28</sup>, an Italian woman (57) who has lived in Colombia the last thirty-five years explained those transformations in the following way:

**Laura:** In an environment a little more...low [talking quietly], vegetables are rarely eaten. Here [Colombia] nobody knew vegetables, nobody knew courgettes, nobody knew...thirty years ago nobody knew the artichoke! People did know the carrots and some other vegetables. But eating grated carrots in salads? Nobody did so.

**Researcher:** So it seems we're experiencing some changes in the ways we eat. Perhaps more variety?

**Laura:** There is more variety because the contact with other cultures...it has to do with civilising. It is not an economic issue because vegetables have always been cheap. But they were not part of the food habits.

**Researcher:** I found that all the people I've talked to considered vegetables very important for healthy eating.

**Laura:** They say...do you know why they say so? Because they've read and seen diets and are told what are the best foods. But when they go to eat, they continue eating pasta, rice or whatever but vegetables...well, just a little. They can say so but...there are people who read and read, and watch TV and are told that vegetables are very good for one's health, that broccoli is good to prevent cancer, for the colon. Then people do get it, but when they go to eat, may be because nobody prepares those [vegetables] for them they continue eating the same.

The association between food preferences and social class has already been reported (Povey et al., 1998). A survey conducted in 1995 with a sample from Bogotá showed an association between the daily consumption of salads and raw vegetables and socio-economic stratum (Centro Nacional de Consultoría, 1995). The same pattern was found for the daily consumption of fresh fruits, with a higher reported eating among women (74%) than among men (64%). The consumption of pulses (beans, lentils and garbanzos) showed the opposite pattern, which might relate to the fact that pulses are considered a substitute of meat. The pattern of meat consumption was, however, surprisingly similar across groups. Carbonated drinks (average 32%) and rice (average 93%), which showed a very high pattern of daily consumption also showed similar trends.

As expected in a country with a very rich ethnic diversity, menus portray the encounter between different groups. Due to the geographical characteristics of the country,

Colombian cuisine has remained very regional though the situation has begun to change in the last few years. The food consumed in Arauca is still based on particular characteristics related to its long history of isolation and processes of settling. When the Conquistadors made their incursions to *Los Llanos* searching for El Dorado, the Guahibo people inhabited the place where Arauca is located. The diet of these original inhabitants was mainly product of hunting and fishing. The cuisine of the newcomers incorporated some of the ingredients of the exotic cooking of the natives and adapted to the geography of the region. The majority of the recipes have as vegetarian ingredients garlic, spring onions and onions. Some products as the annatto are still widely used to add colour and taste to the food. Although most of the local specialities are made of game, in practice few people actually prepare them. Capybara's shredded meat, turtle's soups, and paca's stews are among the recipes registered in a local cook book. In a sense this consumption was a demonstration of strength, ability and power and was related to the *Llanero's* image, who has no problems at all in eating almost anything, compared to the namby-pamby consumption of some urban visitors.

#### 6.4 A 'Natural Experiment'

As part of the observations conducted, I invited a group of three adult people, who lived in the outskirts of south Bogotá, in Soacha, to have lunch one Sunday in December. I met them through my contact with the local community, Ana, a domestic servant. They were told they could decide where to go and order all what they wanted and that I would pay the bill. After meeting and introducing ourselves we talked for about one hour. I explained that I was working on a project about food and eating, that I was very interested in knowing people's opinions on eating and healthy eating and that a restaurant seemed the perfect place to talk about it. Later they guided me to the restaurant they had chosen in the town of Soacha. The guests were: Ana (38), Pedro (35), a lorry driver and Lucy (35), his wife. Ana took her little son (five years old) with her. They are typical of the urban non-professional group.

The restaurant they chose was a *fritanguería* in Soacha. Upon arrival everybody ordered beer to drink. Ana and Lucy started with a tripe soup, and Pedro with *Cuchuco*, a wheat and pork soup. After the soup and as main meal Ana ordered brisket with cassava and potato. Pedro ate heart, pork's maw, potato and cassava, and Lucy ate hen. Obviously

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<sup>28</sup> All the names have been changed

none of these was supposed to be a component of a healthy diet, albeit some of the dishes (tripe soup) were associated with healthy eating by a few individuals in the free association questionnaires (see chapter 8) and made part of the experience of healthy eating in practice. What is particularly relevant in the context of this ‘experiment’ is the move of the representation from one structural state to another as long as the individual is asked to justify his /her choices and confronted with the frames provided by what is acceptable, or in other words, by the collective dimension of the belief. When Lucy said: “taste is what keeps you alive”, she was conceiving the notion of healthy eating in a different way. The following dialogue is part of the conversation we had after I asked Lucy about the healthiness of her choices:

**Researcher:** you really like starchy food....you had plantain, cassava and potato, as starter...

**Ana:** it’s said that one must have only one starch...

**Lucy:** I don’t think that put weight on me, only soups are fattening for me.

**Researcher:** [laughing] but you had soup as well...

**Lucy:** Yes, I did. But because they tempted me [referring to the fact that Ana and Pedro had ordered soup as well].

**Pedro:** But I eat a lot and I don’t gain weight. I remain always the same.

When my guests were confronted with their choices, the representation moved from one specific configuration, the moderate, fruits and vegetables diet, to another of body image. They moved again to other configuration related to the enjoyment of life. The transformation of symbolic senses still accepts the meaning of healthy eating as vegetarian but shows them under a different light. The notion of health is to be transformed as well. The dialogue continued later as follows:

**Lucy:** I know that soups put weight on me. I don’t eat soup. When my clothes are tight on me I diminish my food intake. What I like is vegetables, salads and fruits. And she added, aware of the choice she had made:

For me tranquillity is what does not make me feel sick or disagree with me. When I eat with relish I feel good.

The evidence however is conclusive. They took me to a place where there are none of the healthy choices they mentioned earlier when we met (i.e., fruits, vegetables, salads, lean meat). Mercedes began to evaluate the choice made by the others (including mine) to realise that something was not completely congruent and launched a key question:

**Lucy:** I do want to ask something, what does healthy mean?

**Ana:** For me, healthy eating is home-made and clean food

**Lucy:** but even if you prepare the food at home, foods are made of chemicals. Because if we see the vegetables, the plant sown today tomorrow is like this [referring to the height and demonstrating with her hands] because is [planted] with chemicals. If we eat chicken, the chicken is put in the incubator today and fed with chemicals and tomorrow the chicken will already be grown. Hens are made to lay three eggs each day and if it is beef is the same...you have a little cow and after few days...everything is chemicals.

**Ana:** so I ask myself what is healthy eating?

**Pedro:** for me it is to eat with relish so you know that it is not going to make you feel sick. That's my concept.

**Lucy:** for me is to eat tranquil and to eat what you enjoy.

The definitions are complemented with examples of people who ate what they wanted and kept healthy their entire lives and some others eating low fat and being ill. These illustrations allow them to question the notion of healthy eating and to doubt the relevance of vegetables, salads and low fat. The configuration of the structure changes to permit these questionings to arise, although somehow the frame of healthy eating remains intact. This change shows the dialectical character of a social representation as well, healthy eating being defined by exclusion.

The notion of *psychosis* arose in the conversation and referred to the power of mind over the body, creating a new referent to define the representation. This new referent turns the relative concept, where the food-object is split from the food-thought. No food would be good or bad in itself but in relation to the cognitive-affective value of its ingestion. Pedro defined psychosis in the following way:

Psychosis is when one turns problematic everything one eats. Doesn't eat potato because is irritant, if it's a hen doesn't eat it, if it's a chicken the skin must be taken out. Well...one keeps ill (Pedro).

We finished our meal without reaching an explicit agreement. In a sense the agreement (shared meanings) was there. They felt happy and ate what they had been eating for years. There was not any problem at all and at the same time vegetables, fruits and low fat were in the air as a general rule that can be disobeyed for 'good reasons'. Healthy eating as a palatable and relaxing experience was not alien to the representation and this particular sense in which it is understood came to save the situation. After all for the group of urban non-professional people, restaurants, friends and walks are part of their experience of healthy eating. Other senses may come up depending on specific contexts, as is shown by the following perspective by Rodrigo, a rural habitant with secondary education, when I asked him if people in Arauca ate healthily:

**Rodrigo:** I would say no. People eat without technique. I don't mean dirty but certainly not with all the hygiene that is required.

**Researcher:** And what about yourself..

**Rodrigo:** I do most of the time because I like things very well organised. One pays attention mainly to the woman who prepares the food, isn't it. Whether she is slob or good...

Previously I emphasised the role of social representations theory as rational and rationalising systems (see chapter 4). Drawing on cognitive dissonance theory, another directionality can be offered to the traditional attitude-behaviour model. It does so by showing the constant effort of the individual to make beliefs congruent with the performed behaviour. The contribution of social representations theory is precisely to integrate in a general model the rationalising and rational aspects of the decision taken, which attitudinal theories assumed either way. The move from one state to another by my group of guests ensured moments of consistency. This move, I would thus argue, is not definitive. The contribution of a structural view is to consider stability in a system undergoing constant transformations. The variation-stability paradox of social beliefs was explained in relation to healthy eating in the following terms by a nutritionist from Bogotá. I asked her if there was any agreement on healthy eating since the term seemed very controversial.

**Researcher:** People seem to have a very broad notion of what healthy eating is, which allows them to call healthy eating many different things.

**Nutritionist:** Well, there has always been a pattern about what is good. What changes and is controversial is the selection of foods...what is the best, what is bad for this person...the controversy is that but the pattern continues the same.

Thus there is an active subject, engaged in a system of production within institutional frameworks that puts pressure on the ways the representations are organised. These pressures are, of course, not only external because through naturalisation and reification ideology becomes a taken-for-granted reality. And it is in this sense that a system of knowledge cannot be separated from the manners by which the relations of production are established in a given society. From a materialistic point of view, the practice determines the representation (Beauvois & Joule, 1981). This concept would appear today perhaps too radical and it is certainly true that individuals are aware of the impositions and constraints that mark their daily lives. One cabdriver in Bogota put things this way when I told him about my research project while driving me to one of the fieldwork settings:

No man. You are doing wrong. Beliefs do not apply to strata one and two. Those people cannot afford to believe in anything. What is important for them is to fill their bellies according to their pockets. It is different from strata five and six. For them what is important is the fashion: so-and-so ate this in Paris... that the other... that the diet... For them relationships are very important. For example they visit a restaurant to meet the son of Mr somebody-or-other. In the lowest strata is different. You get a very poor girlfriend and invite her to eat roast chicken and for her it's great because she rarely does so. Those chickens, you know, with all the chemicals they put on them. But for her is something good (**A cabdriver in Bogotá**).

The material reality is constantly re-shaping the representation. Acting as a dynamo, it incites the movements from one structural array to another. The norms are in constant tension with the practices, determined, to a large extent, by the material conditions. All the subjects interviewed during the observation agreed that habits and opportunity are the most important elements in deciding what to eat. The following conversation with Juan, a rural worker in Arauca, illustrates this influence:

**Researcher:** I think we drink too much Coca-Cola...

**Juan:** Because is the drink most readily available. And it's cheap as well. It's the economic situation what make us drink fizzy drinks and things.

And William, an architect from Arauca gave the following answer while eating a take-away fried-chicken:

**Researcher:** Let me tell you that you're contradicting the idea of healthy eating we just talked about.

**William:** Of course! There is not anything else to eat. Here if you don't eat greasy pies, you eat sausages or chicken from another restaurant where you get it even greasier.

In a paradoxical 'conflictive harmony' contradictions are explained ensuring the stability of the representation. The subject does not even blush when accepting the evidence of his/her conflicting practice. A schoolteacher from Arauca said: 'here we don't eat healthily. Here is 100% fat, which is the best'. I wonder if such affirmations do not represent basically a mocking attitude towards the regulations and constraints imposed onto an activity in which the subject wants to preserve some freedom.

### 6.5 *Some remarks*

A reiterative theme in this presentation of results is the separation, urban-rural and by educational status, in relation to eating in general, and healthy eating in particular. From extensive research work in Ghana, Goody (1982) showed how from similar patterns of food consumption Ghanaian society moved towards a class differentiation as the country's economy began to join the global markets. As a cultural product eating marks differences in the process of constructing identity. Politics, morality and ecology are more than ever defining eating practices. Healthy eating is essentially an urban phenomenon typical of educated groups. The less educated have initiated the process of structuring the representation, more clearly in the case of the urban non-professionals. The next chapter will deal with media discourses and portray the meanings of the representation in the context of group discussions.

For healthy eating the relationship with nature is transformed and reappears at the heart of the current discourse on food. I have previously stated that it implies the passage from a relationship of struggle to a relationship of protection and care. The urban becomes detached from the land as a pre-requisite of joining the market society, abandoning local culture in the move to it. In the process, the local is recreated within the global. In the collective memory, however, the 'return to the land' is fantasised and the countryside made part of the representation as an 'ought to be. The notion of organic food comes out in this context. Organic means natural (the concept of organic food has not been constructed by the Colombian public). Natural is opposed to artificial fertilisers, chemicals or genetic alterations. The antithesis natural/artificial represents the relationship nature/culture. The transformation of nature (the raw) into a cultural product (cuisine) was drawn by Lévi-Strauss (1970) in his famous culinary triangle, in which some basic elements (raw, cooked and rotten) structure the ways of food consumption in a cultural group.

At the beginning of the industrial revolution there was little concern for nature. Now, we have arrived at the point where every human action is implicitly negative and only nature is positive. The 'ecologisation' of society and the concerns about the relationships with the environment announces the arrival of a new cultural order. The human being fears others and his/her own capacity for destruction and alteration of divine laws. These changes are taking place not only in educated urban groups but also

in the less educated. In one of my visits to the *barrios* in Bogotá I observed a demonstration of a medicinal plant (they called it *sanagua*) by one of the many quacks and charlatans who gather to talk about the cure-all effects of the natural products they sell. This person was extolling the qualities of the plant for urinary and prostate problems. When he offered me some I rejected it. But an old man at my side took the offered fruit and drinking its content said to me: 'Drink it like this, you see, all what is natural is good'. That was precisely the same point the charlatan was making, he was contrasting nature against chemistry. He was referring to 'the chemistry', representing the materialised reality of human progress.

The axiom of healthy eating, the vegetarian option, could be found everywhere in practices. This vegetarian option is so important and carries such meaningful categories that it is very difficult to think the representation without it. Figures 6.2 and 6.3 present some examples of how this axiom 'works' in practice. Fig. 6.2 shows a leaflet from a supermarket chain for the upper and upper-middle class segments that describes recipes for the preparation of dishes having fruits and vegetables as the main ingredient. The title reads: 'Health mark 10'. And below: 'Eat 5 fruits and vegetables Carulla each day'. Thus, to get good marks in health one must eat fruits and vegetables. Note the two people in the centre of a vegetarian circle. They are blond, blue-eyed, and white and have perfect teeth. The rest is to make the connections between health, beauty and vegetables. Fig. 6.3 is a paper place mat from a known fast-food chain of restaurants. In the foreground a display of vegetables: lettuce, onion, tomatoes and wheat in a farm's kitchen. Outside, a herd of cattle grazes peacefully. The vegetables have a close-up shot, not the meat, although they sell hamburgers. The first introduces the second; the vegetables re-define the meat. A written message is stamped on the right corner on the top: '100% natural products'. At the bottom, another reason to prefer the product: 'El Corral's hamburgers. Proudly Colombians'.

The mass media have played an influential role in the construction of this new symbolism of eating. As the Italian lady interviewed said, people read, watch, and listen (I would add and talk and do things). And it is precisely in this sense that the central characteristics of social representations may be described: its collective production and its social function. Because the influence of the media has been so preponderant, I will dedicate the next chapter to the analysis of the representation from a multi-level perspective of the contents of healthy eating.



Fig. 6.2 Health Mark 10. The result of eating 5 fruits and vegetables each day is a mark of 10: '10 in beauty, 10 in happiness, 10 in good mood and 10 in energy' says inside the leaflet.

**SALUD  
NOTA 10**

CONSUMA  
5 FRUTAS  
Y VERDURAS  
CARULLA  
AL DIA

**CARULLA**

Cada vez más cerca de usted.

Fig. 6.3. EL Corral Hamburgers, Proudly Colombians.



## 6.6 *Summary*

The results suggest that healthy eating is centred on notions such as vegetarian diets, the natural and the balanced. The current pattern of nutritional transition could be characterised by a new relation with eating, i.e. healthy eating. This relation is framed by the issues of late modernity and the perception that we live in a risk society (Beck, 1992). While human intervention is harmful as it supposes the alteration of an order, materialised around the idea of 'chemistry', what is thought of as remaining unmodified represents the natural, materialised in 'fruits and vegetables'. Meat at the same time, has become problematic not because of moral concerns but for health reasons.

Though healthy eating seems to be a typically urban phenomenon, it has reached the rural groups. However, the more distant the group from the land the more structured the representation according with the canons of health promotion. Urbanisation and market societies arise as important conditions for the development of this form of eating. At the same time that the groups share common frames to talk about healthy eating, they exhibit particular differences related with their material conditions. The rural non-professionals, for example, though recognising the ideals of healthy eating in terms of the vegetarian and the natural, invest their daily eating practices with the idea of 'the healthy'. The tensions between the ideals of healthy eating, cultural preferences and food availability reflects the dynamic of social representations as rational and rationalising constructions. Contrary to what might be expected from rigid prescriptions, individuals find ways of justifying and adapting their choices by changing senses, as for instance, from the physically healthy to the psychologically healthy. Beyond the conventional idea of an active subject, the astute is a more convenient perspective to understand the interaction of groups with polemical representational objects.

## 7 THE DISCOURSES OF HEALTHY EATING

### 7.1 *Healthy Eating in the Mass Media*

The social construction of healthy eating rests on a complex set of relationships between the media, science, the government and social groups. The first part of this chapter focuses on how the media portrays the relationship between food and health. The media plays a significant part in making sense of healthy eating though I make no claim about causality, i.e., that lay notions of healthy eating derive from media communications. People get the elements to build the notion of healthy eating from a variety of sources including apart from the media, health professionals, relatives and acquaintances. Yet the mass media of communication play an important role in the gestation of social representations (Rouquette, 1996), and constitute a habitual source of news about food safety and nutrition (American Dietetic Association, 1997). The media act as intermediary between diverse sectors of society. They translate, for instance, the discourses from one sphere (science) to another (common sense) and serve as the vehicle for the expression of different views. Yet common sense transforms those discourses.

In the second part, the analysis of group discussions is presented. Individuals do not fall for the healthy eating discourse very easily. Though at one level there is a consensus in the representation, the consensual character serves mainly communicative purposes in order to express disagreements, a point which I consider important to emphasise. The relationship between the media and group accounts on healthy eating should not be seen as a causal phenomenon but as an interactive process that evinces social historical conditions as both are modes of social representations (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999).

The process of spreading news is not free from complications. The media serve the interests of élite groups in society, which very often own them, at least in the case of Colombia. Commercial interests are present all the way. The media act as reproducer of ideologies as well (Martín & Parales, 1991; Van Dijk, 1988). Previous views and ways of viewing impregnate translations, sometimes with the firm intention of domination and control. The media also have an important role in the diffusion and popularisation of scientific knowledge, responding to the expectations of their consumers. Governmental interests also need to be taken into account, turning media reports into the interesting outcome of social negotiations. The media consumer is not a docile

individual and he or she is frequently aware of ‘hidden agendas’. Following the idea of *the astute* introduced in a previous chapter, individuals suspect and suppose private interests in public matters. This complicates things a little further and it makes distrust an outstanding feature of contemporary societies, perhaps even more dramatic in the so-called developing countries with weaker institutional arrangements.

In this chapter I present the empirical results of the analysis carried out in two different modes of communication (cf. Bauer & Gaskell, 1999), formal (newspapers) and informal (group discussions) communication. Both are expressions of the social representation of healthy eating.

## 7.2 *The Mass-Media of Communication and The Social Representations of Healthy Eating*

The analysis of the newspaper articles disclose a particular type of communicative process, the diffusion of information. The media analysis showed that newspapers accomplish a dual objective. They draw people’s attention to topics of public interest and in that way respond to the expectations of those who read them. On the other hand, they become the points of contact with the outside world, they are mediators because they are, for their part, recipients of information. The newspapers bring new events around and they also feed pre-existing viewpoints. In the diffusion of messages the main interest is not to argue but to feature stories, most of the time omitting details or conflicting evidence.

Moscovici (1961/1976) detailed some characteristics of the process of diffusion, which we may see reflected in the content of newspaper articles in relation to healthy eating. First of all, the communication is specific and attractive. Humour is abundant. The problem of obesity as a worldwide epidemic is presented as a “chubby problem<sup>29</sup>” (El Tiempo, July 18 1998); employing irony, obesity is introduced as a “very big epidemic<sup>30</sup>” (Ibid.). The headlines intend to be provocative as well as in “a high pressure day for cholesterol<sup>31</sup>” (El Tiempo, July 19 1998).

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<sup>29</sup> Un problema redondo.

<sup>30</sup> La obesidad es una epidemia bien gorda.

<sup>31</sup> Un día hipertenso para el colesterol.

The diffusion employs other rhetorical strategies, one of the most common being the citation of expert's opinions in order to get the message across. Nutritionists, doctors, beauty specialists and educators march proclaiming recommendations as to how to live better and longer. The expert opinion is the voice of science, the newspaper acts in this case as mediator and as such it takes distance in relation to what is said. At the same time, the citations add an air of professionalism and seriousness to the publication. The 'scientific' is taken for granted; it is the indisputable presented as the ultimate truth. An article on the problems associated with high cholesterol levels states:

“However science after serious, extensive and deep investigation has achieved the reduction of these pathologies, recommending new diets and developing new medicines already available in Colombia, which reduce cholesterol levels” (*Un día hipertenso para el colesterol*<sup>32</sup>, El Tiempo, July 19 1998).

A second aspect characteristic of the process of diffusion and found in newspaper articles is that the messages are not directed towards a particular group but to the great public; the professional, the housewife, the student, the pensioner, all of them find their common interests in the publication. The communication is not intended to a specialised public nor to structured groups like the vegetarians.

However, as Moscovici (1961/1976) suggested, diffusion is a multiform process. The reader is not always left at liberty to make his/her own conclusions as sometimes the communication advocates an explicit course of action. This includes lists of recommendations to fight obesity, to educate children on eating, and to prevent colon cancer, among others. Frequently rhetoric is employed; in the following example, it is the appeal to fear that serves pragmatic purposes:

“Thus, it is important to be clear about these concepts to change some food habits and to increase our physical activity. In this way, we can achieve physical and mental health and avoid the Intensive Care Unit, not as visitors but as patients, if we are lucky enough to get there alive” (*Un día hipertenso para el colesterol*<sup>33</sup>, El Tiempo, July 19, 1998).

The analysis revealed that the communication was intended in some cases (thirty-three percent of the cases) for a female, upper/middle class urban audience (see appendix 5). This is not surprising inasmuch as women continue to be the provider of food for Colombian families. They are the ones who shop and cook it. Additionally, newspapers

<sup>32</sup> A high pressure day for cholesterol.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

target those who read them, that is, those who can afford to buy them and in places where they are accessible (the cities). Forty percent of the articles analysed clearly related to income capacity. The discourse on healthy eating is more structured in urban, well-educated groups, as will be observed in the analysis of group discussions.

In the next sections of this chapter I will detail how the media structure the discourse on healthy eating. I begin by highlighting the several possible interpretations for healthy eating and the similarities and differences this representation establishes with eating in general. In detailing that structure, I suggest that healthy eating emerges as a new frame to approach eating.

### **7.2.1 The Polysemic Character of Eating and Healthy Eating**

Healthy eating is not a monolithic representation. Different expressive configurations may be found across groups and within groups at different moments. Furthermore, healthy eating is embedded in the more general category of eating. Eating encircles a multitude of meanings such as nutrition, sociability, menus and eating-related activities, as can be inferred from the previous chapter. The study of healthy eating must look at eating as the general category that engenders it. Eating is taking new forms, which follow changes in the relationships between the individual and the environment.

Healthy eating has become the most distinctive aspect of eating in the contemporary world. This is not to say that the association between food and health is something new but that the current conception of this relation is affecting dietary practices more than ever before. This affectation is to be understood not only in terms of the impact (eating and healthy eating becoming synonyms) but also in terms of the structuring itself (eating being recreated around health concerns). The coverage of scientific discoveries, commercial interests and the re-creation of health as the supreme human value, they are all affecting the manners in which these links are conceived. Twenty percent of the articles appeared in the health section of the newspapers analysed, while in 52.5 per cent of the articles the contents were linked to health issues.

The articles included for analysis were distributed in five general sections of the newspapers: Health, Economy, Modern Life, General Interest and Science (see appendix 5). The sections illustrate how eating embodies the most diverse spheres of society. An analysis of the dictionaries of the newspapers discourse on eating, using the

program ALCESTE, revealed four general frames that will be presented in some detail, particularly healthy eating. The frames are a) Social Eating; b) Transformations; c) Food Processes and d) Healthy Eating (see figure 7.1). Healthy eating acts in this case as a broader category that includes two basic frames: beauty and illness. I suggest these general classes portray the general topics of the media agenda on eating

### 7.2.1.1 Social Eating

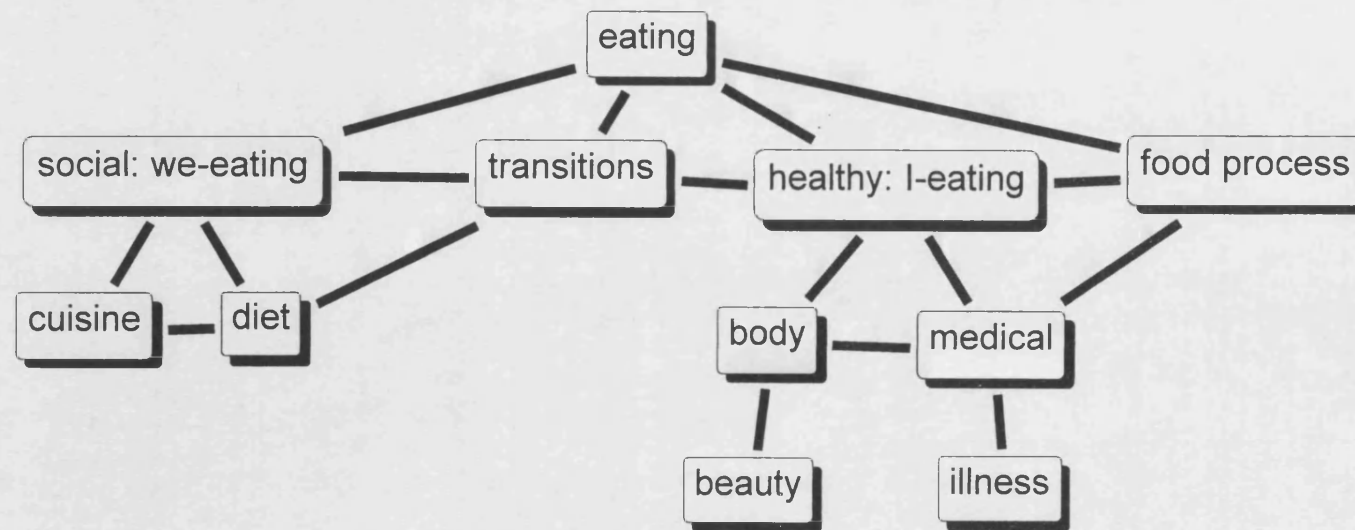
Perhaps it is redundant to refer to social eating as a category, as eating is essentially a social activity. However this category bears upon the collective essence of the act of eating, which is not necessarily present in healthy eating. Social eating implies communion and participation; this is a 'we-eating'. The adjective social implies the goal of this form of eating: interaction in everyday life.

The social character of eating is introduced in two different senses. Mundane eating, which refers to daily practices, and special eating, which belongs to particular occasions. I would refer to the first as diet and to the second as cuisine following the distinction made by Weismantel (1988) between micro and macro structural components of food. In the first, food is a market commodity, while in the second, food is a cultural construct with symbolic meaning (Orlove & Schmidt, 1995), although they both influence one another. In portraying mundane eating as diet, emphasis is made on production factors, the market system and, in general, on the economic life of the group. This dimension is easily overlooked in studies on the cultural aspects of food and eating, which tend to focus more on the symbolism of eating in which the acquisition of food products is taken for granted. The newspapers, however, pay considerable attention to the economic aspect. Eating cuisine, on the other hand, stresses art and tradition. Eating cuisine is linked to the history and geography of each particular group (tradition), and thus it reflects the identity of those who share it.

In order to understand cuisine as a cultural aspect of eating, it is necessary to understand the distinction between the foreign and the local. Eating as art represents the cuisine of the *connaisseurs*, the gourmet dimension that remits to European cuisine. Italian and Spanish cuisine are mentioned as examples of the art of the kitchen, which is reflected



Fig. 7.1 The frames of eating in the media



Healthy eating is characterised as an 'individualised' eating

in the passion for cooking (*La Pasion por la olla*<sup>34</sup>, El Tiempo 4 October 1998). But the distinctive character of cuisine as an art is given by to French cuisine. This is also referred as *haute cuisine*. France is introduced as the land of good food and French cuisine is an expert's cuisine. *Bon appetit* appears as a cliché that gives a touch of class even to a frugal meal. High cuisine, as a sign of distinction opposes the cuisine of popular recipes, the food of the pleb.

Taste is a sign of class identity as Bourdieu (1989) has shown. Besides the opportunities, food choices are marked by group membership. In the eagerness to enter the sophisticated world of the élite, even momentarily, we demand codes and recipes to pass for *connaisseurs*. In the constant pursuit of social acceptance, ignorance about table manners and cosmopolitan foods may constitute an embarrassing experience. Access to the élite world of food is dispensed through the popularisation of high cuisine. The newspaper El Tiempo undertakes the task of making such a sophisticated world accessible by the masses through collectable fascicles. The reader is promised what she wants:

“You for a while, could initiate your immersion in this delicious culinary world without going to France. El Tiempo offers you the complete collection of forty-three fascicles that will tell you everything you need to know about this fascinating art. Bon appetit!” (*Le Cordon Bleu: Cocina con sabor a historia*<sup>35</sup>, El Tiempo, 10 August 1998).

A simple staple as a potato acquires a new status when it is introduced under the auspices of French cuisine (*Que buena papa: Variedad y usos del tuberculo*<sup>36</sup>, El Tiempo, 18 July 1998). Another article introduces the refinement of the French patisserie (*Roger Laburth abrio hace unos meses su pasteleria francesa: Dulces tentaciones en La Candelaria*<sup>37</sup>, El Tiempo, 21 September 1998). The invitation to consume sophistication surpasses French borders to include other foreign delicacies. Caviar (Revista del Jueves, September 10, 1998), and special recipes to prepare B.B.Q. (El Tiempo, 21 November 1998), among other culinary specialities, are all offered to a clientele avid for distinction. Colombian recipes are not part of such a sophisticated world of food.

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<sup>34</sup> The passion for the pot.

<sup>35</sup> Le Cordon Bleu: Cuisine with taste of history.

<sup>36</sup> What a nice potato!: Varieties and uses of the tuber.

<sup>37</sup> Roger Laburth opened his French patisserie some months ago: Sweet temptations in La Candelaria.

It is tempting to describe these processes in terms of a 'culinary colonialism' that recreates social submission. In a country with no common project like Colombia, the idealisation of the foreign (mainly European and North American) accompanied by the disregard of the national (*criollo*) lead to the risk of compromising an already fragile national identity. However, the invasion of foreign cuisine as a sign of distinction, class or cosmopolitan life is not a phenomenon exclusive to Colombia or a symptom of Third World paranoia. The British have expressed concerns about the menace imposed by what was called in a newspaper 'the American greasy spoon' (The Guardian, December 31, 1997). Furthermore, the process of internationalisation seems to be causing concerns to national identities all over the world. Even French cuisine feels threatened by the globalisation and "Europeanisation of taste" (The holy terroir, Financial Times, July 4/5 1998).

While the cuisine-art is European, the cuisine-tradition is national. The latter includes themes of class, community and regional identity. Colombia is a country with notorious regional differences favoured by an uneven geography, varied climate and the absence of adequate communications, which have kept communities in relative isolation. Local cuisine stands as a means of differentiating and re-uniting. The traditional is inextricably linked to the history of the group, and eating tradition unveils all the cultural heritage of the group. Food carries a complex system of meanings and symbolises cultural values, and as such, it is portrayed as a means of getting together and, according to an article, of solving community conflicts (*Se cocina solución a conflictos*<sup>38</sup>, El Tiempo, August 31, 1998). There is no celebration without food and every important family event is lived around the table.

From a cultural point of view, food is also magic. One of the most obvious expressions of the magical meanings is found in the narration of the links between food and sex, where a process of identification through ingestion is assumed. An article in El Espectador (August 17, 1998), narrates a culinary encounter in Bogota with the title: "Sea punch is better than no Viagra<sup>39</sup>". The article humorously expresses the relationship between food and sex in traditional Colombian cuisine. The article tells us that the sexual sea punch prepared by Mrs Sinclair and known as the islander Viagra

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<sup>38</sup> Cooking solutions to conflicts

<sup>39</sup> This is a literal translation. It means that when there is no Viagra, the sea punch is an alternative.

“Puts the *root* really hard”<sup>40</sup>. The secret is a combination of “seaweed, cow’s leg, condensed milk, powdered milk, vanilla, cognac, eggs and the rest is left to love”. Another cook is said to prepare a delicious goat stew. The article reads:

“On a table to the left [of Mrs Sinclair], Luidina served the goat stew: A piece of goat’s meat brought out from a pot where it was floating in a more or less viscous liquid; rice, cassava and tomato and onion salad. This is accompanied with a glass of consommé, which absorbs all the energy and strength of the goat to transfer them to the consumer just *there*, they say. ” (*A falta de Viagra bueno es el ponche marino*<sup>41</sup>, El Espectador, Agosto 17 1998. Italics in the text are mine).

Contrary to the sophistication of the *haute cuisine*, the Colombian eating habits seem to find their place in bad manners. The first is a high class world while the second is basically oriented to the plebs. The following description from El Espectador humorously describes a lorry driver eating *fritanga*<sup>42</sup> in Soacha :

“A swig of beer helps to get the *chorizo* down. He takes the blood sausage, ripping it against the layette, trying to capture some black peas and grains of rice, and he eats it. Another swig. He grasps the last piece of potato, there is not need of serviette, and with it, it tidies up the trickle of fat that goes down his chin. The task is finished. Raimundo feels happy with the toothpick in the teeth” (*El sabor de los apetitos congelados*, El Espectador, August 17, 1998).

I have reserved the term *cuisine* to the cultural aspect of eating presented in newspapers. However, eating cannot be split from the productive system. Diets are intended to be pleasant, convenient and cheap, all of them opposed to healthy eating. Completely embedded in a market economy, eating habits turn into a matter of time and money. A class distinction operates here as well, where those on low incomes are depicted as greasy-lovers and the better off as convenience hunters. The article called “The taste of frozen appetites” refers to that world of convenience influenced by deep social transformations (El Espectador, August 17, 1998). In the modern urban world there does not seem to be time for recipes and tradition. Eaters submerge themselves in a world of fast and cheap food. The foreign is still a paradigm but the elegant –European – is replaced by the practical –the American. Thus the *comida chatarra* (junk food) linked to the youth becomes the prototype of the American diet:

<sup>40</sup> Literal translation from the Spanish word *la raíz*, which here has clear phallic connotations.

<sup>41</sup> Sea punch is better than no Viagra.

<sup>42</sup> A type of greasy food, see also chapter 6.

“So in the end the student just thinks of food when there is nothing to do, like the National budget. The most extravagant and indigestible culinary proposals of the third world come from this sporadic need. As one student says: ‘Gringos do not have even the malice of what junk food is’” (*La dieta del estudiante*<sup>43</sup>, El Espectador, August 21, 1998).

Yet there is not a sharp distinction between cuisine and diet. Both share the scene of modern eating and each has its own relevance and calls upon social needs at particular moments. They interact as well. Tradition is accommodated in new practices and cuisine is transformed in diet, which becomes again cuisine (for an example of this process think of Chinese food). The struggle between tradition and innovation in relation to food issues is present all the way. This allows me to introduce the second theme in the agenda of newspapers, which refers to the transformations of eating. They act as the reflection of transformations in society.

#### 7.2.1.2 Transformations

A second general frame of media coverage refers to the transitions in the area of food and nutrition. While social eating is described mainly in the cultural and modern life section of the newspapers, the transitions appear mainly in the economy section. Four main themes are made salient in the accounts on these transformations: a) The increased purchase of food products; b) The ‘Americanisation’ of eating habits; c) The apparition of convenience food; and d) Vegetarianism. All these themes are interrelated. The main factor that links the relationships between them is the economy. Marketing strategies, globalisation, higher income, urban life and increased supply are all aspects related with changes in eating habits and the rise in the consumption of foods. The media suggest a set of explanations as to why these transformations are taking place:

“But the galloping development of capitalism, yes, it sounds like a sentence from a history book but it is like that, combined with urbanisation, population growth and professional education, among other social developments, shortened, in hundreds of metres at the most, that distance [between fast food and the economy]. New jobs, new roles, new needs, new spaces, -it sounds like the first of January- have produced a new what, how and where to eat. And the answer to why is basically one: Time” (*El sabor de los apetitos congelados*<sup>44</sup>, El Espectador, August 17 1998).

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<sup>43</sup> The student’s diet.

<sup>44</sup> The taste of the frozen appetites.

The ‘consumerism boom’ as it is called in *El Espectador* (July 23, 1998) is a product of the transformation of the economy, which, is viewed as influenced by capitalism and globalisation:

“Likewise, according to the study, the greater supply of products from different countries, some changes in income distribution, the existence of repressed consumption before the economic openness, and successful marketing strategies in the food trade are some of the signals that show that expenditure in food is now more important than in the past decade” (*En Colombia lo que se hace es comer a la lata*<sup>45</sup>, *El Espectador*, July 5 1998).

The headline in the citation above rhetorically expresses a double-meaning: The purchase of foods is increasing and this trend is oriented towards the consumption of convenience foods. Convenience is a demand of modern life and eating is a need to be satisfied in an efficient manner, not something we have to think about too much. Practices are in that way defining the ways in which the representation is concretely expressed. In the process of transformation of food practices, convenient eating is metaphorically portrayed as ‘tanking up’<sup>46</sup>. The idea of tanking up is very important since it remits to notions of the body machine, which are presented in more detail later in this chapter in the analysis of groups discussions. Tanking up expresses the aim of the diet, or as referred to by a nursing student “The important thing [about food] is that it is cheap and filling” (*El Espectador*, August 21, 1998). As described in one of the newspapers:

“The idea is still to eat. But to eat inside the car, between lectures, between the coquetry of a date, within the papers in the office...to eat as not wanting it although the stomach groans. In other words, it is not a matter of eating, not even feeding but tanking up” (*El sabor de los apetitos congelados*<sup>47</sup>, *El Espectador*, 17 August 1998).

Challenged by the market economy, cuisine, either traditional or cosmopolitan is transformed into convenience food: diets. An article, not included in the analysis, as it appears after those considered, notices the entry of the traditional in the productive system. The return of traditional recipes into convenience foods is claimed to be a marketing success (*Sancocho a la lata*<sup>48</sup>, *El Tiempo*, 10 January 1999). Healthy eating is not alien to this trend and marketers generally find ways of harmonising health

<sup>45</sup> Colombia eats *a la lata* means both canned foods and in large amounts.

<sup>46</sup> Translation from the Spanish *tanquear*. Fuelling up might also be another possible translation..

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* 44.

<sup>48</sup> *Sancocho* is a kind of soup, *a la lata* has the same meaning as in 45.

concerns with market expectations. An article in one of the supplements suggest this harmonisation when presenting “Cold meats, sausages and vegetarian meats” (*Embutidos, chorizos y carnes vegetales*, *El Espectador*, *Revista del Jueves*, 27 July 1998). Vegetarianism is in this way being commercially exploited as part of a modern lifestyle.

Under the influence of the economy and its transformations, cuisine (art and tradition) is converted into productive food. Though in principle oriented to reach the bulk of the population, the market for convenience and ‘cosmopolitan-popular’ products are those sectors with purchase capacity, the middle and upper classes. The low income groups remain attached to a traditional eating influenced by urban ways and constrained by the access. Different social segments exhibit different food preferences, whose irreconcilable tastes are humorously integrated in the proposal of the “frozen *fritanga*”:

“In these conditions, the high and middle-income people are the consumers of frozen foods, especially in the night and, sometimes, at the weekends. The élite. However, there is something in common between Raimundo<sup>49</sup> and the élite: the market of the frozen *fritanga*” (*El sabor de los apetitos congelados*<sup>50</sup>, *El espectador*, August, 17 1998).

### 7.2.1.3 Food Processes

Food security and safety are paramount aspects in the diffusion of messages in the realm of eating. While food is increasingly accessible for a high percentage of the population, the perceived risks associated with eating are also on the increase, causing consumers to worry. The concerns expressed in the media are far from being those of genetically modified foods recently popular in the European media agenda. Interest is focused mainly on the storage and preparation of foodstuffs with a marked emphasis on the labelling of food products, mainly ‘use by’ dates.

The prevention of contamination and intoxication is the main objective, directing suggestions and recommendations for those in charge of buying, handling and preparing food in the household: women. While contamination is presented as the alteration of food products following mainly chemical or biological modifications, intoxication is presented as the consequences of that contamination in the individual and expressed

<sup>49</sup> Raimundo is the name of the fictitious lorry driver in the story. It also refers to the ordinary people as in the expression “*Raimundo y todo el mundo*”.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* 44.

through a set of signs and symptoms. Massive intoxication with a school meal in a public school in Bogota received media attention (El Espectador, July 22, 25, 1998), which brought onto the agenda a series of recommendations of how to prevent food poisoning from happening. The reader is taught on how to buy food products safely (*Antes de comprar revise las fechas de vencimiento*<sup>51</sup>, El Tiempo, July 5, 1998); to wash and prepare vegetables (*Aprenda a lavar sus vegetales*<sup>52</sup>, Revista del Jueves, July 30 1998); to read the labels on food products (*Los alimentos tambien tienen etiqueta*<sup>53</sup>, Carrusel, September 23 1998); and how to handle and store foods (*A cuidar los alimentos*<sup>54</sup>, El Tiempo, July 5, 1998).

In relation to food safety, there seems to be a kind of contract, characteristic of the political order of modern societies, which is particularly relevant for the health sector. The contract supposes a shared responsibility on food safety issues between the government and individuals. The first is made accountable through policy making, regulations and control. The second through following recommendations, guidelines and taking precautionary measures in the preparation of foods. The issue of food quality and safety is closely related to the main topic in the media analysis, which is the nexus between eating and health.

#### 7.2.1.4 Healthy Eating

Healthy eating denotes a new relation with food. If the collective essence of eating was stressed in social eating, healthy eating is conceived as an individualised eating fastened to the narcissism and ego-concerns that characterise the era of the cult of the body. Contrary to the pleasant experience of sharing a meal with others particular to social eating, the notion of healthy eating has been portrayed as the isolated experience of nourishing an organism in the constant search for equilibrium. If social eating could be conceived as the 'we-eating' of tradition, history and identity, which is being transformed in diets due to the influence of economic transitions, healthy eating could be understood as an 'I-eating'.

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<sup>51</sup> Before buying, check the expiry dates.

<sup>52</sup> Learn how to wash vegetables.

<sup>53</sup> Food also has labels. *Etiqueta* has also the meaning of etiquette.

<sup>54</sup> Look after food.



The 'I-eating' brings its own lingo somewhere in between recipes and medical terms. A new tradition is being shaped. The body is visualised in a macrocosmos and the ultimate goal is to establish a harmonic relationship between the individual organism and the surrounding environment. The food for healthy eating is neither the elaborate recipe of the traditional cuisine nor the pretentious discourse of the bourgeois menu. Healthy eating turns to the basics of nutrition: micronutrients, minerals, fibre, pure water, fresh, boiled. At times too strict, the discourse of healthy eating makes its concessions. They are called balance and moderation. Yet pretending that healthy eating is replacing other conceptions of eating (i.e. convenience) would be simplistic. The eating scene is pluralistic, though I have stressed, increasingly dominated by health issues.

Healthy eating is defined around two overlapping categories, body and illness, which are socially reconstructed in terms of beauty and medicine as basic themes. Initially I want to stress that healthy eating entails a transformation in our relationship with food, and that this transformation embraces both body and illness within the actual conditions of contemporary society. This leads to two important considerations. On the one hand, there is the point that healthy eating is treated as a medical issue. On the other, the point that body beauty and cleanliness are important in motivating healthier dietary practices. The cleanliness not only refers to body-washing but it also extends to embrace a state of mind, spiritual purity, which turns healthy eating into a virtue.

#### **7.2.1.4.1 The Transformation of Eating**

Healthy eating is to be understood within social transformations, including the effects of technology, the political agenda, and certainly, the modes of economic production. Emphasis has been made in conceiving healthy eating as the contemporary expression of ideal eating. Socially healthy eating has been constructed as a superlative approach to food. The widespread preoccupation with health, weight, and appearance has been a key factor in steering the notion of healthy eating. There are two basic references to healthy eating in the media. The first and most frequent is healthy eating in the context of illness and the second is healthy eating in the context of corporeality. Both conceptions point out a normative eating, which communicates a distancing from what is thought as the pleasantness of good food. The newspapers present an idea of healthy eating that conveys notions of restriction, self-discipline and unpleasantness. An article that

explains the problem of obesity in the context of a Pan American course on the subject affirms:

“There will be opportunity to taste and to see how it is possible to eat both healthily and deliciously” (*Obesidad, una epidemia en aumento*<sup>55</sup>, El Tiempo, July 18, 1998).

The most noticeable characteristic of this new eating is the problematisation of the consumption of meat. Meat is thought of as harmful because of its connection with cholesterol. Vegetarian food does not have cholesterol as do all animal food products, and therefore “Animal proteins should be replaced by vegetable proteins” (El Tiempo, July 19, 1998). In that way the vegetarian assumes the meaning of healthy in the ideal realm of food. We are reminded that “Where there is animal protein there is fat and cholesterol as well”(Carrusel, September 23, 1998). Cholesterol has gained the particular connotation of public enemy in the collective imagination.

Interestingly, for the media the problem with the consumption of meat does not lie in its possible alteration by the use of ‘chemicals’ but in its essence itself as source of fat and cholesterol. It is no wonder that the vegetarian ideal is governing current conceptions of healthy eating. Vegetarianism permeates the conception of healthy foods, both as a commodity and as culinary notion. However, the vegetarian ideal was not related to current production methods and moral issues; it was conceived as a health-oriented issue.

Eating in contemporary societies is viewed as corrupted, and therefore it needs to be purified, transformed into the positive ingestion of foods. Fruits and vegetables characterise the natural and fresh of healthy foods; when tension emerges, the reader is reassured. The risk of pesticides in vegetables is counteracted by the benefits of its consumption and the hazard minimised by proper washing.

#### **7.2.1.4.2 The Medicalisation of Eating**

Medical discourse lends its semantics to popular wisdom. Abstract notions and technical terms are re-introduced in everyday conversations. According to Burnham (1987), nutrition has been one of the most noticeable elements in the popularisation of

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<sup>55</sup> Obesity, an epidemic on the increase.

science. This popularisation uses anchoring and objectification as crucial processes in the familiarisation of new events. The abstract is grasped, the invisible seen. The concept, once part of an alien world, takes a material form and becomes an element of reality, as it is in the concrete where we experience the social representation.

Medical knowledge is understood with the help of metaphors. Fibre is “the broom that sweeps toxins from the organism” (Carrusel, July 31 1998). Cholesterol is “the millennium Killer” (El Tiempo, July 19, 1998); the digestive system is represented around the image of “the tube”. The metaphors are essential to materialise the abstract; they may work as folk theories (Fine, 1995). For Reddy (1993), metaphor is a way of conceptualising the world, and it is this communicative function that it serves. The process of familiarisation leads us to consider the role of anchoring and objectification as concurrent processes, since categorisation is essential for the materialisation. When lipoproteins appear in discourse, the term seems too abstract and needs to be translated by anchoring it in understandable categories. It is then, that we begin to understand that there are High and Low Density Lipoproteins by assuming them as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ cholesterol:

“On the other hand, there is ‘good cholesterol’ (HDL) or High Density Lipoproteins that carries the third or fourth part of blood cholesterol, that remove it from the arteries and take it to the liver, diminishing the growth of plaques that cause arterial obstruction, that is, they protect the person from a heart attack” (*Un dia hipertenso para el colesterol*<sup>56</sup>, El Tiempo, July 19, 1998).

Since eating has been related to a number of diseases, particularly cancer, cardiovascular and digestive conditions, healthy eating is suggested as the way of preventing them. Regularity, moderation, variety, fibre, and exercise, are some of the prescriptions to keep healthy. All these measures are intended to counteract the risk factors associated with modern life; modern life is in itself a risk factor. The abundance and variety of food products in the western world is paradoxical, for they are a source of well being and disease. Austerity in eating becomes a signal of health for those who can afford to buy ‘austere’ foods. Healthy eating is then perceived as both, ascetic and more expensive. Simplicity recreates the healthy, opulence recreates exposure. At an ecological level while the diet of African countries proves to be high in fibre, the diet of industrialised countries turns out to be a risk factor for disease:

“Unfortunately the Colombian balance is inclined towards the United States and Europe, meaning that in Colombia colorectal cancer is on the increase, simply because everyday we copy or adapt those inadequate diets in our nutrition” (*Cancer colorectal, enemigo que mata*<sup>57</sup>, El Tiempo August 9 1998).

Inadequate eating habits are made responsible for the increase in obesity. Obesity is presented as a modern epidemic, and the country is said to be entering the “not very honourable” group of nations with a high proportion of obesity in the population (El Tiempo, July 18, 1998). Aesthetics and health are put together, fitness becomes a sign of health. The media reveals the tactics to face and control the threat and even instructions to calculate the Body Mass Index (BMI) are introduced. Medical terms are thus made public.

#### 7.2.1.4.3 The Clystering Impetus<sup>58</sup>

The exploration of the representation of healthy eating would not be complete without referring to the other extreme of the digestive system, the anus. Defecation, as any other body process, is subject to schedules, places and other social regulations. How immaculate the process is largely depends on the type of nutrition. In the comedy *The Road to Wellville* (Parker, 1994), Alan Parker sarcastically presents concerns with the elimination of toxins and colon cleanliness. Enema obsessed Dr John Harvey Kellogg, featured by Anthony Hopkins, subjected the clients of his health farm to merciless sessions of colon hydrotherapy to clean their body from impurities. Following the idea that a dirty bowel is an ill body, the creator of Corn Flakes develops a strict treatment that includes diet, constant elimination, exercise and sexual abstinence. The enema zealot is ridiculed in the movie and even one of his sons suggests his father's enjoyment in sticking special appliances up his rectum in order to lubricate the colon while getting a prostate massage.

Though the obsession with colon cleansing might seem rather bizarre and the frequent application of enemas a sort of *klismaphilia*, in reality colon irrigation and detoxification have a place in the discourse of healthy eating. Enema therapy has been

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<sup>56</sup> A high pressure day for cholesterol.

<sup>57</sup> Colorectal cancer, an enemy that kills.

<sup>58</sup> Clyster: A medicine injected into the rectum, to empty or cleanse the bowels, to afford nutrition, etc; an injection, enema; sometimes a suppository. Example: “A clyster is a noble remedye to dryue out superfluitees of the guttes” (Traheron, 1543, Vigo's chirurg., p. 216). From the Oxford English Dictionary, 1989, volume III, Oxford: Clarendon Press. 2nd edition.

practised for hundreds of years and it is now known as colon therapy, aimed for purging the colon and the promotion of healthy elimination. Some recommendations are listed in an article entitled “How to eliminate tartar from the intestines” (Revista del Jueves, July 16, 1998). The article explains how an abnormal intestinal transit diminishes vacuum times and it causes the accumulation of tartar on the intestinal walls, which prevents the elimination of toxins. The article gives some advice:

“Just eliminate that tartar. There are people, for example, that administer themselves daily enemas (using purified water at the body’s temperature) in order to avoid deposits of tartar. Another alternative is to visit a medical centre where trained doctors practice colon therapy or to apply one of those enemas sold in the drugstores to yourself” (*Como eliminar el sarro de los intestinos*<sup>59</sup>, Revista del Jueves, El Espectador, July 16, 1998).

Another cleansing method presented consists of a diet plenty of olive oil, fruits and vegetables, or even the use of lubricating capsules to speed up evacuations. The concerns about colon cleanliness are not unwarranted: ten per cent of the articles make direct reference to colon problems, such as cancer, irritable colon and diverticulitis. All of them connect these problems with dietary habits. Moreover, advertising plays its part as well (see appendix 8). The marketing of clystering includes the advertisement of therapeutic services and the promotion of natural products. The preventive goal of colon cleansing expands to encompass beauty concerns. Internal purity finds its expression in beauteousness, the links make part of an integral lifestyle. Odourless, thick and constant evacuations indicate a healthy colon and by extension a correct diet. Constipation turns out to be a primary concern of modern life, no wonder there is even an International Association of Colon Therapy (ICAT) at 10911 West Ave., San Antonio, TX 78213, USA.

#### **7.2.1.4.4 Fibre Zeolotry**

Among the recommendations for preventing disease and improving diet, the consumption of fibre is one of the most outstanding. The inclusion of fibre in the diet is considered an important component of internal cleansing and of the prevention of constipation. Fibre has become one of the icons of healthy eating, a prescription. The popularity of cereal brands that have fibre as a major component testifies its leading role

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<sup>59</sup> How to eliminate the tartar from the intestines

in modern nutrition. An article that teaches us the properties of fibre describes it in terms of its solubility in water (*Dime lo que comes y te diré quien eres*<sup>60</sup>, Carrusel, July 31, 1998). While the fibre from wholegrains prevents constipation (insoluble), fibre from fruits and vegetables helps to reduce cholesterol level (soluble). Vegetarian foods are the source of such wonderful ingredients; the fibre zealotry connects the consumption of fibre with that of fruits and vegetables, as well with colon cleansing. We are again confronted with the fact that there is no fibre in animal products. In accordance with the ascetic character of healthy eating, water makes the perfect complement for a rich-fibre diet. Thus, fibre and water are among the culinary specialities for healthy eating.

Fibre is a panacea. It helps the prevention of diabetes, haemorrhoids, constipation, obesity, colon cancer and heart problems. Yet the wonder properties of the fibre would not be complete if they did not have effects on body beauty: Fibre helps to delay hunger and to give the feeling of fullness, so it is convenient for weight loss. It is opposed to the unhealthy as well, in this case junk food. Most importantly, fibre points out the specifics of healthy eating, for it is an ingredient not associated with cuisine, either traditional or artistic.

### 7.3 *Group Discussions: Making Sense of Healthy Eating*

As with media discourse, which was abundant in concepts and viewpoints, the informality of group discussions produced a great array of notions and categories, sharing similarities with some of the categories of the media. Like the newspapers' articles, the social representation of healthy eating is embedded within the broader notion of eating. Given the informality of the group discussions, some of the accounts of healthy eating were irreverent with some participants even questioning the concept. In contrast with the more stable discourse of the newspapers, the discussion in the groups started from implicit agreements in order to express personal viewpoints and share individual differences. Changes in positions were common as the discussions proceeded. In this section of the chapter, I present the analysis of the focus groups. Similarities and variations in the definition of healthy eating across groups are outlined.

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<sup>60</sup> Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you who you are

The analysis ascertained four general frames to define and structure the social representation of healthy eating: a) social eating, which comprises the pleasantness of healthy eating (pleasant; not harmful). b) transformations, in which healthy eating appears as a new issue (vegetarianism; civilising; new concept). c) medical advice, in which healthy eating is employed as a means to prevent and treat disease and to look after the body (dieting; medical advice; restricted; obliged; unpleasant). And d) lifestyle, in which healthy eating is considered as a component of a way of living (beneficial; balanced; lifestyle; natural; home-made; individual). There is one additional frame, in which healthy eating does not exist, which was mentioned by two participants of rural origin living in Bogotá. I will argue later in the discussion, that the different senses in which it is possible to interpret the representation have a functional character: the adaptation of the representation in changing contexts.

In general terms, the participants reported difficulties in trying to eat more healthily. There was ample acceptance that healthy eating is basically an ideal eating and that most eating situations are discrepant from the ideal model. Actual practices are perceived as unhealthy and this is linked to the conditions of modern life for both urban and rural groups. Basically, the use of chemicals in food processing, and the conformation of noxious dietary habits, fuelled by advertising and social pressure, are seen as the two main features of eating practices. In order to accommodate the practices and the ideal when needed, participants reported to appeal to ‘attenuating factors’, which though they may not completely transform an unhealthy into a healthy diet, they serve to ‘reduce’ the perceived detrimental effects of improper practices on health. The two most common of these factors are *moderation* and *low* (e.g. low-fat; low-sugar), but the groups of rural participants also appealed to customs, in which traditions are seen as a source of health.

If practices are identified as discrepant with the ideal of healthy eating, the next step is to identify the perceived barriers for healthy eating. Four perceived barriers were distinguished: taste, skills, opportunities, and habits. The conception of healthy eating in terms of unpleasant eating and of a medical prescription distances healthy eating from the palatability of good food. Taste is thus considered to be an important factor to comply with healthy eating. In terms of skills, two components were identified: information and education. Here information refers to the know-how knowledge, which is for instance the knowledge on how to prepare healthy foods, while education is

basically related to a know-what, which is basically the knowledge about nutritional guidelines and about the contents of a healthy diet.

In relation to opportunities, this factor refers to convenience, availability, and cost. Convenience was discussed mainly in the urban professional group in which lack of time was considered as a common problem preventing dietary compliance. Availability was discussed in both rural groups as an important problem as the area in which they live presented problems with the distribution of foods. Cost was identified as a difficulty in all groups. In relation to habits, this factor was highlighted in the groups and is one the participants associate with the unhealthy. In general, participants mentioned more education and information, nutritional counselling and the use of marketing strategies as recommendations for improving dietary habits and promoting healthy eating. Although opportunities were perceived as an important barrier, the recommendations suggested in the focus groups did not include any proposal on how to tackle this problem. Following the common sense notion that behaviour is a consequence of knowledge, the emphasis on education, information and counselling is perceived as an effective strategy for the improvement of dietary practices.

Definitions of healthy eating, actual practices, barriers to improve dietary habits and suggestions made by the participants to promote healthier diets, are in accord with other reports in the literature (cf. Margetts et al., 1997; Lloyd et al. 1995), although in an European survey the cost of food was not perceived on average to be an important barrier for healthy eating (Lappalainen, Saba, Holm, Mykkanen, & Gibney, 1997). In general, the non-professional groups were more active in defending their eating practices (the rural) or in reporting healthy eating (the urban). The professionals were more critical of the concept of healthy eating and in quoting the problems that prevent the consumption of healthy foods. With the exception of the urban non-professional group, all the participants agreed on the difficulties of complying with healthy eating. The author speculates on a possible association between this particular acquiescence and the fact that the urban non-professional participants were the only ones paid for attending the focus group.

People's accounts were characterised by competing explanations, arguments and counter-arguments, which however, required some consensus in order to be interpreted. The consensus centred on the consumption of fruits and vegetables, fibre and low-fat



foods. In short, the vegetarian diet seems to be the common element in all five focus groups (see appendix 11). Implicit or explicit agreements serve as the basis for disclosing personal viewpoints, and for dissent. Before the overflow of recommendations, and the inability and/or unwillingness of the individual to comply with them, the concept of healthy eating is attacked and questioned. Because healthy eating is a dilemma, whatever one chooses is problematic. A first year medical student, objected to the possibility of healthy eating in the following manner:

“Anyway, here [Colombia] it is impossible to eat healthily. Let’s begin with the vegetables. First of all, they are irrigated with polluted water. Secondly, they have to be cooked, so they lose all the nutrients. Then, what kind of nutrition are you getting?” (María, Student, 27, rural professional living in Bogota).

In the remainder of this chapter I will consider the findings of the focus group analysis in terms of (a) variation in the senses of the social representation of healthy eating, a functional property; (b) the creative role of language; (c) links of the representation with basic frames such as the distinction between the natural and the unnatural, and (d) the appeal to ‘absent’ categories in the interpretation of practices.

### **7.3.1 The Kaleidoscope of Healthy Eating**

The analysis of group discussions allowed the identification of seventeen different definitions for healthy eating (see appendix 9). The definitions ranged from the idea of restriction, linked to illness, medical advice and dieting, to the idea of pleasant and delicious eating in accordance with the view that healthy is what is enjoyed. In the first notion, eating practices are aimed at the prevention of illness and as part of the treatment of any medical condition. The second conception corresponds to an attitude that privileges emotions. In the previous chapter we saw how individuals changed the sense of healthy eating between the ‘physically healthy’ and the ‘psychologically healthy’ to construct specific meanings according to particular demands. All the possible categories for healthy eating are not social representations in themselves, as if they were static schemata, but specific senses given by interrelated groups of conceptual units in a specific context. Consensual elements, I argue, are constant in the discourse because they are embedded in ideological processes; but the meaning in-context of these elements is not invariant for they are functional.

It has been reported that the lay understanding of healthy eating usually corresponds with dietary guidelines (Povey et al., 1998). In general terms the participants from the different groups agreed in defining healthy eating as a vegetarian issue in two senses: The consumption of fruits and vegetables, and the reduction of meat and animal fat. The fact that this lay understanding is pervasive across groups means that the representation is being structured for these taken-for-granted elements such as vegetarianism, which are, I should say once again, ideological and indeed, political. The diffusion and propagation of the information about healthy eating is served, to a great extent, by the mass media. In the rural groups, however, mainly in the less educated, health professionals have a greater influence. But for all of them, meat and fat were, conceptually, a problem.

One of the basic notions of healthy eating, the idea of restriction, is build upon a paradox, that to eat healthily one has to be ill. The idea of a restrictive diet is related to illness and age, that is, healthy eating emerges as a means to restore the equilibrium when the organism is ill or when that organism is more vulnerable due to ageing:

“We don’t take our health seriously, most of the time we think about our health when we get ill” (Pedro, 30, Mechanic, rural non-professional).

Although no links are made explicit in viewing ageing as an illness, the notion of increased vulnerability as one gets older is present in discourses. As an example take this dialogue between two rural professional participants, a dietician and a veterinarian:

Rebecca: The problem is that after the thirties the machine starts to tire out.

Luis: Which machine?

Rebecca: The organism! But before, great, eat what you want...

Tatiana, an occupational physician made the following comment regarding that matter:

“In Colombia, young people do not eat healthily. As they get older, they then begin to have health problems so they begin to change their dietary habits. Then, the husband, for instance, he eats his skinned chicken, his salad, and so forth...but the rest of the family keeps on eating as usual...” (Tatiana, Physician, 32, urban professional)

While the non-professional groups keep the notion of healthy eating basically tied to health concerns, professional participants seek to surpass the medical frontiers and

healthy eating is located in broader societal transformations, including new religious forms. Betty, gave this definition of healthy eating:

“I do think that the healthy eating needs an integral view. A balanced meal at all levels, the food one wants to eat. To enjoy the food, the pleasure of eating and the attitude towards food, I mean, the relationship one has with food. There are several things, not only what I eat, also how I eat and what I think about what I eat”. (Betty, Psychologist, 28, urban professional).

Issues such as balance and equilibrium reproduce the fascination for philosophical views that resemble oriental religions. As a participant said, “healthy eating means the eating that does not alter my homeostatic equilibrium”. Healthy eating desists of being a mere medical prescription and turns into a lifestyle. Let us reproduce the comments by one of the dieticians to illustrate the point:

“I think the concept [eating] has changed. The influence of Hindu theories and alternative medicine has changed the parameters of what is considered Healthy Eating. Before Healthy Eating was to eat foods from the five groups, the famous pyramid that is now obsolete but is still useful for community education. But for me healthy eating is now different”

“Like I say, the influence of other religions, cultures, and all that, has created another notion of eating. You talk to a doctor who gives bioenergetics treatments and the first recommendation he makes is a vegetarian diet, that you have to stop eating meat because that spoils the vital energy of your body and so forth” (Claudia, Dietician, 32, urban professional)

The consumption of meat arises as the most controversial topic for healthy eating. Besides cholesterol, meat is viewed as a source of disease and is linked to death. By avoiding meat, the eater distances him/herself from death, the corrupted. Meat is the opposition to natural food. Luz, a nurse who participated in one of the focus groups as a professional from rural origins living in Bogotá said:

“We are confused about meat. We have been told that it is bad for the bones, that it increases the uric acid. For example I eat meat, and I have vegetarian friends who ask me, do you eat carcass?” (Luz, Nurse, 55, rural professional living in Bogota).

Another problematic aspect related to meat is the use of growth promoters and antibiotics, which in people’s accounts, are transferred from the meat to the consumer organism. Chemical products are reconstructed as poison, which is thought to be introduced in food via a popular icon of medical science, vaccination. Following the

notion that what is ingested becomes part of the body, the polluted food turns into a source of disease.

As with the media, groups also put healthy eating in the context of dieting and beauty. Yet, beauty as fitness and health are linked in the new discourse on food; being overweight is conceived as a risk factor. Healthy eating becomes then not a notion to enjoy food but a means to control and test self-discipline. The health and social effects of the anxieties with body beauty are not exclusively a women's problem and they are increasingly concerning men, mainly male adolescents:

“The new generation links healthy eating with being thin. Many people do it. I don't. Advertising has made us believe that healthy eating is to be thin”  
(Alberto, Student, 23, urban professional)

The multitude of definitions confirms that healthy eating is not a single concept, an observation that may be extended to most social objects. That is why the prescriptions for healthy eating are at the moment of choosing never absolute, always negotiable.

### **7.3.2 Speaking Metaphors: The Body as Machine**

According to Lakoff, (1993) everyday language is metaphoric. The ordinary view of metaphor as a purely literary license fails to consider the creative character of everyday language. For Lakoff, a metaphor is not only a linguistic matter but mainly a subject of thought, the expression of a cognitive process. Lakoff suggests a theory of metaphor in terms of cross-domain mappings, which allows conceptual correspondences between domains. For him, these correspondences allow the knowledge from one domain to be applied to another. In the notion of cholesterol-as-killer previously presented, cholesterol is personified, and this personification relates the domain person to the domain cholesterol. Thus cholesterol can be thought of as a killer, or as 'bad' (LDL) or 'good' cholesterol (HDL). Conceptualising cholesterol-as-killer transforms cholesterol into a human figure. Characterised as 'evil' and 'public enemy', the concept of cholesterol is invested with an ontological reality, that of social representations, and it is placed in a particular historical moment, the Millennium.

Based on these considerations, I suggest that the process of correspondence between conceptual domains is central for the objectification of the elements of the representation. I consider the use of metaphors as a key component in the development

of health marketing campaigns, for it is a pedagogical tool. Mayer (1993) pointed out the usefulness of metaphors to understanding scientific concepts; they are instructive. If metaphors ground us in the concrete reality of what it might seem otherwise too abstract and alien to us, the opportunities it offers as a communicative tool are enormous, e.g. clarification of arguments.

The metaphor of the body-as-machine, as an example, was recurrently cited in the group discussions. This view allows us to understand how the body works, its physiology. The translation of the knowledge from the domain machine to the domain body makes it possible to understand eating in terms of tanking up. The everyday diet of many Colombians, made up of rice, meat, potato and plantain, is creatively conceptualised as diesel<sup>61</sup>. Calories, the amount of energy the body gets from food, are better understood when thought of in terms of fuel.

### 7.3.3 Eating Contra-Natura

*“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Gen 1:31)*

The citation from the Bible recognises the divine order of things, which are susceptible to being contaminated by the intervention of the one who sins, the human being. Nature incarnates the unadulterated and society embodies the infected. The new framework to conceive the relationships culture-nature is one of the most powerful influences in the development of the social representation of healthy eating. The industrialisation of agriculture and the developments of food technology, among other relevant factors, have considerably improved food security. Consumers perceive these improvements as a sign of human advancement that has cost the proliferation of risks. This perception points out one of the several paradoxes one may find in the area of nutrition: In order to guarantee life by giving the body what it needs, life itself has to be risked. A rural non-professional participant referred to this problem in the following terms:

“I’m talking about science; science invents so many chemical things; it invents about everything. The wisdom...perhaps, wisdom kills” (Pedro, 30, Mechanic, rural non-professional).

All groups expressed concern with the artificial methods of food production. Artificial means a man’s creation and it is opposed to a natural order, the sacred canons, which

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<sup>61</sup> People use the acronym ACPM (Aceite Combustible Para Motor, Diesel) for *Arroz, Carne, Papa* and *Maduro* (rice, meat, potato and plantain).

may not be altered. One participant exemplifies the use of the artificial, as opposed to the natural, in the production of foodstuffs in the following comment:

“That story of chemicals in food is the very true. Now everything is a chemical procedure. In the past times everything was natural. Before one was raised with pure cow’s milk, and the cows were healthy because they weren’t vaccinated...One didn’t get powdered milk. Now all milk is with chemicals. Nowadays since the child is born, he is fed with chemicals, like powdered milk, which passes through a process that it isn’t natural. And that’s why we are every time increasingly against nature” . (Carlos, 50, farm worker, rural non-professional).

A more technical version is offered by a veterinary surgeon from Arauca:

“I think that nowadays nobody can say that eating is healthy because all we eat has chemicals in it. In veterinary medicine we use loads of anabolic...to put on weight, to produce more...we save nine or ten months in producing the animal, why? Because that means money, money is what is important” (Luis, 36, Vet, rural professional).

Wild capitalism is targeted as the driving force behind the transmogrification of food products. Mean interests are made responsible for the infringement of the laws of nature. A participant from Arauca made the following remarks in relation with that matter:

“An organic chicken grows in its normal environment, doesn't it? But the chickens that are sold to us are grown in incubators, the process is speeded up with medicines. Everything is speeded with chemicals. Just think about eating a mango that has been forced to ripen; it’s bad for you. So are those accelerated procedures, as I’m saying...taking the chicken to the end of the process, selling it in the market and getting the profit without considering the consequences for the individual” (Juana, 28, secretary, rural non-professional).

#### **7.3.4 Past-Times, Good Times: Fallacies in Discourse**

In her social psychological analysis of health and illness, Herzlich (1973) explored the associations between the urban and the unhealthy. Opposed to nature and tuned to the artificial, the urban denoted alteration. The rural, on the contrary, was associated with wholesomeness and the preservation of health. The dichotomy remains actual and it suggests a geographical opposition that lies in the degree of human intervention in natural order. Health is then depicted as an end-state. The constant search of equilibrium means that this is at risk or it has already been lost. The urban inhabitant turns to the countryside to procure fresh air, clean water, and genuine foods. The rural inhabitant

searches for another possibility and turns back to a past time when everything was healthier.

Health is elusive. Perceived as a lost gift, it must be re-discovered. For both urban and rural participants it is the human intervention that brings about the loss of health. The solution is then a return to nature, either by encouraging a return to the countryside for the urban inhabitant, or by recovering costumes and traditions for the rural. In both cases the contributions of human actions are not taken into account. The rural participants, for instance, failed to consider the fact that there is more food available and more variety, thanks to improvements in food distribution and storage. Life expectancy, for instance, has not decreased; actually, it has increased. Below, two extracts from conversations with rural non-professional participants are presented; they illustrate the contrast between the past, the healthy, and the present, the unhealthy.

“I would say that now, perhaps it is not that we don't eat healthily but it is the combination of the food with chemicals...and this is why we see the decrease in mortality [meaning increase]. People are now dying younger...before people ate just meat and rice, and dwarf banana, and people were strong. They did not have uric acid, they did not suffer from that. I think that [the current situation] is a product of civilisation... a consequence of too much chemicals” (Juana, Secretary, 28, rural non-professional)

“In my opinion, talking about beef, perhaps it was not so harmful in the past as it is now, because in the old days the vaccines were not used, mind you those vaccines are things that are toxic. For example, the pot is disposable, and it has to be buried, throw it out where does not contaminate...why? Because it is toxic and it is left inside the flesh, and that affects the environment. I mean, it is not like natural things, let us say the paca, the armadillo. Nobody vaccinates them because they are products of nature. I trust nature very much” (Pedro, Mechanic, 30, rural non professional)

Both statements are confronted by the following argument:

“That people lived longer before and that they were healthier before, is very relative. Because the advance of medicine is measured at a population level, I mean, the thing is statistic, life expectancy. The life expectancy fifty years ago is not as the same as now. Now one is not left to die, now it's more difficult to die. Why? Because if you get ill from cholesterol, you get treatment. Fifty years go cholesterol was unknown” (Luis, 36, vet, rural professional).

What seems to be debated here is not whether people are dying younger or not but whether individuals perceive modern society as embedded in risks<sup>62</sup>. The past is reconstructed as free of these risks and consequently as healthier. While the urban groups perceived those risks as components of the urban life and for them the rural represents the healthy, the rural groups need another referent to reconstruct the notion of the 'at risk health'. The opposition past/health and present/illness emerged in both rural groups and in the group of rural participants living in Bogotá. The discussions portrayed science and technology, not only as source of risks but also as discoverer of risks, as in the following extract from a conversation between rural professionals:

Adriana: Let me tell you something. In the old times there weren't so many diseases, women reached old age. Nowadays you see a four year old child and his health is already compromised.

Luis: No Adriana, it's not like that. In the old times many diseases were unknown. Before one would die of Sant Vitus's dance, miserere colic, sudden death, ascites, hydrops, and now those are clinical symptoms, not diseases. Jaundice was a disease fifty years ago, now it's just a hyperbilirrubinemia. Now it's not a disease but a symptom. There is so much progress, and that's the reason why life expectancy has increased, we're better off now...the only thing is the planet is warming.

#### 7.4 *Summary*

Formal and informal discourses share similarities in the social representation of healthy eating. Vegetarian, low-fat, exercise and cleanliness, among others, are all depicted as central features of a healthy eating by both the media and the focus groups. The media inclines more towards a representation plagued by medical and beauty concerns while the focus groups offer a more irreverent and variable account of healthy eating. These included more topics for the definition of healthy eating. Formal and informal communications complement each other when the social representation is viewed as a collective product. From this perspective the representation is in part a social fact in the full Durkheimian sense, that is, a social reality that exists outside the individual and which exerts a coercive influence. By including the analysis of different modes of representation (cf. Bauer & Gaskell, 1999), the study of the representation situates at the collective level of analysis. The multi-level analysis allows us to assemble the components of the global representation, which includes formal and informal discursive

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<sup>62</sup> We must be aware that most of the people being killed under the current conflict are mainly young men, which is affecting mortality statistics. However they are not dying as consequence of disease but as a consequence of intentional injuries, a social malaise.



practices. The discourses between these levels are not necessarily homogeneous; on the contrary, like the pieces in a puzzle, they jointly offer a comprehensive picture of the ways society conceives a social problem.

Though healthy eating has constant elements that structure the discourse, this is highly variable. Here the variations are depicted as general categories that capture the momentum of the particular expression of the representations like snapshots. Each one of these categories conforms particular configurations of the social representation. The focus groups shows how urban and rural, professionals and non-professionals, share the idea of the vegetarian and of restriction as organising ideas to talk about healthy eating. Although there is a level of consensus among groups, each one of them reveals at the same time their particular symbolic and material conditions in the interaction with healthy eating. Both groups of professionals, for instance, give special importance to perceiving healthy eating in terms of an individual choice, while the rural non-professionals attribute special importance to their traditional cuisine. The former stresses the modern theme of individual responsibility in health outcomes, while the latter relates 'the healthy' with the traditions and customs of their ancestors. The urban non-professionals, for their part, are more inclined to conceive healthy eating as the opportunity to share and to socialise where the healthy includes a state of 'psychological' wellbeing. In the following chapter, the core elements are formally identified following the methodologies employed within the structural perspective of social representations.

## 8 THE CENTRAL CORE OF HEALTHY EATING

This chapter presents the results of the questionnaire data; the interpretation of findings follows the theoretical assumptions of the structural perspective. The first part classifies the semantic contents of healthy eating in frames. A second part offers a preliminary list of core elements and their subsequent verification. In a third part, classes and elements are portrayed in dimensional solutions to characterise the association between elements and group affiliation. The solutions result from running Correspondence Analysis. Finally, the results of rating and grouping tasks are set forth.

Though much of the research done under the structural approach has stressed the verification of core elements, the consideration of peripheral elements is as important as the determination of the core. This is because the theory assumes the periphery as the space where the representation is concretely lived. Since the periphery is the operational part of the structure, variations in its content according with group affiliation were expected. In this way, the group expresses the concrete conditions of production of the representation. Vergès et al. (1994b) have noted this phenomenon of peripheral differentiation between sub-populations from the same socio-economic context. Due to this reason, the structural analysis begins by offering a complete picture of the structural organisation, not just the identification of the central core.

### 8.1 *The Frames of Healthy Eating*

An analysis of the complete corpora allowed us to distinguish seven general frames that cluster the complete set of elements (core and peripheral). The frames reveal the highly varied corpus of the representation of healthy eating, and the relationship between group affiliation and semantic salience. Some frames are more relevant for a particular group, but in general, they are available to all the groups. This suggests that the groups may express the representation differently in discursive productions following the collective ideals of healthy eating and the group practices that result from material conditions. The following list details the frames distinguished in the analysis of the word association.

**1. Healthy Eating as Proper Eating (Prescriptive):** This is a frame of regulation where healthy eating is thought of as balanced, adequate and plenty but constrained by *Low* and *No*. This frame characterises the rural professional group. Healthy eating as

proper eating, entrails a new relationship with food. Here taste, although recognised, is constrained. The frame re-creates taste (e.g. no spices, low salt, low in sugar), and makes a value from food preferences. Balance, fibre, proteins, water, and nutritious are examples of the semantics for this class, which points out the normative aspects of healthy eating.

**2. Healthy Eating as a Menu (Diet):** This frame is particularly characteristic of the non-professional rural group that evoked concrete elements that make part of the ordinary diet. The elements most frequently cited were fruits, vegetables, bread, cheese, milk, pulses, and eggs, along with fizzy drinks (e.g. Coca-Cola), which are characteristic of the 'basic basket' of food products for Colombian families. This frame brings about the need to concretise the experience of healthy eating. Some core elements identified later in the analysis such as fruits and vegetables made part of this class, pointing out the impregnation of the everyday eating with the normative character of the representation.

**3. Healthy eating as a Social Act (Recreation):** This frame characterises the non-professional urban group. Here the elements cluster around the notion of healthy eating as communion and family life. Alongside vitamins, cereals and dairy products, elements such as family, music, parks, TV, table, restaurants, tranquillity and walk appear in the associations. Eating together is a salient issue, stressing the importance not of the food itself but of how the food is consumed. This frame provides another meaning for healthiness that refers not just to the contents of the diet but also to the conditions of eating.

**4. Healthy Eating as the Act of Eating (Activity):** This frame seems important to all four groups (although more salient among professionals) and refers specifically to the actions involved in eating. It includes preparing the food (cooking), and consuming it (eat, drink, chew, avoid) in accordance to social norms (meals, regular, time, little). In this frame, the act of eating is framed within 'a sociology of the table' that stresses chewing well, having meals at regular times, avoiding junk food and eating slowly.

**5. Healthy Eating as Diet (Medical):** In this frame diet, health and taste are salient and join other elements such as exercise and vitamins. Here healthy eating relates to dieting as medical prescription. The most characteristic group for this dimension was the urban

non-professional group. Specific elements associated in this frame are health, avoid, nutrition, cholesterol. The meaning of diet in this frame is more attuned to the health aspect of dieting.

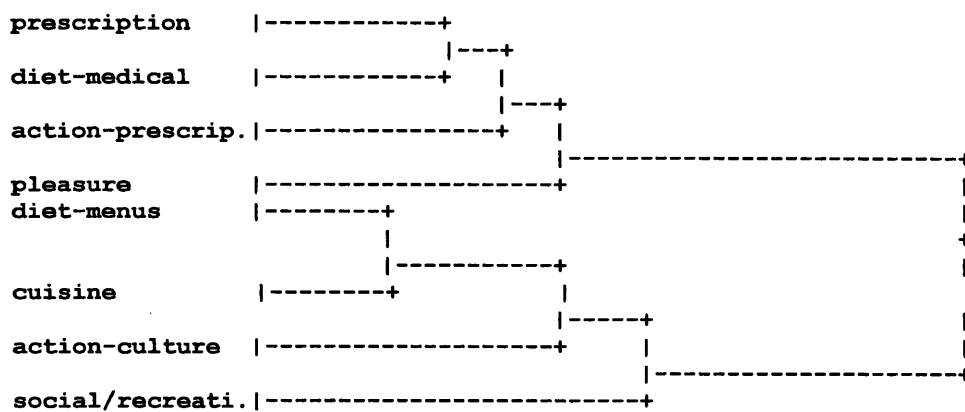
**6. Healthy eating as an Enjoyable Experience (Pleasure):** Similarly to point number three, this frame is very characteristic of a particular group, urban professionals. Opposed to the notion of healthy eating as restricted and constrained eating, this frame shows the possibility of conceiving healthy eating in terms of colour, cleanliness, delicious, exquisite, fresh, hot, nice, pleasant, tasty, good, and well presented. The appropriation of a new concept by a group demands negotiations, where the constrained eating becomes a palatable experience. The difference with healthy eating as a social act, which also has a component of enjoyment, is that in this frame the enjoyable experience comes from the food itself and not from the situation or the experience of sharing.

**7. Healthy Eating as Eating Culture (Cuisine):** This frame characterises the rural non-professionals, who conserve distinct culinary traditions linked to a particular way of life. The *autochthonous* cuisine is an expression of group identity. The healthy character of this eating is ensured by the traditions of the ancestors. The characterisation of healthy eating in these terms is not surprising given the reconstruction of the healthy in terms of past-times, a situation revealed in the focus groups. The elements featured here are armadillo, cassava, *picadillo*<sup>63</sup>, capybara, and grilled meat. This frame includes other elements found in the other groups such as potatoes, chicken, fish, rice, cheese, and meat that make part of a more common daily eating.

The frames listed above cluster in two distinct groups. On one side, we have the ‘ideal healthy eating’ (i.e. prescriptive, medical, enjoyable), and on the other the ‘effective healthy eating’ (i.e. diet, social, cuisine). Core and peripheral elements identified later in the analysis appear in both clusters. This points out the normative and functional characters of the central and peripheral systems.

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<sup>63</sup> Soup made of chopped dried beef, plantain, cassava and pumpkin.

**Fig. 8.1. The frames of healthy eating.**

## 8.2 *The Structure of Healthy Eating*

A total of 2,532 occurrences resulted from the procedure of free association. Although this would point out a very high average per person (12.6), in fact no participant associated more than ten words. However, some participants were very productive and after mentioning a specific word, they exemplified their answers with more forms. The analysis included those forms, independently of the original word. Thus, for instance, sometimes the association of a particular word resulted in the association of other words. The analysis considered these 'secondary' associations. The number of different words mentioned was 496 words, 246 of which appeared just once. The maximum frequency for a single word was of 135 and corresponded to vegetables. The frequencies per group were of 494 in the rural non-professional (group 1); 663 in the rural professional (group 2); 746 in the urban non-professional (group 3) and 597 in the urban professional (group 4).

The analysis detected frequent elements, not all of which qualified as core elements due to their high mean of evocation (see table 8.1). Those elements pointed out a particular case of highly salient peripheral elements. From the structural perspective, the work of Flament paid considerable attention to the role of the periphery (Flament, 1994b), who stated that the core cannot be understood but in a continuous dialectics with the periphery. Flament posed the question about these salient non-central elements in the following terms: How is it that a peripheral element can be as salient as a central one? He answered the question by referring to the conditional character of the periphery, stating that the salience of these elements are given by their links with the core and its peripheral character is due to their flexibility. The hypothesis proposed by Flament is

that a salient peripheral element is a new topic within a changing social representation. The table below presents such salient peripheral elements (common elements across groups in bold characters).

**Table 8.1. Salient peripheral elements** (Constant elements across groups in bold characters)

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Cheese	<b>Balance</b>	<b>Balance</b>	<b>Balance</b>
<b>Milk</b>	Cereals	Cassava	Company
Grains	White-meat	Grains	Fibre
Pulses	Fat-free	Soup	Fresh
Pasta	Fish	Cheese	Ice-cream
Soup	Juices	Eggs	Low starchy
<b>Water</b>	Liquids	<b>Milk</b>	<b>Proteins</b>
	<b>Water</b>	Children	<b>Vitamins</b>
	Low-sugar	Family	<b>Water</b>
	<b>Proteins</b>	Music	Well-presented
	<b>Vitamins</b>	TV	
	Meat	Chewing well	
	<b>Milk</b>	<b>Water</b>	
	Moderation	Clean	
	Natural	Parks	
		Walk	
		Health	
		<b>Proteins</b>	
		<b>Vitamins</b>	
		Restaurants	

There are some points I want to suggest in relation to this salience. Firstly, it should be noted the presence of *water* across the four groups. In strict sense, water is not part of eating but a necessary substance for survival and basic everyday activities such as hygienic practices. The inclusion of the element water in the representation of healthy eating may characterise a recent phenomenon driven, to some extent, by the rejection of all that is unnatural. In fact, mineral water companies have taken advantage of this, turning water into a fashionable element of modern diets. In the wave of body cleanliness and spiritual purification, water comes to help in finding the natural. This encounter has been commercialised and adapted to healthy lifestyle guides in urban settings (e.g. drinking at least one litre of water each day).

The former suggestion follows the hypothesis proposed by Flament. Within a process of transformation of the representation, the element water would become increasingly important for the proper functioning of body organs and for body aesthetics. Thus, water would be slightly substituting drinks like Coca-Cola in the accompaniment of meals and it would be a matter of time for water to become a core element of healthy eating. But, the salient peripheral character of the element water for healthy eating may have two other possible explanations

One explanation has to do with the complementary role water plays for healthy eating. In other words, natural and pure water is an important component of the healthy in general but not a specific component for healthy eating. Healthy eating could be recognised in the absence of water. Being a vital element, water may be a component of other representations. The other explanation, even more plausible from my point of view, may have to do with some methodological shortcomings. Abric questioned the assumption that the first associations in a list are more important than the subsequent ones (Abric, 1994c); he referred to the rank of evocation. In a sense, however, because in association lists only the upper-most elements are considered (usually five or seven), the order of evocation seems to have an implicit importance in network-like models. In the theory of reasoned action, for instance, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) considered the first five to nine beliefs as the salient elements that would determine a person's attitude.

A similar case happens with the concept of balance, which is salient in all groups but the rural non-professional, as with proteins and vitamins (in terms of frequency). The concept of balance acts in with double meaning. It is the effect of the external over the internal, the process of restitution of the body equilibrium through the consumption of balanced foods, where equilibrium is ingested. However, it also relates to the concept of moderation, a moral theme, and with keeping the enjoyable within 'healthy' limits. The salience of this element means that it is particularly important in the advertising of food products. At the same time, the salience may result from the commercial influence, which evinces a complex interaction between public, institutions, and organisations.

A final remark in the interpretation of those salient peripheral elements has to do with the presence of a strange element, ice cream, and the theoretical possibility of the periphery to hold contradictions in the representation. In conceiving the flexible and conditional character of the periphery, some strange elements such as ice cream can be legitimised and made acceptable by the representation. The attachment of other meanings that modify the sense of eating ice cream (e.g. a low sugar ice cream or an ice cream made of natural fruits) render possible transgressions.

When the combination of frequency and mean rank of evocation are applied we obtain a list of possible core elements. Table 8.2 shows the elements that need to be tested and their centrality verified. Similarities and differences in the semantic content should be

emphasised to trace ideological patterns in food consumption (e.g. vegetarianism) and cultural specificity. Common elements to all four groups are in bold characters.

**Table 8.2. Preliminary identification of core elements.** Frequencies and mean ranks of evocation are in brackets<sup>64</sup>.

Group 1 <sup>65</sup>	Group 2 <sup>66</sup>	Group 3 <sup>67</sup>	Group 4 <sup>68</sup>
<b>Fruits</b> [36, 3.4] <b>Vegetables</b> [35, 2.8] Chicken [30, 3.5] Fish [22, 3.4] Grilled meat [18, 3.1] Meat [18, 3.8] <b>Salads</b> [13, 2.5] Natural juices [11, 4.5] Cereals [7, 4.7] Rice [7, 4.7] Eggs [6, 4.6.]	<b>Vegetables</b> [33, 3.0] <b>Fruits</b> [32, 3.5] Chicken [16, 4.1] Tasty [11, 3.4] Low-fat [9, 3.5] Nice [7, 2.3] <b>Salads</b> [7, 3.1] Delicious [5, 2.4] Grilled meat [5, 4.6] Soup [4, 3.8]	<b>Vegetables</b> [34, 3.7] <b>Fruits</b> [31, 3.7] Meat [24, 4.7] Fish [20, 4.7] Chicken [16, 4.8] Juices [12, 4.7] Cereals [10, 4.3] <b>Salads</b> [8, 3.4] Tranquillity [7, 4] Dairy products [7, 4.1] Regularity [4, 2.3] Low-fat [4, 4.3] Countryside [4, 4.7] Pulses [4, 4.8] Low-salt [3, 4.3]	<b>Fruits</b> [32, 3.1] <b>Vegetables</b> [29, 3.0] Fat-free [12, 4.6] Tasty [11, 3.3] Light [8, 3.6] Low-fat [8, 4.8] Meat [6, 2.7] <b>Salads</b> [6, 2.8] Clean [6, 3.5] Cereal [6, 4.0] Regularly [6, 4.2] Dairy products [6, 4.2] Natural [5, 3.2] Nutritious [5, 4.3] Tranquillity [4, 3.0] Colours [4, 3.3] Pleasant [4, 3.8] Pulses [4, 4.8] Exercise [4, 5.3] Nice [3, 1.3] Delicious [3, 4.0] Calmly [3, 4.0] Milk [3, 4.5] Cheese [3, 5.0] Low-sugar [3, 5.0] Juices [3, 5.3]

The elements listed above are all possible core elements. The confirmation of their central character had to be given by the property of being an essential component of the representation, that is, by their property to give meaning to the whole structural array. In other words, that only those elements perceived as completely essential to structure the representation of healthy eating could be regarded as components of the central system. Three essential aspects should be noted here: Firstly, the variation in the number of possible core elements in each group; secondly, the role of the periphery and of those highly salient peripheral elements; and lastly, the existence of common elements across groups.

<sup>64</sup> The Following cut-off criteria were based on the relative frequency and evocation of the words.

<sup>65</sup> Cut-off criteria for frequency >4 and <= 4; for order <5 and >= 5

<sup>66</sup> Cut-off criteria for frequency >3 and <= 3; for order <5 and >= 5

<sup>67</sup> Cut-off criteria for frequency >2 and <= 2; for order <5 and >= 5

<sup>68</sup> Cut-off criteria for frequency >2.47 and <= 2.47; for order <5.4 and >= 5.4



The object of representation evoked a larger production among the professional urban individuals in terms of different words. The variations pointed out a wider spread of semantic elements in this group, which diminished the cut-off point (frequency) for inclusion although the cut-off point for the order of evocation was similar to that of the other groups. I can argue then that the increase in the educational level (e.g. professional) and the possibility of having a direct relationship with the elements of the representation (i.e., because of the urban life) expand and diversify the semantic association. This hypothesis would be related with the stretch in belief dimensionality in a similar sense to that argued by Snyder (1982; see chapter 2). Yet, the production of the other groups does not support the effect of education although leaves open the question of the relationship between the access to the 'objectified' representation, such as the availability of 'healthy foods' in the urban world, and semantic richness. Thus, healthy eating would be closer to the urban ways than to the rural life.

A second point to raise here has to do with the components of the representation that incorporate the experience of healthy eating in terms of actual practices or menus. These salient elements are theoretically peripheral due to their sensibility to the immediate context and their function of adapting the representation to the concrete reality. As internalised practices adapted to the whole representational system, the periphery deals with the concrete, daily and vivid experience of eating. It is at a higher level, at the core, where these experiences may or may not appear as healthy, according to specific demands. In other words, a close examination of the elements listed shows that some of them are 'effective menus', that is, food as part of the everyday life, the more pragmatic aspect of the representation.

However, following Flament's suggestion (1994b), the periphery is composed of new elements as well. The novel elements suggest that the social representation is always in constant re-definition. Some of these elements may not have a concrete perceptible referent (e.g. proteins, vitamins, fibre, balance), but they become 'touchable realities' through processes of objectification. The materialisation can be collective and/or particular to each group depending on social and historical conditions.

A final remark I want to suggest here refers to the ideological processes that ensure the constancy of some core units across different groups (e.g. vegetables). I would place these elements in the space of the new demands of a renewed morality, characteristic of

the western world in late modernity. The changes include, for instance, the conflict found in the consumption of meat. The negotiation of the conflict in group practices is possible thanks to the availability of competing frames. The consumption of meat may have a different sense when healthy eating is framed by a 'healthy eating-as-recreation' discourse and when is framed by 'healthy eating-as-medical' discourse. Yet, the generalisation of some core elements across the groups makes it feasible to suggest that these elements are part of wider cultural and ideological processes.

In order to verify the centrality of the elements, the participants completed a version of the procedure of *calling into question*. The frequencies, percentages, and significance levels of the elements tested are in tables 8.3 through 8.6. The results in table 8.7 are the core elements of the representation of healthy eating in each group.

The core elements of healthy eating cluster in three general categories. The first category is the *vegetarian diet* (i.e., vegetables, fruits, natural juices, salads, pulses, and cereals); this is the most salient category for healthy eating. The factors that make this category so important and the reason people may have for choosing a vegetarian diet relates mainly to health issues. They also have to do with a new 'ecological morality', in particular for urban professionals. The rural non-professionals, however, have not been touched yet by these 'ethical' reasons, as evinced in the part devoted to the analysis of the observation. Surprisingly, the rural non-professionals did not confirm the need for meat for healthy eating, which suggests the same 'vegetarian trend' across groups, at least at the ideal level. Here there is clear conflict between concept and practice.

Another category has to do with a sort of *demi-vegetarian diet*, where red meat is excluded from the core though being one of the most salient elements. White meat (i.e. fish and chicken) appeared in three groups (both rural groups and the urban non-professional group) as core elements, which suggest, among other things, a re-creation of the symbolic character of blood. Blood, as with other body fluids, emerges as a source of infection and disease. It is plausible that the current position of white meat in the representation of healthy eating relates to the 'vegetarian trend' described above.

**Table 8.3 Probable core elements: Rural non-professionals (Group 1).**

Element	It's essential for healthy eating Frequency (percentage)	It's not essential for healthy eating Frequency (percentage)	Two-tailed significance (binomial test, expected probability 0.50)
Eggs	6 (30%)	14 (70%)	0.115
Vegetables	20 (100%)	0	0.000
Natural juices	19 (95%)	1 (5%)	0.000
Salads	19 (95%)	1 (5%)	0.000
Meat	8 (40%)	12 (60%)	0.503
Fruits	20 (100%)	0	0.000
Fish	20 (100%)	0	0.000
Chicken	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	0.041
Cereals	12 (60%)	8 (40%)	0.503
Rice	8 (40%)	12 (60%)	0.503
Grilled meat	14 (70%)	6 (30%)	0.115

**Table 8.4. Probable core elements: Rural professionals (Group 2).**

Element	It's essential for healthy eating Frequency (percentage)	It's not essential for healthy eating Frequency (percentage)	Two-tailed significance (binomial test, expected probability 0.50)
Low-fat	13 (65%)	7 (35%)	0.263
Vegetables	17 (85%)	3 (15%)	0.003
Nice	13 (65%)	7 (35%)	0.263
Salads	19 (95%)	1 (5%)	0.000
Delicious	12 (60%)	8 (40%)	0.503
Fruits	20 (100%)	0	0.000
Chicken	17 (85%)	3 (15%)	0.003
Tasty	14 (70%)	6 (30%)	0.115
Grilled meat	14 (70%)	6 (30%)	0.115
Soup	12 (60%)	8 (40%)	0.503

**Table 8.5. Probable core elements: Urban non-professionals (Group 3).**

Element	It's essential for healthy eating Frequency (percentage)	It's not essential for healthy eating Frequency (percentage)	Two-tailed significance (binomial test, expected probability 0.50)
Countryside	11 (55%)	9 (45%)	0.824
Vegetables	20 (100%)	0	0.000
Juices	16 (80%)	4 (20%)	0.012
Salads	17 (85%)	3 (15%)	0.003
Meat	13 (65%)	7 (35%)	0.263
Fruits	20 (100%)	0	0.000
Fish	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	0.041
Chicken	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	0.041
Cereals	14 (70%)	6 (30%)	0.115
Tranquillity	19 (95%)	1 (5%)	0.000
Dairy products	13 (65%)	7 (35%)	0.263
Regularly	12 (60%)	8 (40%)	0.503
Low fat	12 (60%)	8 (40%)	0.503
Pulses	16 (80%)	4 (20%)	0.012
Low salt	14 (70%)	6 (30%)	0.115

**Table 8.6. Probable Core elements: Urban professionals (Group 4).**

Element	It's essential for healthy eating Frequency (percentage)	It's not essential for healthy eating Frequency (percentage)	Two-tailed significance (binomial test, expected probability 0.50)
Fruits	18 (90%)	2 (10%)	0.000
Vegetables	17 (85%)	3 (15%)	0.003
Salads	17 (85%)	3 (15%)	0.003
Fat free	10 (50%)	10 (50%)	1.000
Light	10 (50%)	10 (50%)	1.000
Low fat	17 (85%)	3 (15%)	0.003
Meat	10 (50%)	10 (50%)	1.000
Clean	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	0.041
Cereals	16 (80%)	4 (20%)	0.012
Regularly	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	0.041
Dairy products	10 (50%)	10 (50%)	1.000
Natural	16 (80%)	4 (20%)	0.012
Tranquillity	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	0.041
Colourful	2 (10%)	18 (90%)	0.000
Milk	9 (45%)	11 (55%)	0.824
Pulses	16 (80%)	4 (20%)	0.012
Tasty	14 (70%)	6 (30%)	0.115
Exercise	14 (70%)	6 (30%)	0.115
Pleasant	10 (50%)	10 (50%)	1.000
Nutritious	18 (90%)	2 (10%)	0.000
Delicious	6 (30%)	14 (70%)	0.115
Juices	11 (55%)	9 (45%)	0.824
Nice	8 (40%)	12 (60%)	0.503
Calmly	13 (65%)	7 (35%)	0.263
Cheese	9 (45%)	11 (55%)	0.824
Low sugar	14 (70%)	6 (30%)	0.115

**Table 8.7. The core of healthy eating (verified elements)**

group 1	group 2	group 3	Group 4
vegetables	Vegetables	vegetables	fruits
natural juices	Salads	juices	vegetables
salads	Fruits	salads	salads
fruits	Chicken	fruits	low fat
fish		fish	clean
chicken		chicken	cereals
		tranquillity	regularly
		pulses	natural
			tranquillity
			pulses
			nutritious

It is probable that the central character of white meat in the representation of healthy eating obeys health concerns, well above moral or religious issues. The content analysis of both media and focus groups suggests that this is the case. Economic factors, on the other hand, are also important. Beef is an expensive food and not many households have frequent access to it, which make beef consumption a mark of class identity. Chicken and fish on the other hand are more accessible. These economic factors, however, do not explain the absence of red meat in the values of healthy eating.

A final category refers to the *conditions for eating* (i.e., cleanliness, tranquillity and regularity). Tranquillity emerged as a core element in both urban groups, where the rush, tight schedules, and artificial living conditions affect the ingestion and digestion of foods. The metropolis breaks up the harmony with nature and threatens proper nutrition. Cleanliness and regularity, on the other hand, characterise prescriptive aspects of eating and link healthy eating with the general conditions of a healthy lifestyle for urban professionals.

A final observation has to do with the elements listed in table 8.6 that appeared ‘by chance’ in statistical terms. The elements are fat-free, light, meat, dairy products, and pleasant. These elements seem irrelevant in the definition of healthy eating. Pleasant is not supposed to be part of the healthy eating experience, which emerges frequently as a restrictive occasion. Meat is a problematic object, and light-eating recreates a pejorative notion. Finally, fat-free is not perceived as being as healthy as low fat; the public seems to view fat as a necessary substance. Fat-free is an extreme option and let us remember that equilibrium, balance, and moderation, are all concepts integrated in the representation of healthy eating.

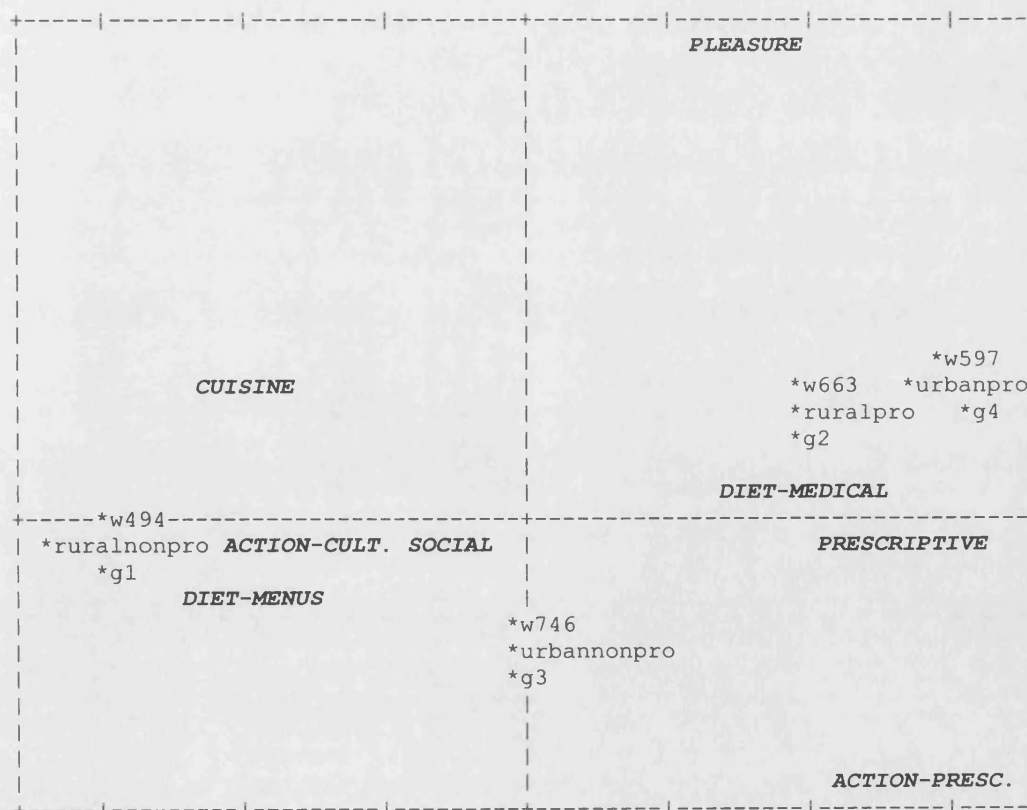
### 8.3 *The Semantic Universes of Healthy Eating: Mapping the Structure in Correspondence Analysis*

The most notorious finding in the exploration of this social representation is the complete separation of the urban from the rural and the division between educational levels. If we consider the whole semantic production, we get a clear distinction between the professional and the non-professional worlds. Group distinctions reveal the differential characters of the semantic universe of healthy eating. The non-professionals more oriented towards ‘conventional’ foods, the more concrete experiences of everyday

eating, regional dishes, local patterns, and menus. The professionals, on the other dimension, structure their experiences in a spectrum from the action itself, through the prescriptions, up to the enjoyable experience of healthy eating, characterising the urban professionals.

It is noticeable as well that the positioning of the urban non-professionals lies right on the border between professionals and non-professionals. Their universe is stretched by urban life and constrained by their low education and income. Not surprisingly, the group is on the edge between the professionals and the group of rural non-professionals. Figure 8.2 shows the association between frames and group affiliation.

**Fig. 8.2. Healthy eating: Group affiliation and frames** (w = number of associations; g = group number).



If we consider only the most frequent elements with the lowest mean rank of evocation, a distinctive pattern of associations allows us to depicting a separation of groups (fig. 8.3 and 8.4, symmetrical normalisation)<sup>69</sup>. One dimension separates the urban professionals from the other groups, which nevertheless remain distant (all the groups remain distant from the origin), exhibiting particular characteristics for each group.

The urban professionals extend as a separate group and are dissimilar to any other group. The urban professional women make the largest contribution to the inertia of the first dimension (0.499). The closest group to the urban professional women is the urban professional men who are well represented in the same dimension (0.157), making a low contribution to the inertia of the second dimension (0.007). Female rural professionals and female urban non-professionals make the largest contributions to the second dimension (0.308 and 0.359 respectively). It is interesting to note the ‘weight’ of women in defining the dimensions.

Considering only the words (rows), only a few semantic units appear well in one dimension. These are fat-free (0.106), chicken (0.084), and meat (0.020), which is well represented in the first dimension. Fish and juices made the largest contributions to the inertia of the second dimension (0.103 and 0.145), but in general, the elements require two dimensions. Vegetables, fruits, meat, and salads are close to the origin indicating their communal properties across groups. The left side of the plot shows the words common to the urban professionals. The *light* character of healthy eating distinguishes this group so well. In the right side are the elements associated by the rural, which are the daily foods consumed by this population.

Using symmetrical normalisation it is possible to study the relationship between both variables (group affiliation and words). The results (see fig. 8.3) represent the urban professionals closer to the ‘enjoyable’ category while the rural non-professionals settled closer to the ‘menus’ category, in a similar way to the association between frame and group affiliation. Both rural groups are closer to each other than to the other groups. Urban non-professionals are closer to the ‘tranquillity-regularity-countryside’ dimension while rural professionals shared elements with both the urban professionals and the rural non-professionals.

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<sup>69</sup> The method establishes distances between words (row points) and groups (column points).

Fig. 8.3: Word association by group affiliation

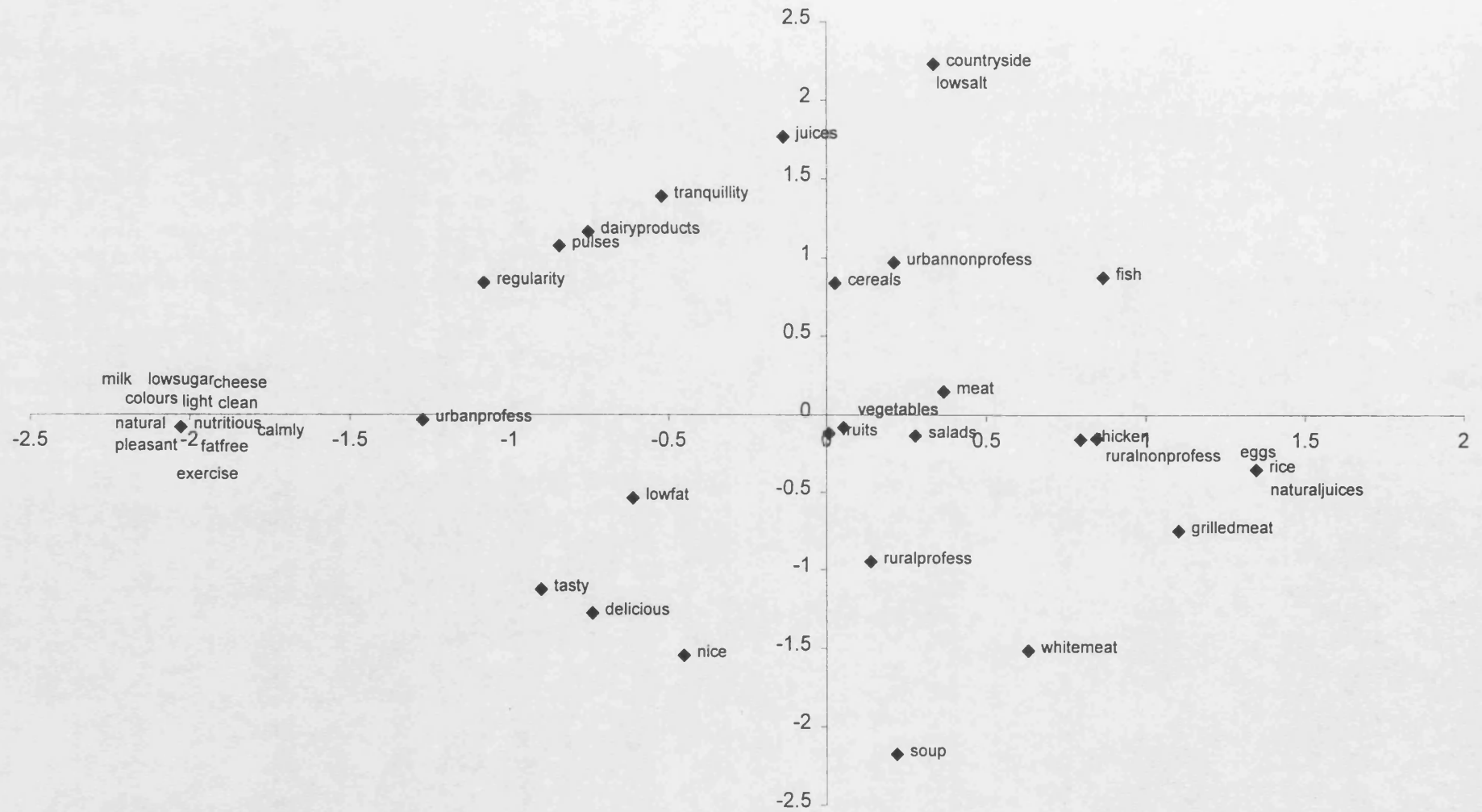
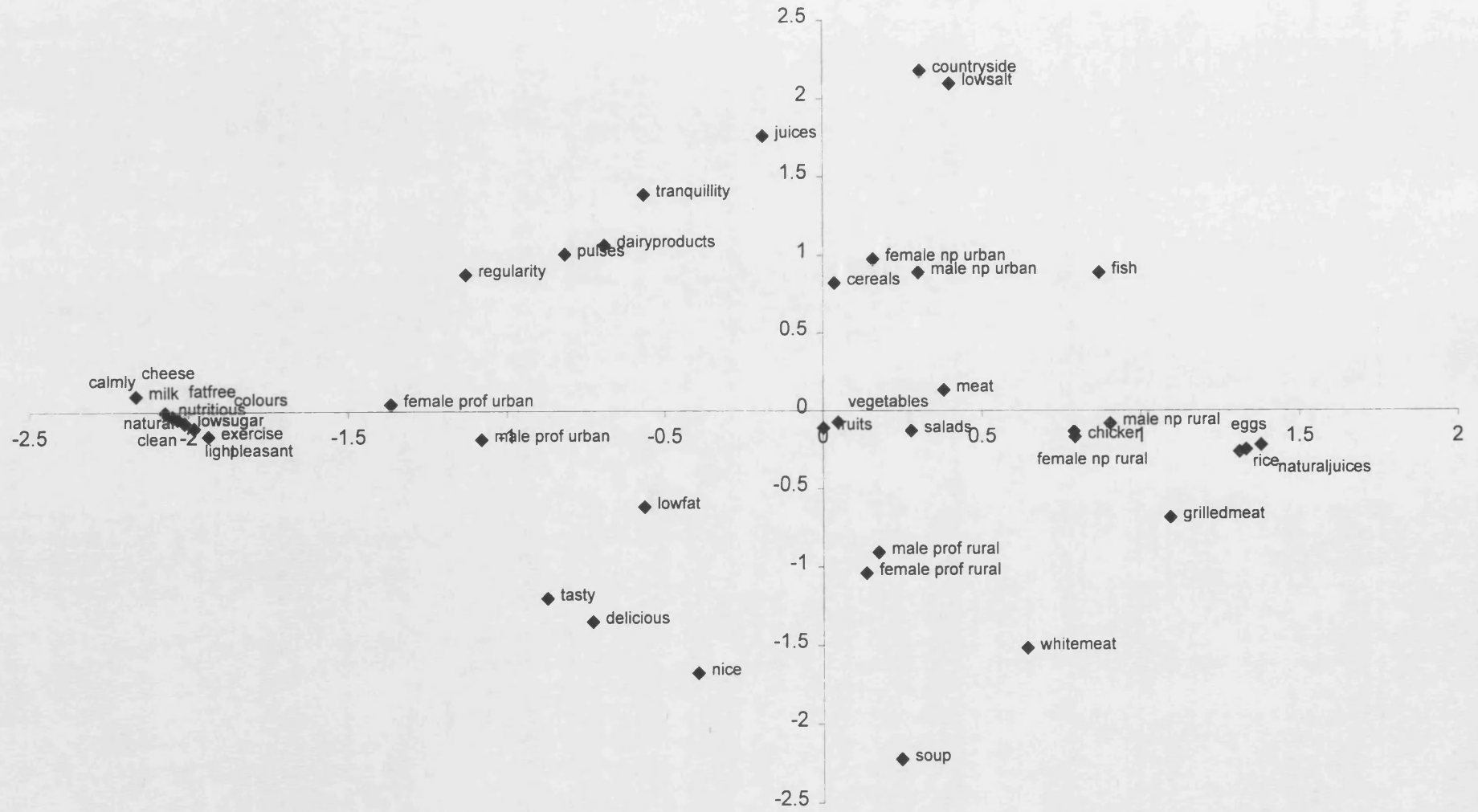




Fig 8.4: Distribution of word association by group & sex



In general, the data is represented in two dimensions, which explain 71 per cent of the total inertia. The most dissimilar groups are the urban professional and the rural non-professionals (see fig. 8.3 and 8.4). Both groups are completely opposed to each other indicating two separated worlds. Urban female professionals are found in one extreme and the rural male non-professionals on the other.

Table 8.8 shows frequencies and contributions for the list of core elements. A brief look at the marginal frequencies of the correspondence table showed four salient elements: vegetables (130) fruit (130), meat (65), and chicken (62); vegetables and fruits have the highest frequencies and masses (weighted frequencies). These two elements are the most characteristic of healthy eating for all groups, as we learnt from the core-periphery analysis. There are, however, some differences between men and women. Women tend to evoke vegetables and fruits more frequently (83 and 84 versus 47 and 46 respectively), a finding that is consistent with other reports in the literature (Lennernäs et al., 1997).

Note that although meat was a possible core element in three out of four groups, it was not recognised as such in the procedure of verification of centrality. This phenomenon concurs with the suggestions by the *Midi Group* in the sense that frequency alone cannot be regarded as unique criteria for the determination of centrality. It is the symbolic value of the element what determines the centrality. The salient character of meat suggests, however, that meat is still an important component of dietary practices for the Colombians.

If we combine different categories of meat, what becomes clear is the high frequency of evocation for this element, which, nevertheless, differs among groups without showing evident sex-differences. Figure 8.6 displays the trend across groups. The more urban and educated the individual is, the less willing he or she is to accept meat as part of the healthy eating experience. The absence of meat in the core of healthy eating and its salient character as peripheral element points in the direction of a transformation in food habits. This change in the social perception of meat unveils one of the most meaningful transformations of human culture.

**Table 8.8. Frequencies and contributions of possible core elements.**

<b>Element</b>	<b>Marginal frequency</b>	<b>Mass</b>
Vegetables	130	0.178
Fruits	130	0.178
Meat	65	0.089
Chicken	62	0.085
Fish	42	0.058
Salads	35	0.048
Grilled meat	23	0.032
Cereals	23	0.032
Low fat	21	0.029
Tasty	20	0.027
Juices	15	0.021
Dairy products	13	0.018
Fat free	12	0.016
Natural juices	11	0.015
White meat	11	0.015
Tranquillity	11	0.015
Nice	10	0.014
Regularity	10	0.014
Pulses	8	0.011
Rice	7	0.010
Delicious	7	0.010
Clean	7	0.010
Eggs	6	0.008
Light	6	0.008
Natural	5	0.007
Nutritious	5	0.007
Soup	4	0.005
Countryside	4	0.005
Colours	4	0.005
Pleasant	4	0.005
Exercise	4	0.005
Low salt	3	0.004
Milk	3	0.004
Calmly	3	0.004
Cheese	3	0.004
Low sugar	3	0.004
<b>Total</b>	<b>730</b>	<b>1.000</b>

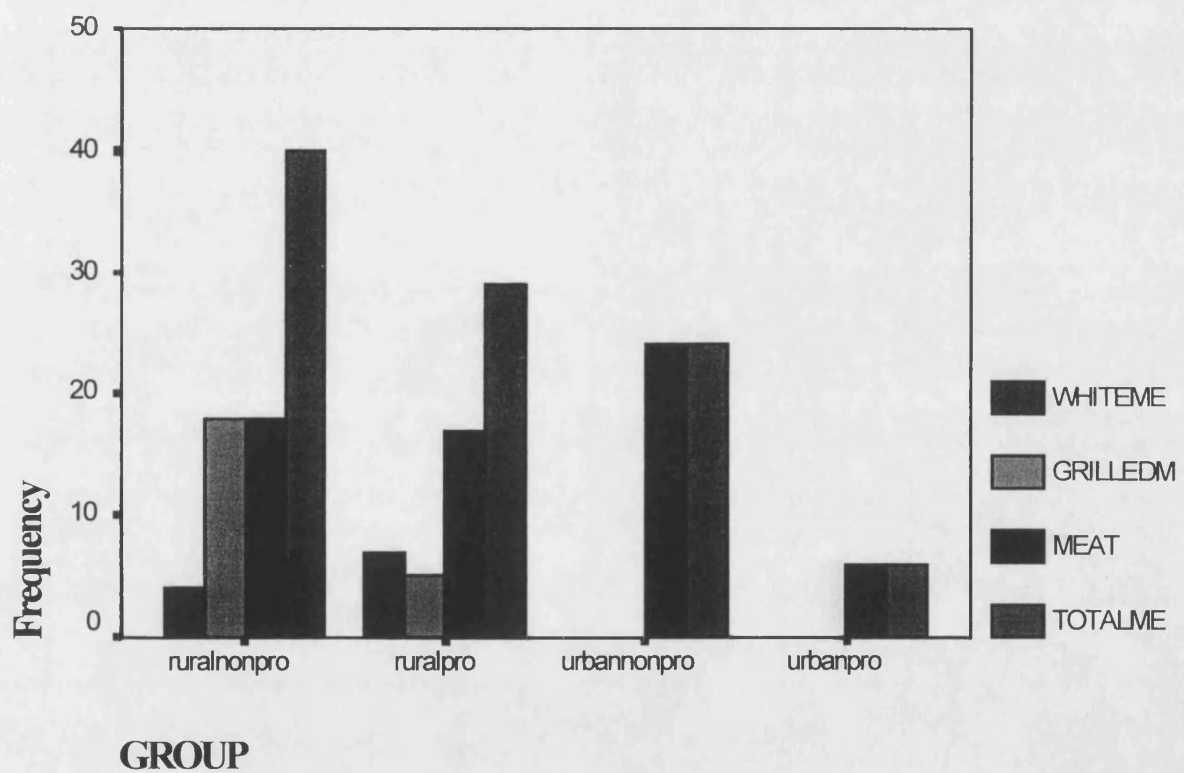
Besides the frequency, it is also important to note the number of categories invoked. The rural population was especially prolific in producing meat classes. Here the concept of grilled meat has a double meaning. It characterises a traditional dish in which the meat is skewered and grilled in a bonfire for consumption in special occasions. This was the meaning for the rural non-professionals. The rural professionals shared that meaning with the one of 'grilled' as the healthy option ('a grilled steak') and opposed to the 'fried' option.

In summary, the association between words and groups illustrates the same orientation drawn in the analysis of the entire corpora. That is, an urban professional group distinctively inserted itself in the semantics of healthy eating by emphasising its trendy component. An urban non-professional group is guided by the prescriptive character of healthy eating. The rural professionals are tied to their daily eating but include the enjoyable and restrictive components of proper eating. Finally, the rural non-professionals characterised healthy eating in terms of the concrete experience of local dishes and daily food. Fruits and vegetables as the elements with the highest masses pulled the centroid to their locations and graphically represented a good description of the more basic core of healthy eating.

#### *8.4 Rating the Elements*

As a complement to the information so far obtained, the participants rated a sample of possible core elements (before the verification). The rating procedure compared the evaluation of a selected group of words by group as a factor. Are there differences in the evaluation of these elements across groups? And if so, what possible explanations can be offered to understand these differences? Another question posed for the analysis is whether verified core elements received a more favourable rating than non-central elements. In order to compare the mean across groups the data was run in a MANOVA procedure.

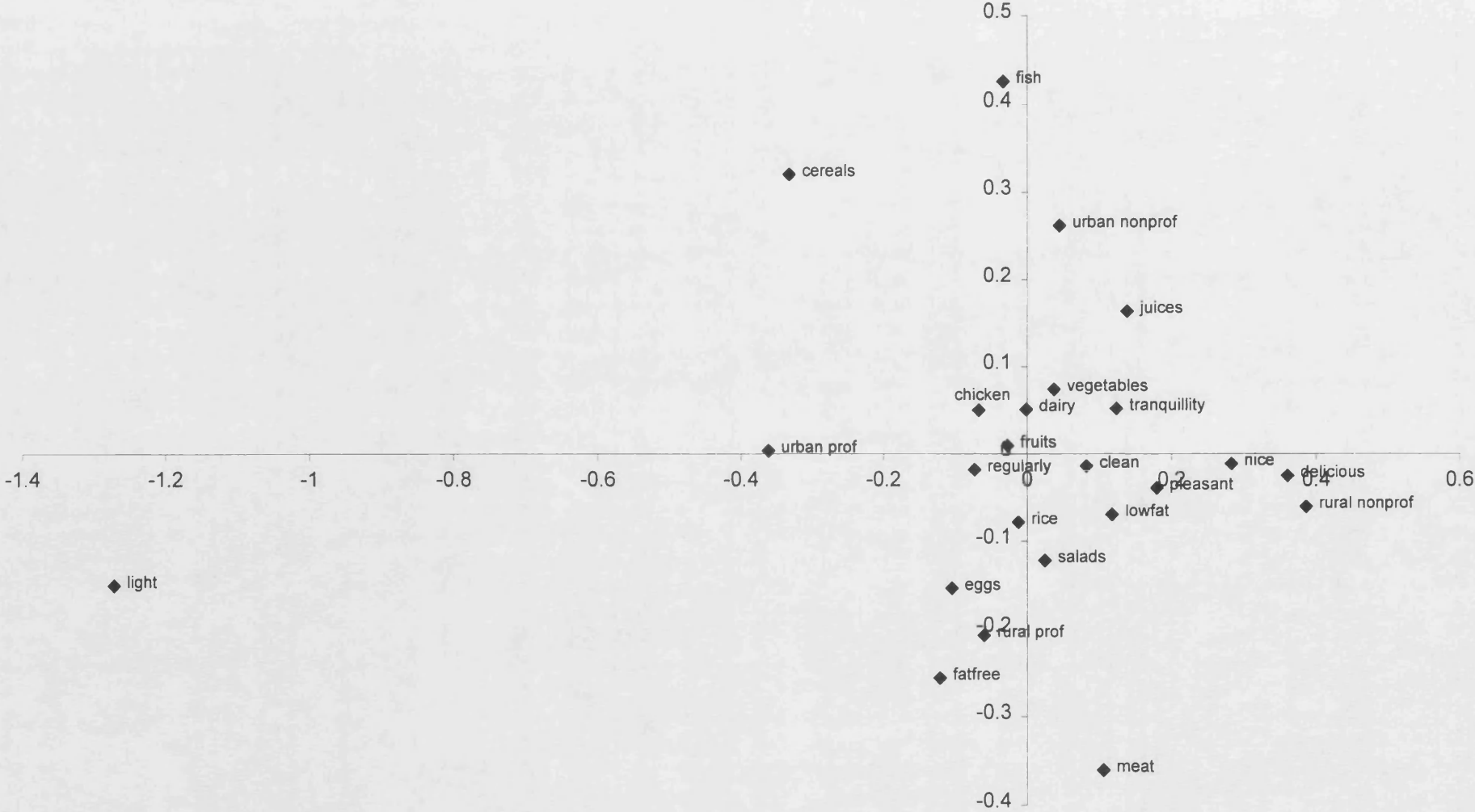
**Fig. 8.5 Importance of meat for healthy eating across groups**



**GROUP**

Maximum frequency 50

Fig 8.6: Word distribution by rating



The results showed group differences in the evaluation of elements ( $F= 1.005$ , Pillais Test,  $p < 0.05$ ). The differences identified corresponds to cereals ( $F= 4.891$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); fish ( $F = 2.987$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); light ( $F = 6.515$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); delicious ( $F = 3.808$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ); and nice ( $F = 4.748$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The most obvious finding was the tendency to place the judgement in the right side of the scale (positive evaluation), which can be related to the cultural theme of food as a sacred good. In other words, virtuosity would be in the very essence of food and therefore every single food would be judged as important. All the elements that were later corroborated as components of the central core received high ratings, except chicken that surprisingly obtained the highest mean from urban professionals. This was the only group that did not include chicken in the verified core.

Note that the highest evaluations were given to core elements: vegetables, salads, fruits, tranquillity, and clean. Tranquillity was identified as a component of the core only for both urban groups, and clean appeared as core element only for the group of urban professionals. However, both concepts were perceived as equally important in all five groups. It may be suggested that this perception relates to the fact that tranquillity and clean are central in other representations and are not exclusive to the core of healthy eating. Let us take the case of the rural non-professionals as an example. In this group, tremendously affected by violent situations, tranquillity might appear as one of the most important components for almost everything, not necessarily eating. They recognise this importance when tranquillity is presented to them, but when thinking about healthy eating tranquillity does not appear particularly relevant. For urban participants, who complain of stress and lack of time, tranquillity is a core element.

It is also interesting to observe the rating for cereals and meat. The rating for cereals is high in the urban professional group, in which cereals were identified as a core element. Cereals receive here a connotation of ready-to-eat products for breakfast, which have been extensively advertised in the media, and not necessarily as a category for food. Meat was rated high in both rural groups, which consistently emphasised the importance of meat in the dietary habits of this group. Here meat appears as an important peripheral element, even more frequent than some verified core elements. What makes meat peripheral is the symbolism that depicts meat eating as harmful. In general, we see that the evaluation does not depend only on the central character of the representation. Some peripheral elements, such as dietary practices, are positively evaluated even if such habits do not necessarily concur with the ideals of healthy eating.

Finally, let us look to the concept of light-eating, the element with less favourable rating and which evinces the most evident differentiation between groups. This concept has not been apprehended by non-professionals, mainly among the men. The meaning of *light* for the rural and urban non-professional women was that of fat-free, which they associated with the advertising of some food products in television, mainly margarine and yoghurts. In some cases, the less educated women said explicitly they did not know what *light* meant and in others, they expressed some acquiescence in order not to be passed as ignorant. For urban professionals, light is a concept that expresses a way of life. Figure 8.7 displays the distribution of the words' evaluation in a dimensional space. Note that *light* is portrayed far apart from the other elements and it is the element that expresses the greatest disagreement in its evaluation by the different groups. Fig. 8.6 exhibits the plots of the groups.

### 8.5 *Grouping the elements*

This section shows the results of a categorisation task employed to evaluate two hypotheses: First, that common sense organises the elements of a representation appealing to concrete referents. And second, that the categorisation of the elements differs according to cultural conditions. In other words, that thought is structured by the prevalent types of activity in a given culture. I expected that rural non-professionals would sort the categories in terms of more concrete categories and that the urban professionals would do so in terms of categories that are more abstract.

The results of the categorisation task are shown in table 8.9. The minimum score possible is 0, the maximum possible is 240; the higher the score, the more abstract the categories employed by the group to sort the elements. The criteria and the score assigned to each categorisation are listed in appendix 14. The results that appear in Table 8.9 confirm the second hypothesis. The urban professional group obtained the highest score, followed by the group of rural professionals. The rural non-professionals, on the other hand, obtained the lowest score.



**Table 8.9. Scores obtained in the categorisation task.**

Rural non-professional	rural professional	urban non professional	urban professional
90	170	121	196

In the rural non-professional group, healthy eating is conceived mainly by employing concrete conceptual categories that make part of the group's daily life. When the participants from this group were asked to assemble the list of possible core elements according to a criteria defined by themselves, three different situations were observed. The first and most common was the 'inability' to sort the elements following a clear pattern. If, for instance, someone from this group tried to group the words *tasty* and *clean*, the reason given was: 'one must eat tasty but clean'. In another case the elements *meat*, *clean* and *cereals* were chosen and the reason given was 'because meat is good, clean is also good and cereals are exquisite'. Other categories were 'because it is what I eat the most'; 'because they're good'; 'I like it' and 'they are all related'.

In a second situation some participants were able to develop a clearer criteria for the sorting task but the reason they argued was expressed in concrete terms: 'they can be in one meal'; 'salads are prepared from vegetables'; 'juices are prepared from fruits'. 'Lunch' and 'dinner' were also expressed as sorting criteria. In a third, and less frequent situation, categories corresponding to imperceptible objects were employed (e.g. 'vitamins', 'phosphorus', 'essential', 'fundamental') but quite often the category would not correctly apply to the elements being sorted.

The urban non-professional group was more prone to sorting the elements using abstract referents than the rural non-professionals (e.g. balance, harmony). Still the immediately perceptible was employed as referent in the majority of cases (e.g. 'breakfast', 'lunch', 'dinner', 'I include them in my daily nutrition', 'a fish meal'), and in some occasions lacking a clear criteria to group the elements (e.g. 'fruits, juice, clean'; 'salad and juices'; 'eating fruits with tranquillity is pleasant'; 'I think it is nice').

By contrast, both professional groups developed clearer and more original criteria to cluster the elements although they also employed concrete referents. The urban professionals grouped the elements around abstract entities (e.g. 'clothes make the man'; 'neurosis 21<sup>st</sup> century'; 'qualities'; and 'advertising'), not necessarily related to the concrete categories of eating. The rural professionals on the other hand, though

producing categories more specifically related to healthy eating, the criterion was equally clear and accurate (e.g. 'dietetic', 'proteinic', 'placid', 'land', and 'recommendations'). Table 8.10 exhibits some examples of the categorisation of elements in the four groups.

The progress from oral to written traditions in the history of humanity has transformed the ways in which cultural groups represent relevant objects. The advent of electronic and audio-visual media has also played an important role in the materialisation of reality, the concretisation of the abstract, making the imperceptible touchable, in such a way that individuals do not have to be experts to talk about 'vitamins' or 'cholesterol'.

Although it is true that the mass media have played an outstanding role in this process, it is also undeniable that more basic conceptual mechanisms are operating here. It is not only about representing a reality invoking its concrete referents; it is also about visualising the abstract. In other words, one thing is to categorise based on the concrete characteristic of an object of representation and another is to classify based on conceptual thinking.

The more basic mechanisms I am referring to are the writing systems. It is the move from oral communication to literacy and the effect of formal education that affects, to a great extent, the representation. This may seem obvious but is certainly one of the most consistent findings of this work. In his brilliant account on the relationship between culture and cognition, Olson (1995) argued that writing systems are not mere transcriptions of speech but cultural tools created to communicate information. The word sign is not the direct representation of the object as in a graphic schema but a tool that creates new categories for thinking.

Although the professionals were able to employ abstract concepts in the categorisation of the elements, it is noteworthy that some subjects in all groups employed concrete categories to group the elements. This phenomenon suggests that the social representation is primarily structured around the concrete, in line with Vygotsky's observations (Vygotsky, 1996) that it is in the concrete where we live our everyday. This serves to corroborate the importance of the objectification in the structuring of common sense and of the use of metaphors in communicative interactions. Although the results do not allow complete support of the first hypothesis,

**Table 8.10 Illustration of sorting categories across groups.**

Group	Sorting criteria	Elements
Rural Non-professionals	all are related phosphorus rich in proteins all can be eaten together nothing better than drinking a nice juice because is what I eat the most	tasty-lowfat-dairy regularly-tasty-fish-nice-light vegetables-salads-fruits-meat-chicken meat-fish-chicken juices-nice fish-rice
Rural Professionals	dietetic recommendation proteic calcium light placid carbohydrates land	regularly-high-cereals-lowfat lowfat-cereals-clean-regularly-fruits fish-eggs-meat-dairy eggs-dairy vegetables-salads-fruits-light-clean dairy-cereals-delicious-tranquillity-regularly cereals-rice vegetables-cereals-fruits-salads
Urban Non Professionals	breakfast lunch dinner I include them in my daily eating harmony a fish meal	fruits-lowfat-cereals chicken-delicious-eggs-nice lowfat-regularly-clean meat-juices-lowfat-salads-dairy tranquillity-clean fish-salad-rice-juice
Urban Professionals	advertising weight control characteristics self-respect clothes make the man neurosis XXI century adjectives	lowfat-light-regularly lowfat-chicken-salads-juices-regularly lowfat-fatfree-tasty-nice-clean tranquillity-regularly nice-clean-regularly lowfat-fatfree-light tasty-nice-delicious-fatfree

it suggests that the process of materialisation of reality is an exciting field of research in social representations.

### 8.6 *Summary*

At the level of practices, media discourses, group's discussions and structural analysis there seems to be agreement about the key role played by the vegetarian diet, including vegetables and fruits, in the definition of healthy eating. These components were identified in this chapter as the central core of healthy eating. The endurance of these elements across groups and in the media, as well as the emphasis they receive in the promotion of healthy eating concur with the formulations of the structural perspective. The core has a collective character and it is linked to the history of the group. The central core of healthy eating would act as a link between the collective and the social, hence the collective playing a role in the structuring of the social representations. The core expresses ideological constructions as well, embodied in the 'ideals' of eating and the new ethics of food.

At the same time, there are differences between groups. These differences result from the actual conditions in which the group is found, including dietary habits and cultural practices. The specific components of the representation to each group are found in both the core and the periphery, but the periphery is especially important in the incorporation of group practices and of material conditions into the representational system. The interaction between core and periphery express the representation in terms of frames, which are employed as interpretative tools that assist communicative processes.

## 9 DISCUSSION

In this thesis, I have explored several theoretical ideas and presented empirical results in an investigation of healthy eating that now require integrating by way of a conclusion. I would like to cover three areas for this discussion. First, to comment on the empirical findings; second, to point out some considerations in relation to the phenomenon of social representation; and third, to suggest several implications of this research for marketing nutrition and implementing public policy. Before commenting on those issues, I would like to remind the reader of the problems that originated this thesis and of the concepts and methods applied.

Beginning with the problem of consistency between attitudes and behaviour, I challenged the conventional view of attitudes as causes of behaviour that has dominated the field of health promotion. As behaviours are embedded in systems of meaning, which are cultural practices, I proposed that consistency must be viewed as a socio-cultural variable and not as an objective fact. Instead of prediction, I argued that we should look at interpretation. Moreover, since consistency supposes a rational actor, I pointed out that a conventional view of rationality as maximising utilities is not only insufficient but also entirely inadequate for the analysis of eating-related issues.

Rationality was assumed from a cultural perspective, in which what is deemed as rational appears as what is sensible to do in a particular situation. The bases to interpret that rationality as actors and as observers derive from collective knowledge, which includes practices. The practice was conceived as structured actions embedded in a cultural-historical context (see chapter 4). The interaction between ideas and practices reproduce the symbolic order of culture and the material conditions of production. The integration of these conceptualisations was carried out within the framework of social representations. Based on the sociological perspective of social psychology, the theory of social representations offers an adequate background to study the social construction of healthy eating. The framework of social representations was complemented with the assumptions of the structural perspective, which particularly focuses on the organisation of the elements within a social representation.

The structural perspective originated in the hypothesis that social behaviour is product of the ways by which people perceive social reality. According to the structural perspective, also referred to as the central core theory, the representation is organised around a central core that gives the representation its meaning. The core is surrounded by a periphery, the component that mediates between core and concrete reality. Both sub-systems constitute the representational system. Drawing on the general conceptualisation of social representations and on the particular assumptions of the structural perspective, I studied the social representations of healthy eating in Colombia, arguing that healthy eating has become a problematic topic. I also argued that, besides the analysis of the contents of the representation, it is also necessary to examine the structure, the way in which elements of the representation interact with each other. Some of these elements are invariant while some others are flexible and changeable.

In order to characterise the individual that deals with the contingent consistency and rationality in the context of the rapid changes and ambiguities that characterise contemporary societies, I introduced the notion of the person as astute (see chapter 4). Astuteness is not only a basic cognitive ability but also a socio-cultural tool that allows the person to take advantage of situations and to compete in increasingly 'individualised' and 'controlled' social environments. The notion of the astute may be of interest in social psychology because it supposes communication, attribution, and interaction as basic mechanisms. The ability to attribute intentions and states of mind to others, implies a process of de-centring and of representing the action of the other from the perspective of that other. The understanding of the perspective of the other has already been topic of conceptual development in social psychology by G.H. Mead (1934) and M. Billig (1991). The relevance of the notion of the astute in research on consistency and collective knowledge lies in a view of the representation as adaptive to social demands.

The thesis provides a critical evaluation of the structural perspective, and raises a number of issues in relation to eating as a social problem. With reference to the first aspect, I argued that most assumptions of the structural perspective are grounded in traditional conceptions of social cognition, which is somewhat at variance with the general theory. I advocated the need to change from a restricted notion of social cognition to one that includes the dynamic and communicative aspects of social life (see chapter 3). Regarding the second point, I emphasised the social and ideological

components of healthy eating. Eating is strongly linked to two topics of modernity, globalisation and identity. Within the socio-cultural perspective that oriented this research, the original question of how to modify dietary practices changed to a more encompassing objective: to investigate how healthy eating is structured according to these social and ideological orders. It is widely accepted that beliefs need to be taken into consideration to design and implement health promotion programs. In order to study the social representations of healthy eating, I proposed three specific objectives: (1) the study of the contents; (2) the study of the structure, and (3) the study of practices.

### *9.1 On The Empirical Results*

The empirical study was conducted in an urban and in a rural setting. The urban setting was a large city, Bogotá, the capital of Colombia; the rural setting was Arauca, an isolated region of Colombia. In both settings professionals and non-professionals were observed and interviewed. In selecting opposed milieus, I compared the representation of a relatively new social object within the same country. The data collection included: (1) an observational study following the model of the observer as journalist; (2) a content analysis of forty articles from the two main newspapers of Colombia; (3) a content analysis of five focus groups; (4) a procedure of free association with two-hundred participants; and (5) a questionnaire for the verification of the centrality, rating, and categorisation, applied to eighty participants.

The structural analysis of the social representation of healthy eating distinguished common elements across all the groups, namely vegetarian foods. These elements, identified as part of the central core, were also consistently the most important in defining healthy eating across the different methodological procedures employed. In the observation, fruits and vegetables were regarded as essential components of a healthy menu. Tranquillity and regularity were perceived to be important in relation to time availability and the sequence of eating for urban professionals, while the demi-vegetarian formed part of the core for both rural groups and the urban non-professional group. The relevance of these elements emerged in media articles and focus groups as well. At the same time, there were differences across the groups, which reflect the social conditions of production of the representation. By social conditions of production I refer to the particular context of representation, including the symbolic order of culture and

the material conditions of economic production. The content of the central core while showing similarities across groups and linking them to collective categories, also reflects differences and makes its structure heterogeneous.

The rural non-professionals gave traditional eating practices considerable importance, while the urban non-professionals favoured the prescriptive eating and the recreational component of eating (see chapter 8). The rural professionals paid considerable attention to prescriptive advice and the urban professionals to lifestyle. For both professional groups healthy eating was characterised as less social than for the non-professional urban; they conceived it more in terms of 'looking after and caring oneself', a more individualised eating. The apparent paradox between social consensus and individual variability reflected in the distinction between core and periphery finds another expression in the interplay between the social and the collective, that is, in the differences and similarities across groups. On the one hand, we have healthy eating as a collective construction in which governments, science, mass media, and social groups participate. In this case, healthy eating gains institutional power. On the other, we have healthy eating as a social construction in which different groups re-create the collective in different contexts. As a collective construction, healthy eating reinterprets scientific findings and gives them a meaning that makes such findings understandable. At the social level, that collective construction is again re-interpreted by each particular group.

I argue that eating in general and healthy eating in particular are rooted in cultural themes. The characterisation of those themes is important in order to develop further the study of the structure of social representations. The multi-level expression of representational phenomena includes the cultural themes at a general level, backing the organisation of the social representation and allowing, at the same time, its transformational character. These themes, I propose, are structured in frames, which are interpretative assets and which facilitate discursive action. The media analysis identified five frames of eating: social eating; transitions; processes; beauty, and illness. The media do not necessarily produce an explicit discourse for healthy eating. In the newspapers, healthy eating is a re-construction of two particular frames of eating, body and illness. In this case, healthy eating is embedded in the wider discourse of eating, and at the same time, it is separated from the general view of eating as a palatable experience. Furthermore, it was shown that newspapers medicalise the notion of healthy eating.



Participants accepted partially the media view of healthy eating as a medical issue. They employed categories of eating to re-construct healthy eating, contrasting with the characterisation of newspapers. Table 9.1 shows the frames identified in the media analysis, focus groups, and structural analysis. The frames found in the newspapers to think about eating are similar to the frames that emerged in the focus groups to think about healthy eating. Participants characterised healthy eating both as embedded in the representations of eating and as transforming the conception of eating by generating new frames such as medical advice. Both social representations emerge not as isolated entities but interrelated systems, which makes it difficult to draw clear-cut lines between eating and healthy eating. That interrelation, I want to suggest, takes place in a conflictive dynamics between eating as need and drive and healthy eating as social norm. The tension between systems evolves towards a conflict within healthy eating when the groups employ the frames of eating in talking about healthy eating. In that way, the tension between social norms and body drives is re-created in paradoxical practices.

Despite the public expressing concerns and fears about becoming ill, the consumption of fast foods is gaining popularity. Burger King and McDonalds, two symbols of fast food, are expanding all over the world. While concerns about body-weight become more intense, and the slimming industry expands, so do obesity and diet-related disorders. Consumers face opposing choices. The oppositions pleasure-restriction, sin-virtue, are basic themes structured at the level of frames: **pleasure** = enjoyable, recreational eating; **restriction** = prescription; medical advice. **Sin** = gluttony; **virtue** = moderation. Through socialisation, restriction and virtue become values, abstract ideals, which differ from core elements because the themes are not linked to any particular object. Due to their insertion in cultural and ideological processes, food preferences become values. I propose below a model of the relationship between themes, frames, and core elements. For the moment, I will continue describing the transformations and ambiguities in healthy eating since these reveal essential cultural issues. This description is important to support a dynamic view of the representation.

The process of civilising (cf. Elias, 1982) transforms eating according to the rules of economic production, and healthy eating emerges as a product of socio-economic changes. The transformations involve the separation between production and

**Table 9.1. Frames employed in the definition of healthy eating. In newspapers the frames refer to eating in general. The frames in focus groups and the structural analysis refer specifically to healthy eating.**

NEWSPAPERS	FOCUS GROUPS	STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS
SOCIAL EATING TRANSITIONS PROCESSES BEAUTY + ILLNESS	SOCIAL EATING TRANSFORMATIONS MEDICAL ADVICE LIFESTYLE	PRESCRIPTIVE EATING MEDICAL ADVICE-DIET ACTIVITY MENU-DIET MENU-CUISINE RECREATION ENJOYABLE

consumption, which is evidenced by the emergence of healthy eating as a typically urban phenomenon. The movement into a market society forces people to detach themselves from land, and to leave traditions behind. The bourgeoisie employs eating as an expression of class distinction. Eating becomes a means of differentiating social class once societies move towards the world of the market economy. In this thesis, virtually no differences in the content of diets were found between both groups of rural inhabitants, contrary to the situation between urban groups. The content of diets distinguished the urban professional from the remaining groups. This between-group differentiation is also manifested in the function of the representation. Healthy eating is not a mere prescription of a physician or dietician, for urban professionals it turns into an issue of fashion.

For the urban professional, the access to the low-fat, fat-free, and "light" contents of healthy eating implies access to a cosmopolitan and sophisticated world. In this group, the issue is not only about cholesterol or about food safety, but it is also about the legion of books on new diets, and about the care for a body that may become a key to success. These findings concur with other reports. Educational level has a strong influence on the perceptions of healthy eating (Margetts et al. 1997), and individuals with lower levels of education are more likely to resist dietary change (Lappalainen et al., 1997). While all groups have a grasp of healthy eating, the ways that this is understood by the groups reflect their particular reality. The representation is malleable to justify the group practices. Consistency is then a process of construction and interpretation of meanings within a socio-cultural context.

Central to the transformation of eating is the transformation of the consumption of meat. Considering the vegetarian and demi-vegetarian as the core of healthy eating, it seems obvious that the consumption of meat poses a problem (see chapter 8). Though meat-eating is part of the periphery as a widespread practice, it is not a component of the ideal of eating. The findings suggest that meat-eating is being transformed. I consider the urbanisation of Colombian society at the origin of this transformation. The transformation separates the social from the 'instinctual' to ensure the differentiation of the human from other living species. The new social norms find expression in the revulsion of all that resembles primitive instincts. As part of the process of urbanisation and the development of new manners of conduct, we find the refinement of eating,

which is also the product of an economic order. Here again we find the urban inhabitant behaving within the expectations of the social class to which he/she belongs.

In my observations of the eating of peasants, I identified a different sociology of the table. This includes the employment of incomplete sets of cutlery and the limited use of forks. The work of the fork is done by the hands or spoons. In the rural area meat is not cut in the aesthetic forms we find in urban supermarkets, such as fillets or steaks, a means of denying the anatomy of what is digested. For the rural groups eating meat perpetuates our carnivorous tradition, meat is to be torn and devoured. It portrays a triumph over what is so difficult to get: food. In this population, the association of meat is with the living animal slaughtered some hours before it is eaten. In the urban milieu, by contrast, it is necessary 'to forget' where the meat comes from. The anatomy of the animal needs to be denied (see chapter 6).

Physiology is also socialised and eating finds a place and a time. Healthy eating requires a re-socialisation of eating; it is not in any place, at any time, or any menu. It is a regular time (regularity) that follows the voice of the body: the body speaks. The body-as-machine, described in chapter 7, has its own clock, the biological clock. The alteration of regularity by missing meals causes the disruption of the natural rhythms opening up the possibility of illness. This appears especially relevant for urban inhabitants; the urban ways of life ruins the nutritional rhythms. The urban participants identified tranquillity and regularity as part of the core. Tranquillity is opposed to rushed eating, and fast food arises as improper eating. The components of eating, space, time, and menu, find an expression in the structure of the representation of healthy eating (e.g. eat at regular times). The core is an ideal, as vegetables and fruits are an ideal for the rural non-professional, who seldom have access to them.

The prescriptive and functional characteristics of the representation may have correspondences at both core and peripheral levels (see chapter 3). It is not only about defining and about evaluating healthy eating. It is also about how people characterise the food they eat everyday in terms of healthy eating, and how they invest that daily food with a new reality, the reality of being healthy. It is because of these processes that people may end up perceiving their daily eating as healthier than it actually is. If the healthy becomes a central value for society, and if, as common sense suggests, people become what they eat, then there is the need to reconstructing dietary habits in line with

the new ethics of eating. This modification follows, either a transformation of the menus, or the legitimisation of actual practices to be in accord with social expectations.

### **9.1.1 Whither Eating?**

The assumption that a concept such as healthy eating is embedded in complex socio-economic dynamics is now empirically established. Healthy eating involves a cultural transformation and is inextricably linked to conditions of production. Therefore, it requires an appreciation of economic sociology. Aspects such as income, migration, urbanisation, demographic and epidemiological transitions, are all important in considering the apprehension of the phenomenon. The interrelation of all these factors points in the direction of a change in the relationship a group establishes with eating, which appears to be shaped by the notion of healthy eating. Healthy eating, as eating in general, is not only a symbolic expression but also a product of material and historical conditions (Mennell, 1985). Representations of healthy eating are indicative of the current stage of the nutritional transitions, the behavioural change pattern (Popkin 1993).

In a process that resembles the history of humanity, from hunter-gatherers to high-fat, high-sugar diets, Popkin links the new dietary pattern with the desire to delay disease and prolong health. Western societies are denying, perhaps more than ever, death, embracing the idea that life can be prolonged, and the illusion of immortality. Some characteristics of this new pattern include the increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, the reductions of body fat levels and rapid changes in food technologies, among others. The new pattern, far from evincing a single, clear process, embodies ambiguities and complex paradoxes. By negotiating ambiguities, marketers find ways of managing them creating 'new concepts'. Thus, fast food would seem to be moving from the classical American menu of hamburgers, fried potatoes, and Coca-Cola to a recreation of fast food that incorporates health concerns. We see, for instance, the success of Japanese food and of other oriental dishes. If someone asked me, at this particular moment, about a good investment opportunity in Bogotá, I would answer without hesitation: Open a restaurant to sell Japanese-like or a similar type of Asian food, with a fast and informal service and at accessible prices.

The American fast food is competing with the new fast food of the body-mind equilibrium. Healthy eating becomes a marketing concept and if fast food wants to preserve the market success it has reached, then it needs menus to match what people perceive as healthy eating. Research has showed that claiming health benefits in advertising increases the sale of food products (Levy & Strokes, 1987). Yet, this marketing effort seeks to catch specific segments of the public, the groups with higher educational levels and higher purchase capacity. As it was previously suggested (chapter 6), the issue here is not just about fast food but about what fast food characterises, the American way of life. In Colombia, fast food entered the market towards the end of the 1970s. Since then, its contribution within the expenditure on food has increased despite the association between fast food and the unhealthy. The Colombian media introduce fast food as sophistication. Associated with economic wellbeing and a sign of economic progress, fast food is a business success.

Originally directed to the elite, who re-created the foreign in local life as a sign of distinction, the consumption of fast foods has now moved into different sectors of Colombian society. However, within the transformation of eating, we are beginning to think in terms of the Tai person, the Yin, the Yang, and other Eastern terminology now popular in the Western world. This offers individuals what they fear they have lost or are in danger of losing: balance and harmony in a polluting environment. Pollution is ingested via food. The body needs to be cleansed to eliminate all the toxicity to prevent disease. Spiritual cleansings, meditation, relaxation, and colonic lavages, all these methods are available to expel contamination. A pure body radiates beauty and psychological harmony; balance is a goal that can be achieved through the proper ingestion of foods (e.g. cereal brands). Thus, the healthy food is not the exuberant and delicious dish anymore but the right combination of substances: vitamins, proteins, and minerals.

The macro-cosmic approach to life and food is characteristic of affluent urban individuals. Breatharianism for instance, an ancient Tibetan practice, emerges in the West as a method for spiritual cleansing, in which sunlight and air are the only source for nourishment. Meanwhile the rural and the less affluent still construct healthy eating mainly in terms of a medical prescription to restore health. But health is not a single concept, as Herzlich (1973) suggested in her seminal work on health and illness. In this study, participants perceived health and illness as dual realities: mind and body,

psychological and physical. The less educated also appeal to the power of mind, not in terms of cosmopolitan Eastern philosophies diffused through the books of best-selling authors<sup>70</sup>, but in terms of cultural notions that conceptualise collective views of the world. A good example of these local theories of the mind-body equilibrium is the notion of *psychosis*<sup>71</sup>. The dialectics mind-body characterises another theme that is framed in terms of the physically healthy and the psychologically healthy.

The two dimensions of health, physical and psychological, struggle between dissociation and integration. They are part of World Health Organisation definition of health as a "state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Health in terms of physical and psychological well-being is a collective, institutionalised, construction. We often hear about the bio-psycho-social approaches to health. Nevertheless, they may also split when the dissociation is convenient. In the 'little social experiment' conducted in Soacha (chapter 6), the prevalence of one notion over the other, physical or psychological, in specific circumstances, provided the justification for current practices and acted as a group defence against imposed control. Tuning the representation to competing frames constitutes a useful communicative strategy from both perspectives, for actors and for observers. The ability to tune to the 'right' frame is one of the characteristics of the astute.

It is at the crossroad between free choice and institutional norms, between pleasure and restriction, that the choice of food turns into an existential dilemma, demanding justification and changes in positions. The outcome of any choice cannot be attributed to destiny, as it is a matter of individual responsibility according to the prescriptions of the ideology of individualism, the ethics of the western world. Self-discipline, moderation, and the notion of "you eat what you cooked" that emphasises self-responsibility in the outcome of actions, exemplify ideological frames, such as asceticism. The concept of asceticism has already been described by Weber (1958), who

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<sup>70</sup> Examples: Chopra, D. 1997. *Peso perfecto: El equilibrio mente-cuerpo en un programa para conseguir mantener su peso ideal*. Buenos Aires: Javier Lejera ediciones; Maoshing, N. 1995. *El Tao de la nutrición: Manual de dietética taoista*. Madrid: Mandala Ediciones.

<sup>71</sup> Common sense in Colombia identifies *psychosis* as both a noun (state) and a verb (process). It refers mainly to the physical effect of a negative evaluation (see Chapter 6). The notion of psychosis can be assumed in terms of Thomas and Thomas theorem (1928): "If people define a situation as real then it is real in its consequences".

made a connection between capitalism and asceticism, where self-discipline is a social category linked to success. The context of this connection is his seminal work *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism* in which he brilliantly put forward an economic sociology. I argue that asceticism in the contemporary world has become a commodity. People buy asceticism in foods such as wholesome products, natural foods, and vegetarian products, and in workshops, courses, and seminars. In Colombia, austerity is a sign of class and education when it is not the result of lack of money.

The importance of individual responsibility is clearly part of Anglo-Saxon cultures, where there is no room for 'accidental outcomes'. I consider that Latin Americans are more inclined to think in terms of destiny. Crandall and Martinez (1996) found, for instance, that attributions of controllability are significantly higher among US students for predicting anti-fat attitudes than among Mexican students. There is ample room here for comparative studies and cross-cultural research. In general terms, people are under pressure to assume the prescriptions of healthy living in their everyday life, while being increasingly accountable for the outcome of their actions and with free choice becoming an important principle. Mechanisms of social control are subtle and effective. The exercise of power via ideological constructions achieves such efficiency that even dissident ideas are incorporated into the existing order, demonstrating the tolerance and kindness of the establishment. These ideological constructions achieve such a power that people do not seem to have an option. Thus, we are free to do what we have to do.

I suggest that in Colombia healthy eating is represented as a re-socialised eating. Under the rules of the healthy, eating leaves its traditional characterisation as an enjoyable shared activity, to come into in a new relationship of individual responsibility for health care. For this new form of eating, a little of what you do not fancy makes you good. Some components of healthy eating supposed to be elements for disease prevention, turns into hazards. Elements such as self-discipline, self-control, fitness, and weight-obsession have been associated with the increase in the incidence of diseases such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa (cf. Hartley, 1998). These aspects have been the subject of considerable attention by feminist authors (e.g. Chapkis, 1986), and have provoked a social counter-reaction that seeks to abolish the stigma of being overweight as this condition becomes more prevalent. In Arauca recently took place a beauty contest



between overweight participants (*Un empate bien gordo*<sup>72</sup>, *El Tiempo*, October 6 1999) in which the only two participants were both winners!

## 9.2 *On the Structure and Dynamics of Representational Phenomena*

In this part of the discussion I want to highlight that social representations are socio-cultural systems. Culture and history are important in the study of the production of collective knowledge; history introduces changes and transformations in a process that provides stability. Based upon the dialectics change-stability, I defend the notion of a structure as to imply that, despite the ‘unceasing babble’ (Moscovici, 1984b), or the interactive essence of social representations as modern and changing phenomena, there are relatively constant elements, ‘negative heuristics’ in the sense given by Lakatos (Lakatos, 1970) in his account of scientific activity, that ensure the dynamics of tradition within change. This is what the structural perspective addresses.

Within the framework of the theory of social representations, I criticised the structural perspective on several grounds, namely: a) the absence of the developmental aspect; b) the schematic view of the notion of structure; and c) the functional equivalence and similarities between the concept of structure, as currently conceived by the Midi Group, with classic models of attitudes, in particular the theory of reasoned action. Nevertheless, the distinction between core and periphery establishes a useful metaphor to understand the operation and organisation of social beliefs, offering conceptual elements to complement those topics of social representations that focus on the production of common sense. As evidence of the conceptual and empirical contributions of a core-periphery distinction it is worth noting the key role this distinction has played in shaping the developments of the attitude-structure era in social psychology. It is seen in applications of models of influence and change (cf. Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), and in its relevance in other fields of the social sciences as in political science (cf. Galtung, 1971).

The theoretical assumptions of the Midi Group, constructed around the concepts of core and periphery, delineates an active field of empirical production (e.g. Molinari & Emiliani, 1993; Vergès, 1992). In drawing suggestions on how to develop the structural perspective I propose two lines of argument: Firstly, to deepen the idea that social

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<sup>72</sup> A very big draw

representations are functional-dynamic and generative processes. Secondly, to suggest that concepts such as *themata* (cf. Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994), which presupposes the existence of archetypes, collective frames that anchor social representational phenomena onto collective representations, may be useful in conceiving the linkage between the collective level of the representation and the social level via the central core. I call attention to the different levels in which representational phenomena are expressed: the individual, the social, and the collective.

These levels differ from those described by Doise (1986). Doise proposes an articulation between models of social psychology in relation to the phenomenon these models explain. The articulation to be proposed here refers to the levels of manifestation of a single phenomenon: the representation. The concept of representation is vital for the integration of the different levels of explanation, (i.e. biological, psychological, and social), which related to the distinct levels of activity. This makes the study of representational phenomena a central task for psychology. The notion of social representation, interested in bridging the psychological to the sociological, uses the latter to interpret the differentiated nature of the collective. Other models of representation build on the psychological to explain the links between biology and psychology in terms of individual mental representations, the emergence of the symbolic as a distinctive feature of human activity. A common denominator to all the possible interpretative levels lies in the idea of the transformational and functional character of the structures.

The idea of looking at the concept of representation as a generative process is a response to the static and rigid conception of the phenomenon in terms of schemata, a product of the cognitive revolution. The move from a purely descriptive structuralism to a dynamic view of representational structures is a current trend in social psychology (see Smith, 1998). The structural perspective of social representations adopts associative networks and schema assumptions, the two most popular models of representation. Yet, both derive from distinct traditions in psychology. Associative networks rest on associationism as a source of knowledge, a tradition very close to behaviourism and to the classic perspectives on the study of attitudes. It is from this perspective that the structural approach operationalises the concept of social representation. Schemata, on the other hand, follow the Gestalt tradition; the 'view of

the world' approach to the study of attitudes came from the Gestalt psychology. From this perspective, the structural approach takes much of its theoretical assumptions.

The migration of the Gestalt psychologists from Austria and Germany to the United States favoured the movement from stimulus-response models to cognitive structures (cf. Farr, 1996). Gestalt structures, as general principles of organisation (Koffka, 1935), were however conceived as a-historic and static, and this rigidity marked the origin of the schematic models of memory. During the cognitive revolution, and at least during the first part of the attitude structure era, representational phenomena were viewed within such models.

Both associationist and structuralist perspectives are highly individualised, and some argue that they are incompatible with each other (cf. Jones & Nisbett, 1972). Yet, I should point out that a specific model of representation might incorporate both perspectives (cf. Smith, 1998), as it is the case with the structural perspective. However, by applying an associationist perspective at the methodological level and a schematic perspective at the theoretical level, the structural approach of social representations ensures the co-existence of two perspectives lacking the sociological dimension. However, it has not been the lack of the 'social' that has encouraged the search for alternative models of representation but the problem of viewing representations as 'things' instead of 'processes', an inadequate approach. The study of representational phenomena in social psychology has adhered to the tradition of individual mental processes. In the fourth edition of *The Handbook of Social Psychology* (Gilbert et al., 1998), the chapter devoted to representations is entitled "Mental Representations and Memory" (Smith, 1998). The notion of representation is still viewed as a purely individual phenomenon.

In the particular case of a social representation, I suggest that the elements of the structure are poly-functional. The potentiality to convey novel ideas-objects takes into account the context in which the representation is expressed. The poly-functional character implies the recreation in the meaning of the elements, according to the transformations in the sense in the whole structure. Drawing on some considerations by Rokeach (1968), I argue that it is the particular organisation of elements in a given context that constitutes the sense of the representation, above the isolated meaning of unitary elements. This notion of structure preserves a Gestaltist perspective.

Nevertheless, in keeping with the idea of a context sensitive structure along a historical continuum, we may advance the knowledge of how belief structures operate.

By focusing on the interactive and communicative aspects, the study of the representation is positioned at the social psychological level of analysis, the level of the social representations. From the perspective of social representations the interest focuses on the interaction between the individual and society. This interaction, I want to suggest, is grounded in human activity. In chapter 4, I criticised the view attitudes-cause-behaviour, which lies behind the problems of consistency, and by implication of rationality, in social psychology. I proposed, following Wagner (1993; 1994) that in the theory of social representations, representations cannot be considered as causes of behaviour. Lacking the logical independence between the antecedent and the consequent, the representation can be inferred from the action itself but representations may not act as causal explanatory mechanisms of actions. The causal explanations in terms of representations-intentions and actions, Wagner signalled, are cultural mechanisms, folk psychology, that allows people to re-construct and to understand the event.

In order to consider the action at the level of the social representation, I introduced the concept of practice. I distinguished between the practice, the socio-cultural level of action, and the behaviour, the individual level of action. Individual behaviour is a contingent expression of the idea-practice, and 'translates' the social-collective into the intra-personal in a demanding context. This conceptualisation offers a theoretical solution to the problem of consistency. First, because agents, intentions, and events are not natural or objective facts but constructions plagued with meanings. And second, since the actual behaviour we observe is only one of several possible expressions, the interpretation of the act follows the implications of the act. Thus, consistency and rationality are social constructions to be interpreted in terms of the implications of the action. That interpretation demands a hermeneutic approach within social psychology. In this research, I did not deal with individual behaviours but with the interpretation of communicative actions and social practices. I propose this level of analysis as necessary to understand the consequences of individual overt behaviour.

The focus on interpretation has been central to discursive (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and rhetorical psychology (Billig, 1991). Potter and Wetherell have criticised the theory

of social representations on several grounds, such as that it is engaged in cognitive speculation that threatens to bring the theory back to conventional social cognition. However, Potter & Wetherell (1998) have suggested common points between both perspectives, i.e. the emphasis on content, communication, and construction. Moreover, the discursive approach proposes the notion of interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1998) as the structural organisation of discursive contents. Perhaps to these authors the term structural is 'too cognitive' and they prefer to define the interpretative repertoires as 'building blocks'. These repertoires organise the content of discourse around the taken-for-granted, like core notions, expressing ideological constructions.

In their analysis on racism in New Zealand, Wetherell and Potter (1992) described two specific repertoires, culture-as-heritage and culture-as-therapy, as two ways of organising discourses on racism. The relevance of each particular repertoire is a function of the context; the repertoires arise differentially according to the needs of the conversation. However, the emergence of a repertoire does not imply the cancellation of the other; competing repertoires may co-exist to respond to the variability of discourse. From this formulation, I want to draw attention to two aspects. First, that the notion of interpretative repertoire exemplifies the link between the structural and the functional. Interpretative repertoires are fundamentally functional notions. Second, that the notion of interpretative repertoire is similar to the notion of frame used in this thesis. A frame is the sense produced by the organisation of the contents of a representation in a given discursive context. Nevertheless, the interpretative approach does not conceptualise the metaphors or images that assemble the discursive descriptions. By considering the formulations of the theory of social representations and of the structural approach, it is possible to articulate the contextual and the stable.

The analysis of communication allows us to appreciate the variability in the expression of beliefs. This variability, which is adaptive, is possible if we assume the generative character of the social representation. In contrast to proposing permanent structures causing behaviour and the pursuit of the general laws of social phenomena, but then missing the specificity of human action, I am stressing the importance of the particular and the contextual. Toulmin (1992) has showed how this trend of favouring the general over the particular, the focus on universal principles and the primacy of formal logic over rhetoric, is part of the general project of modern philosophy. In answering the call for an interpretative approach to social psychology, Billig (1991) has advocated the

importance of rhetoric in the understanding of the ideological and social psychological processes, introducing social psychology into the analysis of the dilemmatic. Social life, particularly in modern societies, demands constant changes in positions and recognition of the contradictory and the paradoxical.

Assuming the case of a collective core, as this thesis has shown in line with the assumptions of the structural perspective, the essence of consensus and relative coherence involves, I want to argue, collective categories. These have the capacity to mobilise the wider discourses in society, securing at the same time some stability. Though some further theoretical interpretations might seem rather speculative, they may point out in a direction that deserves careful consideration. I am appealing concretely to the notion of *themata*, which also deals with the problem of change and stability. Drawing on Holton (1973; 1978) and his works on scientific thought, Moscovici and Vignaux (1994) described the themata as primary conceptions around which social representations are structured. The themata act as general topics, ideas-source, irradiating their meaning into the elements of the structure and connecting directly the collective and the social via the core elements of the representation; they would help to define the representation. Acting as latent organisers, cultural creations that anchor the social into the collective, the themata in the original sense given by Holton are preconceptions that favours new ideas, and at the same time allow continuities in the development of scientific thought.

The notion of themata is relevant not only because it unveils a function of articulation for the central core, i.e. between the collective and social levels, but also because it allows us to understand why in spite of the contextual variation on the way we interpret the sense of the representation, the structure retains constancy at some level of latent meanings. Here we see a conceptual development that implies similarities between common sense and scientific thought; here we find parallels between cognitive and socio-cultural development. As primary notions, the themata constitute essentially a pre-requisite for the development of new ideas, as only in the constancy we may appreciate change. The level of themata prompts us to consider the close links between culture and cognition and the sequential development of systems at both ontogenetic and cultural levels. The themata find concrete forms in the generation of frames and in the objectification of discursive productions, in social representations. They can be metaphors, primary conceptions materialised in vivid notions of the world. The body-

as-machine is a primary notion, a deeply rooted view of the body that extends to other conceptual domains. Food as fuel, the digestive system as a tube, the biological clock, these are some examples of bodily process in a 'mechanic' lingo.

Some examples of frames and themata for the case of healthy eating may be set out based on the classes derived from the corpus of the representation (see table 9.1 for the list of frames identified across procedures). The classes extracted from focus groups and word associations to define healthy eating are not different social representations, which would be the general conception, but negotiations over the interpretation of the object. These are moments of the representation captured via linguistic production. At the same time, some possible expressions of the representation, frames, are not available to all groups. The interpretation of healthy eating as a 'new form of eating that we don't understand yet' as defined by a professional in one of the focus groups is at a level of critical thinking that requires some degree of formal instruction. The interpretation of healthy eating as that 'people used to eat before' is an expression found in both rural groups, particularly in the non-professionals, because they use the categories past/present to anchor discourses on health. In the latter, the interpretation of healthy eating appeals to the notion of traditional cuisine. Here we find the theme: tradition/change framed in transformation-diet and cuisine. It is the nostalgia of the rural participants for their traditions; the past takes on greater significance in times of change. Other themes identified so far are pleasure/restriction, sin/virtue, and mind/body.

The dictionaries obtained from the corpus also allowed identifying frames structuring themes. Such frames are, for instance, cuisine and diet (theme = tradition/change); enjoyment and restriction (theme = pleasure/restriction); physical and psychological (theme = body/mind). Moscovici and Vignaux (1994) cite some themata in the case of food: traditional, natural, sophistication, which find their expression in notions like cuisine, beauty, and distinction. The vegetarian diet, to give an example from the data collected, acts as the organising principle of the representation of healthy eating, as the central core. An urban professional female called the fruits and vegetables diet "the source of eternal youth", a materialisation of this content. This core can anchor wider themes as for example the natural/unnatural. Yet, fruits and vegetables as objectification of the natural are susceptible to confrontation, as actually some participants did: fruits and vegetables may also be unnatural when they have been in contact with chemicals or with artificial means of production. When individuals question or dismiss the

importance of fruits and vegetables for healthy eating, they are not expressing a different social representation but re-interpreting the sense of the representation when the context demands that interpretation.

The idea of stability and change would have then a multi-level socio-cultural expression. At one level, there would be the *themata*, implicit notions, which I assume operate at the level of collective representations. This level would connect with the level of the social, the latter registering the differences between the groups that make part of a society. The conceptions of a healthy eating in terms of natural products, fruits, vegetables, and white meat, may be congenial to many groups of the so-called 'western society'. In Colombia, for instance, the groups thought of healthy eating in these terms. However, these are also the terms of the media, and of governmental sectors campaigning on healthy eating. This enduring level is what I characterised as the collective. The core, I want to argue, is much more encompassing, extending beyond the frontiers of the Colombian society: it is the current discourse of the 'western world' on food. At this level, the representation has a similar content among the population of the European Union (cf. Margetts et al., 1997). Figure 9.1 proposes a model of the collective/social interaction in the organisation of social beliefs.

At the same time that the representation of healthy eating is consensual in the core, it reveals group differences. These particularities contemplate the group-specific level of the representation, linked to the collective, including the institutional, in the central core. However, I am not implying the absence of group differences in the core; the empirical analysis suggests that this is not the case. The point I am trying to make is that the differences are more evident in the concrete components of the representation, the menus that are part of the periphery. Portraying group differences in the notion of healthy eating, the representation fulfils here a function of identity. These representations are translated into individual representations, which are complemented by individual experiences, opportunities, and needs. The social/collective act as frames of reference to *construct* particular intentions, which are *interpreted* in the light of social practices as individual behaviours. This interpretation exemplifies the conceptualisations of practices and behaviour already discussed.

The notion of *themata* draws important questions regarding origin and functions. Where do they come from? What range of functions do they serve? How do they transform?

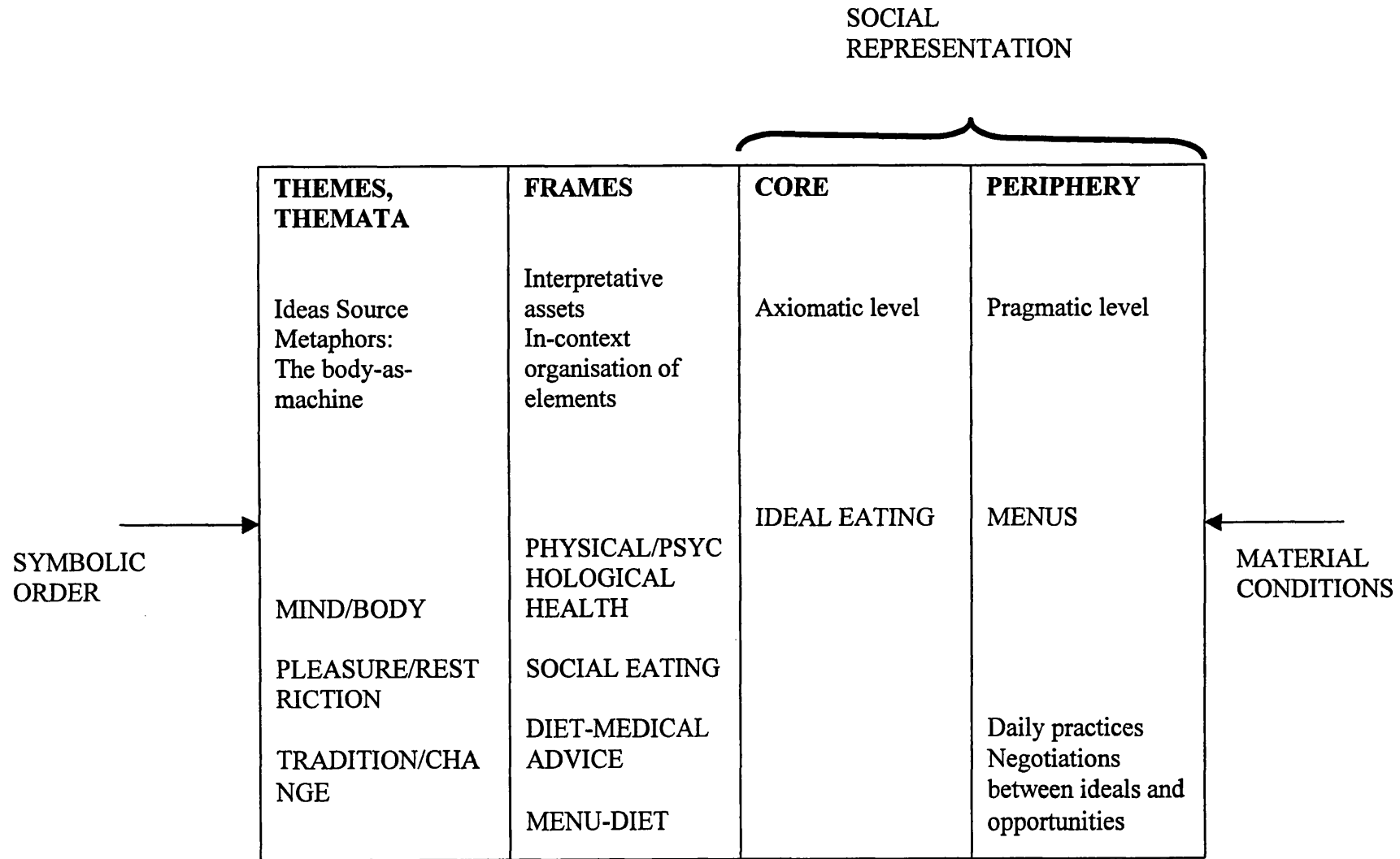


This notion needs development in order to elaborate the phenomenon that it is trying to explain: the construction of collective knowledge. Still there are some considerations to take from this conceptual proposal. First of all, it calls attention to the universal elements within the social, the possibility for the peasant to share common representational elements with the *yuppie*, or the doctor, on the basis of eating as a biological need and its construction as an essential human activity. Secondly, it suggests the interaction within the representation of series of basic categories, which offer the possibility to adapt the representation to context demands without losing its collective essence. I suggest that in situations in which a re-interpretation of the representation is necessary, the themes defining the frames are not overturned, but momentarily displaced by competing meanings that allow one to explain what is perceived as problematic.

The characterisation of the structure in dynamic terms challenges the methodologies currently available. Should we turn to the analysis of discursive productions and all kinds of symbolic material available in a particular society along a temporal dimension? Answers to these methodological issues should receive serious consideration from the theorists of social representations. We have been tempted to employ sophisticated methodologies (i.e. factor analysis techniques, structural equation modelling, etc.), and to repeat the mistake of an overemphasis on measurement that results in the primacy of the methodological over conceptual developments, presenting a summary of results as the 'social representations of x'. In the opposite extreme are those researchers employing grounded theory in the name of social representations. Although I used the methodological procedures employed within the structural perspective, this was for an analytical purpose: the consideration of the central core theory from both the conceptual and methodological levels. Though the methodological procedures do allow gaining access to complementary information on structural issues, the mere identification of elements is useless if we assume that they are just isolated units.

It is a questionable assumption that the core is an absolute system. Perhaps, the limits between the core and the periphery might be rather loose. Perhaps, as Rokeach (1968) pointed out in relation to the structure of beliefs, it is possible to imagine a core made of several layers in which the inner layers enjoy greater stability than the outer layers. He located the central-peripheral distinction along a dimension, in which the innermost component were primitive beliefs with an axiomatic, taken-for-granted character.

**Fig. 9.1. The collective-social interaction in the organisation of social beliefs.**



Probably at this level core elements recast the themata. The ability of a central system to manage competing interpretations based on basic themes would ensure its flexibility; the assumed stability of the central core, as currently conceived, would rather be relative. An experiment conducted by Moliner (1995b) suggested that core elements might easily become peripheral, against the predictions of the authors. Employing two elements of the social representation of the firm, 'profit' (core) and 'team's work' (peripheral), Moliner et al. hypothesised that a counter-attitudinal essay would not affect the centrality of the element 'profit' because its alleged stability and resistance to change. To their surprise, the questioning of the central element turned it into a peripheral element.

The authors explained the phenomenon in terms of the change of the object of representation, based on Asch's thesis that "changes of evaluation require the transformation of content in response to altered contexts" (Asch, 1948, p. 275). Is it the object of representation that changes as Moliner et al. suggested? Or are we before the re-accommodation of one array of social representations to another in order to respond to a demanding event? Knowledge, as we know, is not either in the object nor in the subject but in the interaction between the two. A structural change, I shall argue, implies a transformation in the representation of the object, either temporal or permanent, but not necessarily a different representation. If we assume a change in the object of representation following a change in the central character of an element, then we are mistakenly conceiving the structure as a rigid and a-historic system. As Rouquette (1996) rightly suggested "A representation in action is not a static configuration, but a series of evolutive 'moments' in accordance with situations. Its function is to maintain the stability of the perceived and conceived world, but also to integrate the changes which can occur in this world" (p. 225).

The main issue in this part of the discussion is to stress the generative and dynamic aspects of the structure, as well as, the essential tension between the elements of a social representation. These elements do not have absolute values, as the values relate to the context in which people express the representation. Moreover, the essential tension implies a conflictive character of the representation, reproducing in the re-construction the dilemmatic nature of social objects. The conflict and dialectical character manifests at the intra- and inter-representational levels. On one hand, the definition of the representation implies not only what it affirms but also what it denies. Some

participants for example associated healthy eating with fat, not because they thought eating fat is healthy eating but because it is the presence of fat that makes healthy eating important. On the other, and with reference to the inter-personal dynamics, in representing something it is important to anticipate what the other assumes.

The ability to anticipate others' actions requires cognitive sophistication and collective and social frames such that the anticipation becomes a social tool. I have argued that in order to understand these processes we need the notion of the 'astute', the eminently social individuals. The astute may not only attribute their own intentions to others but they may also re-construct the intentions of others based on the social reality of what is sensible to do in a particular situation. These basic attributional mechanisms allow interpreting the implications of the action. The interpretation follows a belief-desire framework, the behaviour is a product of beliefs and intentions. Moreover, the astute have the ability to pretend and to act 'as if'. When we express intentions we may express what it is socially desirable to do or actually possible according to the material reality, having at the same time a sort of meta-knowledge about our 'real' intentions. These processes require dynamic systems of representation.

All the dynamism of social representations is lost when we assume that their structure, which is functional, is schematic. An investigation into the social representations of eating in France (Lahlou, 1996), for instance, reduced the study of this social representation to the analysis of its linguistic corpora. Though I agree with Lahlou that the lexical analysis is an essential process to access the semantic universe of the representation, and it conveys important practical applications for marketing, the analysis adheres to a schematic view of the representation. Schematised, the social representation is not more than groups of semantic classes, categories that according to Lahlou are the basic nuclei of the representation. Following Lahlou's simile that representations are "like mental organs" (p. 288), he compared the lexical analysis with an "anatomy" of the social representations. In line with the arguments I am presenting in this discussion, I would suggest that a "physiology" is necessary as well.

The theory of social representations, as an alternative model to the individualisation of the social, deals specifically with representational phenomena as an eminently social issue, emphasising communicative processes. This epistemological position has attracted the attention of many social psychologists, mainly in Europe. Since the

concept of social representations, which sees representation as a meta-theoretical construct, has not been yet fully accepted in mainstream social psychology, the notion of representation has remained attached to the idea of individual mental processes. Moreover, because our knowledge about cognition has increased extraordinarily in the last thirty years due to the influence of the neurosciences, the current models of representation increasingly follow the framework of neuropsychological processes (see Smith, 1998). Though there is a neuropsychological level of the representation, there are serious doubts as to whether this is the level of interest for social psychology. But if there is something common to both levels of explanation, the individual neurocognitive and the social, it is the generative character of the representation. The dynamic versus the descriptive view highlights another swing in social psychology (Markus & Zajonc, 1985), besides the oscillatory trend between the rational and the irrational (see chapter 4).

A dynamic perspective emphasises the constructive character of the representation, the sensitivity of the structure to changing environments. Instead of moving from a descriptive to a dynamic view as mutually exclusive perspectives, it would be more appropriate to consider both as complementary notions. I am not implying, however, that all notions of schema have assumed the view of static structures (cf. Bartlett, 1936; Neisser, 1976). In Chapter 3, I stressed the need to conceive the structure in terms of dynamic systems. The structuralist view of Gestalt psychology that imitated schema models and the structural perspective of social representations require the complement of a dynamic view that considers the cultural, historical, and communicative dimensions of knowledge. The interdependence of structure and function is an essential character of knowledge. It must also be added that an isolated structural analysis outside the discursive and cultural space does not suffice to offer a comprehensive view of the social representation. If we fail to consider the sociocultural environment in which social representations are expressed, then we risk a reduction of the concept to a schematic version and miss its peculiar dynamism.

### *9.3 Practical Consequences: From Attitude Change to Social Transformations, The Marketing of Healthy Eating*

In this section I want to suggest three important aspects to take into consideration for the marketing of public nutrition and for the implementation of health policies: a) socio-

economic influences, b) the creative role of language, and c) the complexities of beliefs systems. I consider that although food choice is a multi-level phenomenon that includes physiological aspects such as hedonic responses to flavours, the social construction of food and eating is the main influence in selecting what to eat. Moreover, the understanding of the organisation of this construction is important to planning communicative strategies that motivate change. Lewin (1958) had already signalled the importance of the meaning of the decision and of the social context. He saw that buying food was a conflict situation, the clash of opposing forces (e.g. attractiveness versus price), conflicts which carry over into the preparation and consumption of food. For Lewin, while the process of buying and preparing food takes place in a group (e.g. the family), the choices made by the housewife, the gatekeeper, are set in a broader social context of norms and values.

The concerns about persuasion by mid-century brought about a good deal of knowledge about influence (e.g. Hovland, 1954), yet the process of change has been described basically in terms of psychological operations, those of the belief-holder. Failures to achieve the intended goals were explained mainly by psychological barriers (e.g. Hyman & Sheatsley, 1947). The individual-oriented perspective on influence has remained dominant; social, group and community changes resulting from the aggregation of individual changes. Adopting an individualistic approach, health promotion has assumed the perspective of rational actors in a restricted economic sense. The rational choice perspective assumes a direct link between knowledge and behaviour, intentionality is conceived as an attribute of mind. The theory of social representations, assuming a macro level of analysis, emphasises the understanding of the cultural and societal influences on food choices; intentionality is a construction. Food choices are shaped by the collective construction of knowledge (the rational dimension), and by the material conditions of production (rationalising dimension). From the social representations perspective, comprehensive interpretation is favoured over prediction; individuals are essentially meaning makers. Within this comprehensive framework I want to introduce three components I suggest as essential for the communication of health messages, in this particular case nutrition, which derive from the results of this research.

### 9.3.1 Social and Economic Influences

The change of a social practice and of the particular ways of representing a reality are not only matters of information but also of material conditions. This includes the guarantee of food security, the availability of fresh foods in the most deprived areas, and income. I have emphasised the importance of economic factors because the study of eating needs the understanding of the economic and political arrangements. Murcott (1988) has distinguished between structural and materialist approaches to food and nutrition, and how they complement each other, in the same way that cuisine and diet are complementary phenomena. The consideration of the social and economic influences is also important for the process of intervention, the selection of means, and the elaboration of persuasive messages. But here it is also important to bear in mind the role of the astute. People frequently do not believe in impartial advice and assume that economic interests are behind most human activities; if there is a profit people usually want to get a part.

Although in general terms the cognitive revolution focused attention on the active individual who constructs reality, we have generally assumed activity as made up of clear intentions and as relatively constant. However, often intentions are not more than rhetorical strategies to engage in in-context communications. We understand too little about how the people in Colombia negotiate 'the healthy' under budget constraints; we have not realised how the perception of 'the healthy' changes under the same constraints. Food choices reveal an economic order in terms of the actual purchase of foods and in the re-construction of that purchase in terms of social expectations, the justification of social practices. Any intervention should begin by considering the economic influences and their interaction with cultural patterns as a symbolic expression of the group's life. Although there seems to be consensus that mere information is not enough to produce change (Baranowski, 1995), persuasive programs frequently start without considering the lack of opportunities. Can interventions based only on messages have an effective and permanent effect when low income prevents the purchase of foods? Even in the presence of adequate funds, can they have any effect when healthy foods are rarely available in poor urban and rural communities? These economic, and indeed, political issues must receive especial consideration since nutritional change is more than a cognitive-behavioural issue.

In one study specifically aimed at implementing a behavioural intervention program in an impoverished community of Cali, Colombia, Walbek (1973) employed the conventional framework 'attitudes cause behaviour' to conduct a persuasive manipulation. As the author suggested, a verbal measure of attitude is not the adequate way of assessing changes in overt behaviour, a problem that is similar to that mentioned by Deutscher (see chapter 2). Overt behaviour and verbal behaviour may be both considered as part of a complex system. Walbek concluded that nutritional training programs to enhance nutritional information have small effects on dietary change and that verbal reports of behavioural intention are not an adequate method to assess behavioural change. The problem of the association between attitudes and behaviour was a problem of measurement in this case, not necessarily a conceptual issue. Still the observations are relevant in the sense of confirming that the problem is not the lack of information, since general nutritional guidelines are available to the groups, as indeed this research has confirmed. Most nutritional interventions assume that information will lead to lasting changes despite the absence of opportunities. Yet, in all focus group participants mentioned price as an essential factor to comply with dietary guidelines and as one of the most important barriers in preventing healthy eating jointly with food habits.

### **9.3.2 The Creative Role of Language:**

One of the most powerful mechanisms to achieve the intended goals of an intervention is an adequate communication. In order to develop an effective communicative strategy it is important, besides the exploration of the content of previous group-specific beliefs, attitudes and values, to understand the mechanisms that enhance or limit the scope of the communications designed. The emphasis on the creative and constructive role of language makes relevant the consideration of metaphors as a pedagogical device. The content analysis of media and focus groups identified several metaphors, the most noticeable being the view of the body-as-machine. A question that immediately arises is how to employ this metaphoric expression in sensible ways, so as to ensure the appropriation of new ideas by the groups. The body-as-machine metaphor allows us to understand the physiology of the human organism in mechanistic terms. If individuals construct within this conceptual correspondence eating-as-tanking up, and food-as-diesel, then in what terms should we introduce healthy eating? Since social representations are lived in the life-world, in objectified realities, a plausible hypothesis



to research is as follows: Communicative strategies employing familiar metaphors and able to express concepts in terms of objectified realities are more effective in producing change than those not doing so, provided that the material conditions to initiate and sustain change are available.

Rokeach (1968) in his elaboration on the applications to advertising of the structural organisation of beliefs cites the examples of Pepto-Bismol and Anacin ads. Rokeach wrote "There are probably millions of Americans walking around right now with a conception of a stomach that looks like a hollow dumbbell standing on end, and with a conception of a mind composed of split-level compartments" (p. 186). He associated these ads with an alleged conception of the human being by the advertising industry as an irrational and stupid being. I cannot but disagree with this consideration, not because I am defending the advertising industry but because I consider that the materialisation of functions and concepts is vital to achieve the goals of a good communication. This is why the use of metaphors is vital. At the same time, the adult has the capacity to know that in real life things are not like that, but we opt to conceive reality in concrete ways. Where are these materialisations coming from? From advertising? Probably they come from culture and advertising uses them to communicate messages more clearly, but this is nothing more than a hypothesis that needs to be researched.

As an example of this, let us think about the idea of the intestine-as-tube and how this idea is employed to advertise cereals with a high content of fibre. This is a primary image in which movement is well understood in terms of transit. Constipation can be thus conceived as a problem in the intestinal transit. Alternatively, let us think about the idea of cholesterol-as-killer although cholesterol is not a person with intentions to cause health problems. However, invested with a new ontological reality, cholesterol is anchored in existent categories; the metaphor allows investing the problematic with the reality of what is known.

There are still two additional aspects to consider in relation to the use of concrete referents. One is the tendency to think the representation in concrete terms. I have suggested that this is a particular characteristic of common sense. The other has to do with the changes in the cognitive activity because of the changes in culture and history. If rural inhabitants with lower educational levels have wider access to visual categories, then we should consider the use of images to communicate health messages in these

populations. It is in terms of these categories that they master most aspects of their social world.

### **9.3.3 The Complexities of Belief Systems**

In addition to structural and functional properties, belief systems include a particular genesis, the development of evaluative elements around which the other components of the representation are structured. In his research on the circulation of psychoanalytic ideas in French society, Moscovici (1961/1976) stressed the role of the attitude as the primary genetic component of the representation. Comparing different segments of the population, he showed how this attitudinal component is the first one to appear and that it was present in all groups, even in those with a less structured representational field. It is apparent that when confronted by polemical social objects, people need to position themselves evaluatively before getting the 'information' from 'authoritative' sources. This issue on the genesis of the structure has important conceptual and practical implications. Conceptual because it would imply a process at the social psychological level with a similar genesis as the biological level, in which affective and more primitive structures precede the development of 'higher' functions in developmental terms.

This aspect relates to the notion of continuity in the articulation of the different explanatory levels, in which emotional components precede informational components. It also has practical implications, because once people make their minds up based on affective aspects, the persuasive communication should consider seriously a strategy at the same level. This implies that the communication must employ competing affective interests in order to increase the effect of the data presented. This is especially relevant in the communication of emotionally charged issues such as food and eating.

Not only in terms of their genesis belief systems are complex. Other aspects such as the stable core-changeable peripheral properties of the elements within the two sub-systems need elaboration. If the periphery of a representation such as healthy eating is composed of menus, habitus in the sense given by Bourdieu (1985, see chapter 4), then the changeable property of the periphery would be rather relative since the periphery would be also part of the social memory. On the other hand, if the core fulfils a function of legitimisation, and practices as well as ideologies are often contradictory and

paradoxical, then the core would probably have the property of adapting to the changing circumstances in which we express the representation. In this sense, the stable and changeable properties of each sub-system would be relative and the communication should include the understanding on how the dynamics between both components operate.

#### *9.4 Concluding Remarks*

Four groups in Colombian society constructed their representation of healthy eating around categories such as fruits, vegetables, white meat, and conditions for eating in accordance with dietary guidelines. These categories are the central core of the representation. The elements identified in the periphery were mainly menus, in accordance with the formulations of the structural perspective that the periphery is the concrete expression of the representation. If both components of the structure are, in general terms, the axiomatic and the pragmatic dimension, a conflictive relationship between the two may be recognised. The conflict is managed by reconstructing the general sense of the representation. A tension between an ideal of eating and actual food preferences has already been reported in nutritional research (USDA, 1995).

I pointed out the different levels that intervene in the construction of knowledge. I emphasised the constructive character of healthy eating to appreciate how the results of scientific production are recognised in a collective creation. Knowingly, I started at the collective level of understanding. Healthy eating has an institutional form concerned with the reduction of premature death, disease, and disability. This level re-interprets the findings in nutritional research and adjusts them to institutional and public problems: the burden of disease, loss of productivity, quality of life, etc. Although I assumed this level, the 'whys' of healthy eating must not be taken for granted. The next level down in the organisation of knowledge is the social level on which this thesis has focused. How different groups portray healthy eating is a relevant question at this level. The social links to the collective via core notions, which may have different functions. At this social level, the process of construction of a notion like healthy eating results not only from the reality that science unveils but also from economic and political considerations.

The study of this social representation offers a good opportunity for the analysis of cultural transformations and the several factors that it implicates. When I collected data for this thesis, the Colombian public ignored genetically modified foods. Now the debate has begun (e.g. Cromos September 15 1999). This dynamism is what characterises social representations. I hope this thesis has demonstrated the value of employing wider frameworks in the analysis of social problems. I see it as a contribution to the understanding of food issues in Colombia.

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## **11 Appendices**

### 11.1 Appendix 1 Map of Colombia.

Location of the urban and rural settings.



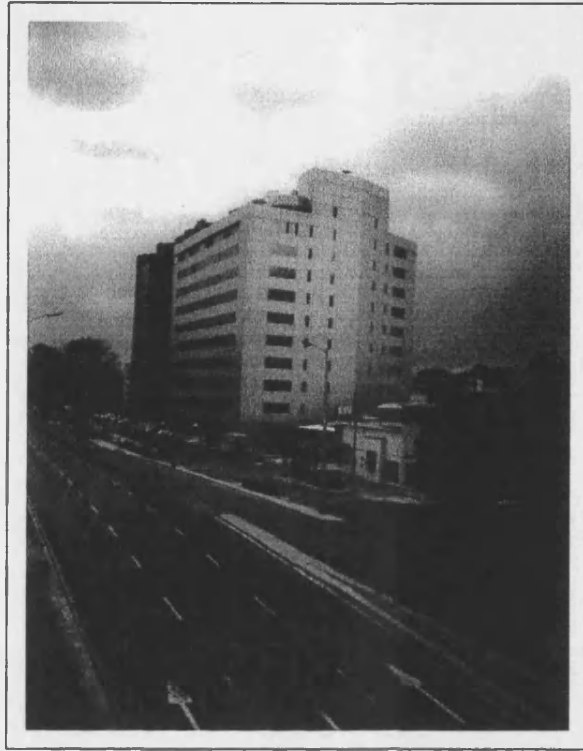




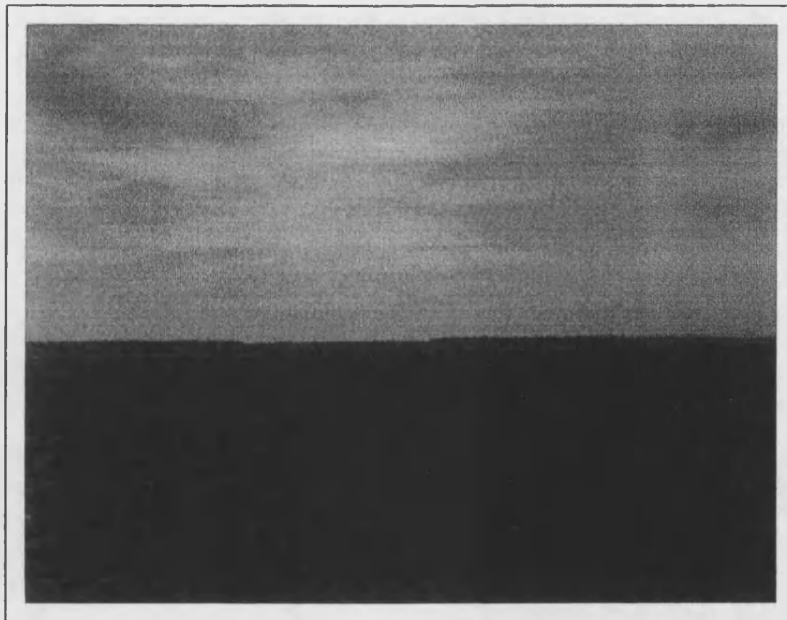
**Table 3.1 Coding categories employed in the investigative observation**

<b>Code</b>	<b>rural non-pro 1</b>	<b>rural pro 2</b>	<b>urban non-pro 3</b>	<b>urban pro 4</b>
<b>Space: settings for production, purchase, preparation and consumption</b>	market kitchen table food stalls	market kitchen table food stalls restaurants	market mobile market super-market kitchen table food stalls	super-market kitchen table restaurants
<b>Time: socially structured activities of eating</b>	two meals: breakfast/dinner	three meals: breakfast/lunch/ dinner	three meals: breakfast/lunch/din ner	three meals: breakfast/lunch/din ner
<b>Menus: meal contents</b>	diet: contents of everyday eating cuisine: consumption of traditional dishes	diet: contents of everyday eating cuisine: consumption of traditional dishes	diet: contents of everyday eating cuisine: consumption of traditional dishes	diet: contents of everyday eating cuisine: consumption of traditional dishes

#### 11.4 Appendix 4 Photographs as evidence

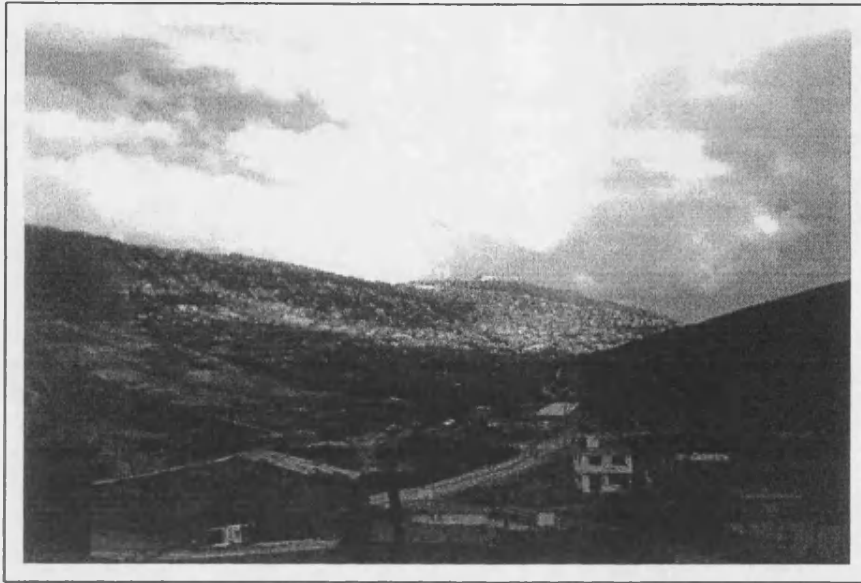


Picture 5.1.



Picture 5.2.

Contrasting worlds: above, a street in Bogotá. Below, The Orinoquia savannah. I stressed the differences in the representation of healthy eating by choosing quite opposite environments.



Picture 5.3.

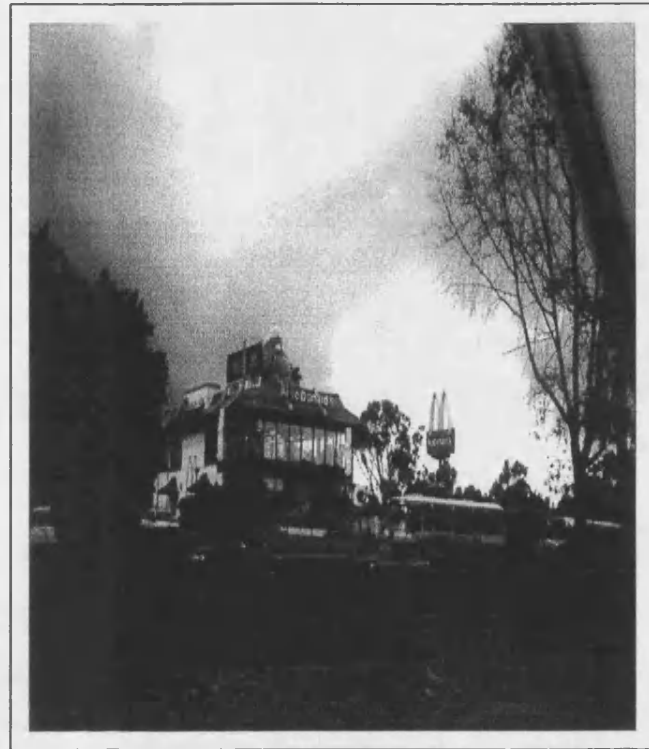


Picture 5.4.

Urban contrasts: above, the slums on the outskirts of South Bogotá, in Soacha. Below, the 'Highlander Pub' in the more affluent north. In the background, a hawker sells food, drinks and Marlboro.



Picture 5.5.

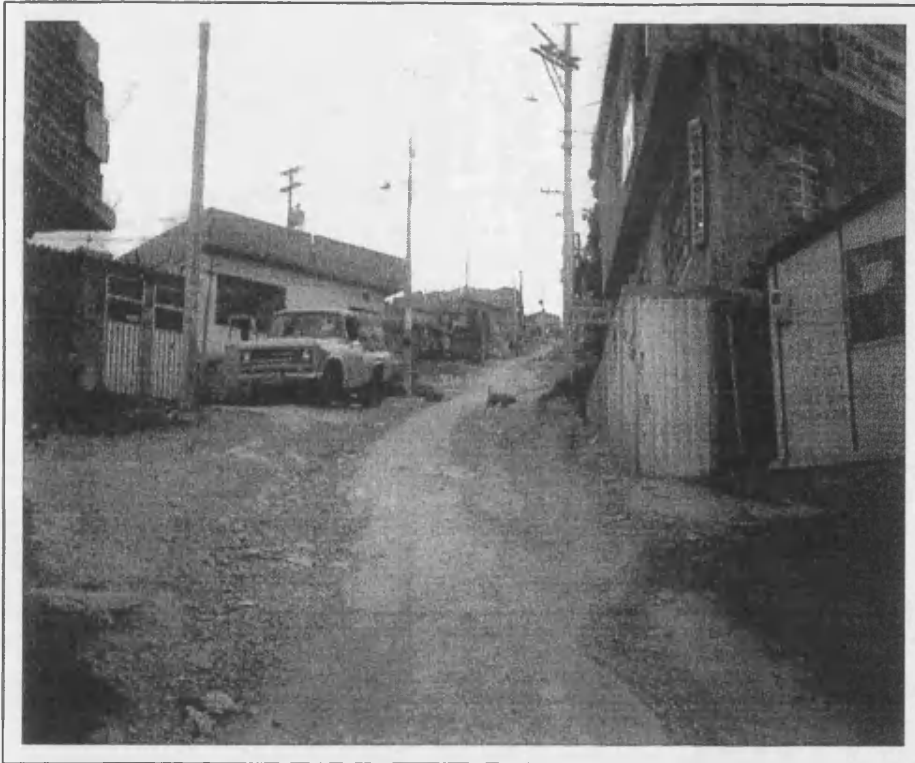


Picture 5.6.



Picture 5.7.

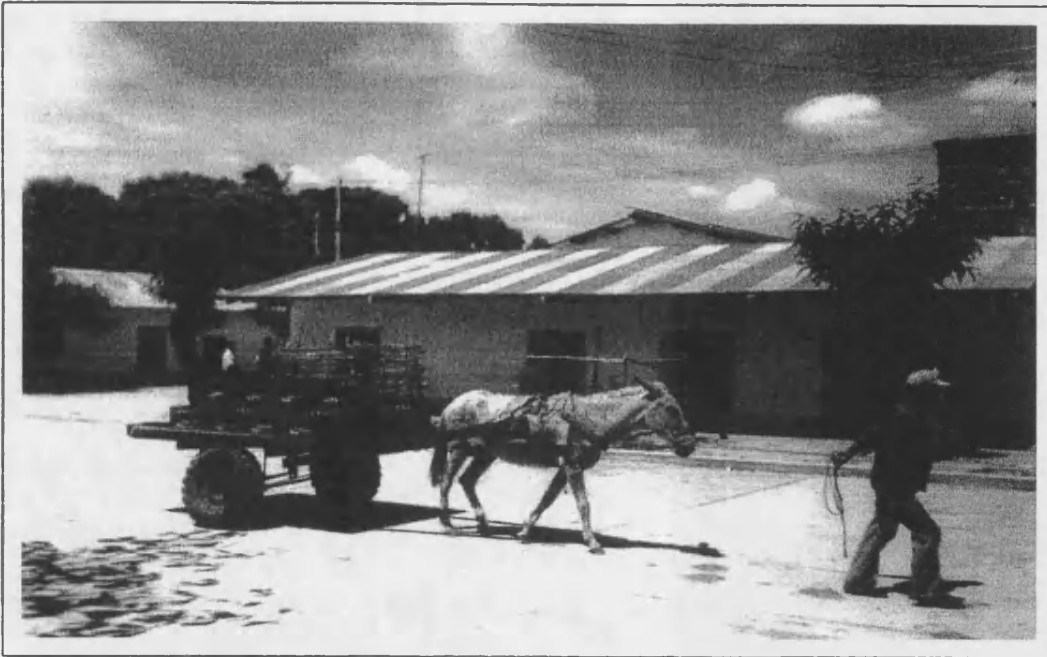
Global culture for the well-off: Picture 5.5: A *drive thru* restaurant in an affluent sector of Bogotá. Picture 5.6: McDonald's. Picture 5.7: 'Personal Food Service', this is not a translation but the actual name of the supermarket next to the *italianissimo* 'Piccolo Café'.



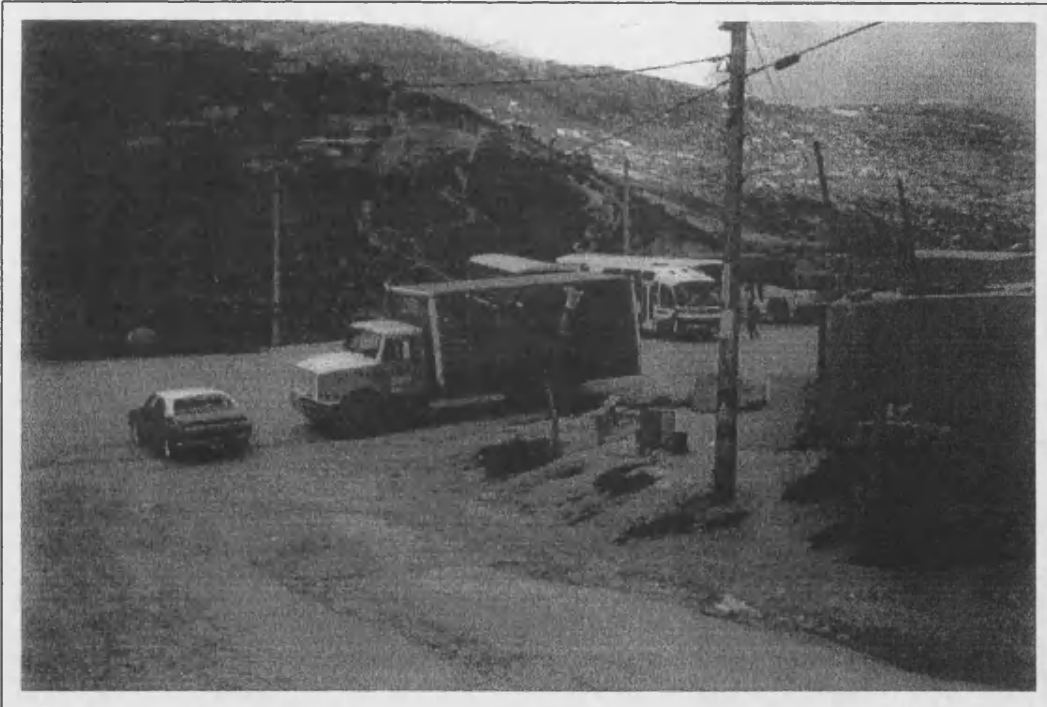
Picture 5.8. A 'mobile market': the old pickup truck serves as a food retailer in the steep streets of Ciudadela Sucre, Soacha. In the foreground, *La Casa del Tamal Tolimense*, a typical restaurant open at weekends.



Picture 5.9. Flesh: this picture was taken from a restaurant opposite to the butcher's stalls in the market of Arauca. Customers knew where the steak had come from.



Picture 5.10.



Picture 5.11.

Always Coca-Cola: thirty-two percent of the people surveyed in Bogotá reported daily consumption of carbonated drinks. Above a rather rustic track in Arauca transports the drinks. Below, a truck unloads the familiar beverage in south Bogotá. Right in front of the truck, the Dodge carrying my guests and I to the restaurant. Actually, I got out of the car so it could go down the street.



Picture 5.12. The researcher with his guests at the restaurant. They moved between the 'physically healthy' and the 'psychologically healthy' when defining healthy eating.



Picture 5.13. A food hawker in Soacha.



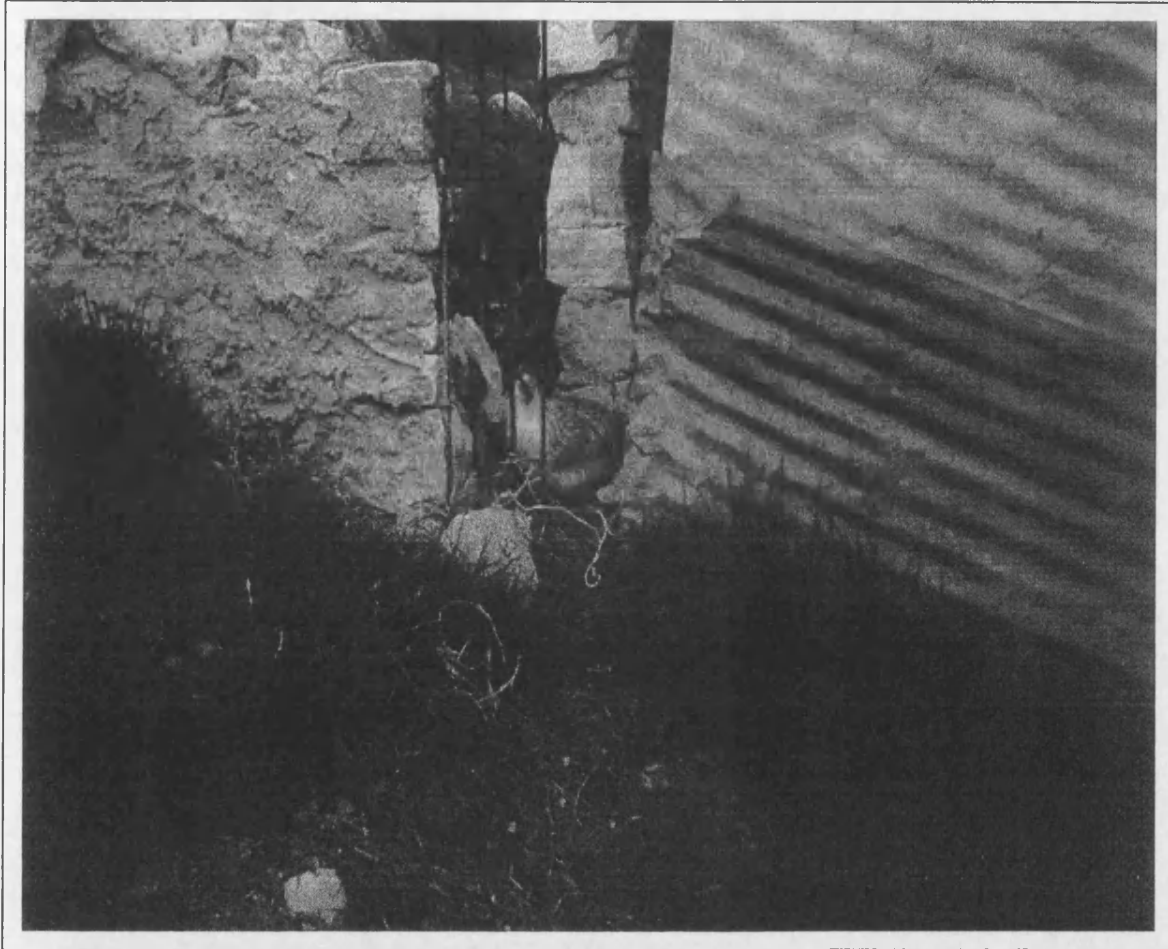


Picture 5.14. The Cholesterol Palace: Sumptuous exhibition of foods (blood sausages, roast chicken and pork scratchings) in the restaurant chosen by my guests to talk about healthy eating



Picture 5.15. Mealtime: Peasants in Arauca eat twice a day. Here a group enjoys the afternoon meal in a farm. Note the size of the pots and the generous portions served. The menu? *Picadillo* and slices of fried plantain.

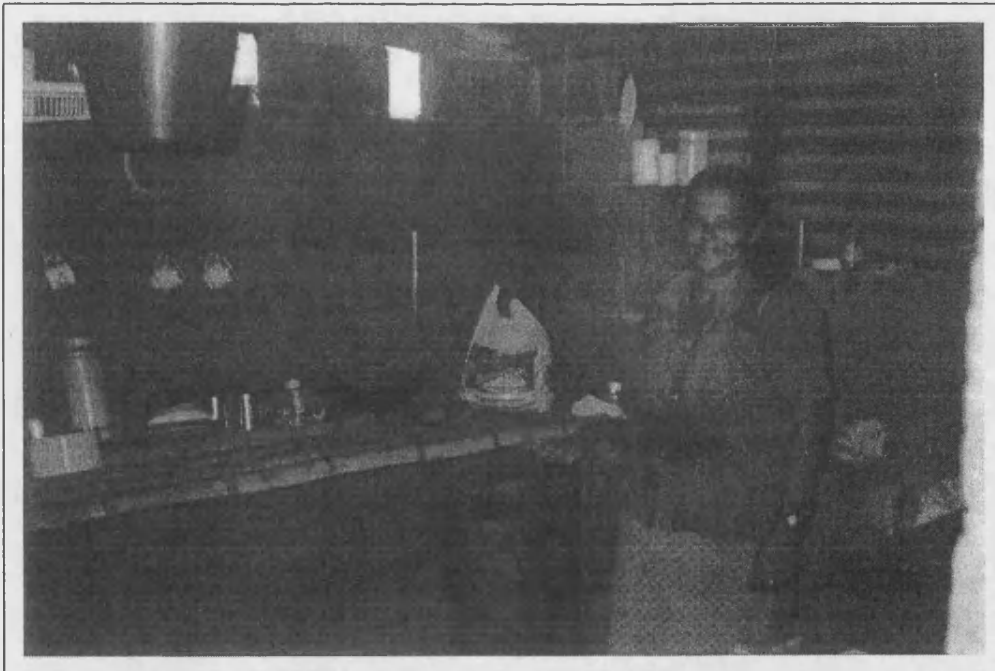




Picture 5.16. An organic chicken scratches around in Ciudadela Sucre, Soacha. Most of the people living in the area are rural migrants.



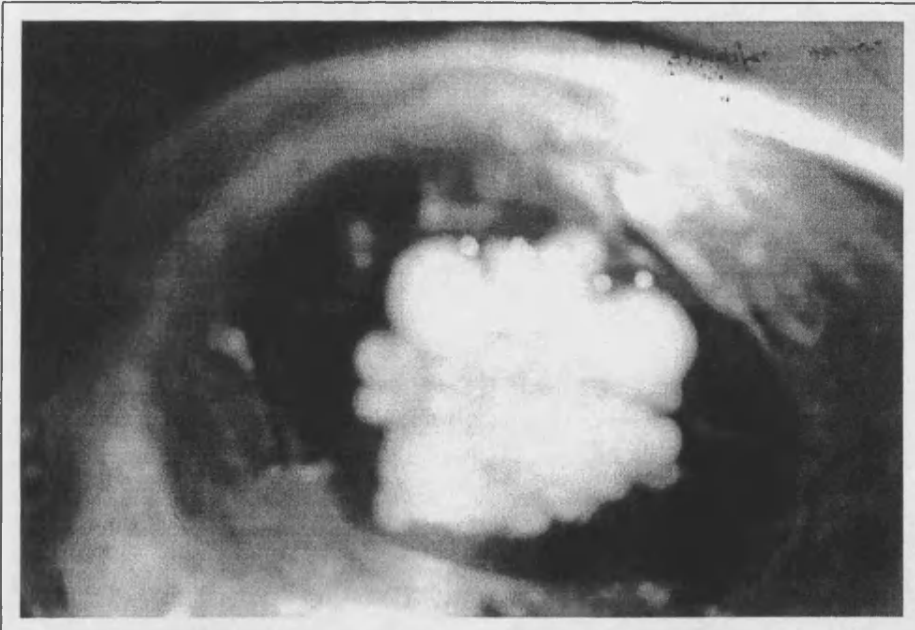
Picture 5.17. *Hayaca* and *arepa*, two traditional dishes from Arauca, ready to be tasted by the researcher.



Picture 5.18. Doña Ema proudly shows her kitchen. Seven carrots on the granary and one green onion branch appear as the vegetarian ingredients.



Picture 5.19

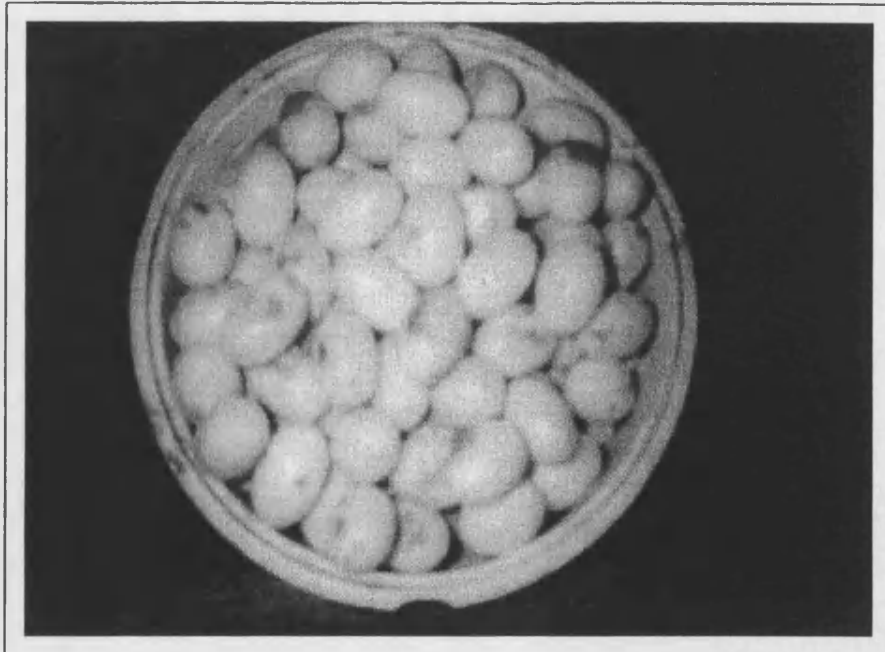


Picture 5.20

Pre-Environmentalism?...Above, two peasants squeeze lemons on a grilled alligator's tail they are preparing to eat. Below, tortoise eggs ready for the pot in a home in Arauca.



Picture 5.21



Picture 5.22

...or anti-ecologists? Above, a peasant takes the eggs out of a slaughtered iguana. The animal will not be consumed. Below, turtle's eggs ready to eat, a local speciality in Arauca.

## 11.5 Appendix 5 List of newspaper articles.

Article <sup>1</sup>	Newspaper	Section	Gender oriented <sup>2</sup>	Income relevant <sup>3</sup>	Links with health	Main category
1 La pasión por la olla	El Tiempo	modern life	no	yes	no	cuisine
2 Antes de comer revise las fechas de vencimiento	El Tiempo	health	no	no	yes	food safety
3 En Colombia lo que se hace es comer a la lata	El Espectador	economy	no	no	no	consumption
4 Qué buena papa!	El Tiempo	modern life	yes: F	yes	yes	cuisine
5 La obesidad es una epidemia bien gorda	El Tiempo	first page	no	no	yes	obesity
6 Aprenda a lavar sus vegetales	El Espectador, Revista del Jueves	magazine	yes: F	yes	yes	food safety
7 La comida entra por los ojos	El Tiempo	general interest	no	no	no	food events
8 No obligue a los niños a comer	El Tiempo, Carrusel	magazine	yes: F	yes	yes	education
9 Embutidos, chorizos y carnes vegetales	El Espectador, revista del Jueves	magazine	yes: F	yes	yes	delikatessen
10 Un día hipertenso para el colesterol	El Tiempo	health	no	no	yes	hypertension
11 Como eliminar el sarro de los intestinos	El Espectador, Revista del Jueves	magazine	yes: F	yes	yes	colon irrigation
12 Provóquese, coma y, ante todo, saboree	El Espectador	general interest	no	no	no	food events
13 Los alimentos también tienen etiqueta	El Tiempo, Carrusel	magazine	yes: F	yes	yes	labelling
14 La dieta del estudiante, El Espectador		modern life	no	no	no	students' diets

<sup>1</sup> Translations are available in chapter 7 for those articles cited in the text

<sup>2</sup> pre-post (two months) reliability = 97.5%

<sup>3</sup> pre-post (two months) reliability = 95%

15 A falta de Viagra bueno es el ponche marino	El Espectador	general interest	no	no	no	food events
16 El sabor de los apetitos congelados	El Espectador	modern life	no	no	no	convenience food
17 Realice este test y descubra que la engorda	El Espectador, Revista del Jueves	magazine	yes: F	yes	yes	overweight
18 Ajonjolí, el grano antivejez	El Espectador, Revista del Jueves	magazine	yes: F	yes	yes	beauty
19 Dime lo que comes y te diré quién eres	El Tiempo, Carrusel	magazine	yes: F	yes	yes	fibre
20 Secretos del caviar	El Espectador, Revista del Jueves	magazine	yes: F	yes	no	caviar
21 Se cocina solución a conflictos	El Tiempo	general interest	no	no	no	community life
22 Intoxicados 136 niños con refrigerio escolar	El Espectador	general interest	no	no	yes	food safety
23 Lasaña y chorizo	El Espectador	modern life	no	no	no	food consumption
24 Bienvenida la comida y la bebida	El Espectador	modern life	no	no	no	food events
25 A cuidar los alimentos	El Tiempo	health	no	no	yes	food safety
26 El síndrome del intestino irritable	El Tiempo	health	no	no	yes	irritable colon
27 Roger Laburth abrió hace unos meses su pastelería francesa: dulces tentaciones de La Candelaria	El Tiempo	modern life	no	no	no	cuisine
28 El menú de las importaciones	El Tiempo	economy	no	no	no	consumption
29 Cáncer colorectal: enemigo que mata	El Tiempo	health	no	no	yes	colorectal cancer
30 La dieta es muy individual. Un buen manejo nutricional	El Teimpo	health	no	no	yes	aids
31 El alimento ideal que no	El Tiempo	health	yes: F	no	yes	breast-feeding

cuesta nada: lactancia materna la mejor inversión						
32 Le Cordon Bleu: cocina con sabor a historia	El Tiempo	modern life	yes: F	yes	no	cuisine
33 Intoxicación por alimentos	El Espectador	health	no	no	yes	food safety
34 La delicia del B.B.Q	El Tiempo	modern life	no	yes	no	cuisine
35 Bocados	El Tiempo	modern life	no	yes	no	food events
36 La comida y la devaluación	El Espectador	opinion	no	no	no	food access
37 Hablemos sobre los oligoelementos	El Tiempo	modern life	no	yes	yes	minerals
38 La ensalada, de invitada a protagonista	El Tiempo	modern life	yes: F	yes	no	vegetarian
39 Los anzuelos del comercio	El Tiempo	general interest	no	no	no	education
40 Cuando los bichos aparecen en el desayuno		science	no	no	yes	food safety

## 11.6 Appendix 6 Codes and definitions: media content analysis

### (1) /eating

Definition: General category. It encompasses four subcategories: (a) social; (b) transitions; (c) processes; (d) healthy eating.

### (1 1) /eating/social

Definition: The collective (group) aspect of eating, whenever eating implies (a) to share; (b) communion and/or (c) group identity.

### (1 1 1) /eating/social/cuisine

Definition: The social aspect is expressed through recipes/culinary traditions

### (1 1 1 1) /eating/social/cuisine/art

Definition: The gastronomical aspect of the cuisine; the cuisine of the *connoisseur*; basically the foreign cuisine.

### (1 1 1 1 1) /eating/social/cuisine/art/foreign

Definition: It specifies the three nations of good food as it is portrayed.

### (1 1 1 1 1 1) /eating/social/cuisine/art/foreign/french

Definition: All references to French cuisine in general terms.

### (1 1 1 1 1 1 1) /eating/social/cuisine/art/foreign/french/high cuisine

Definition: All references to French cuisine as the expert's cuisine.

### (1 1 1 1 1 2) /eating/social/cuisine/art/foreign/italian

Definition: All references to Italian cuisine.

### (1 1 1 1 1 3) /eating/social/cuisine/art/foreign/spanish

Definition: All references to Spanish cuisine.

### (1 1 1 2) /eating/social/cuisine/tradition

Definition: Recipes do not remit to elegance and European tradition but to national, regional and/or local identity. It is the popular cuisine as opposed to the expert's cuisine.

### (1 1 1 2 1) /eating/social/cuisine/tradition/identity

Definition: Groups references to (a) regional (b) community and (c) class identity.

### (1 1 1 2 1 1) /eating/social/cuisine/tradition/identity/regional

Definition: Exemplifies identity at the regional level (e.g. departments).

### (1 1 1 2 1 2) /eating/social/cuisine/tradition/identity/community

Definition: Exemplifies identity at the community (*barrio*) level.

### (1 1 1 2 1 3) /eating/social/cuisine/tradition/identity/class

Definition: Relates identity and social class.

### (1 1 1 2 2) /eating/social/cuisine/tradition/sex

Definition: All references to cuisine and sex: The effect of food on sex arousal.

### (1 1 2) /eating/social/diet



Definition: Eating is embedded in a system of economic production. This is the every day eating, not the eating related to special events as it is cuisine.

**(1 1 2 1) /eating/social/diet/prac lifestyle**

Definition: Dietary practices related to particular lifestyles, represented here by three categories: (a) junk culture (b) frozen and (c) fatty foods.

**(1 1 2 1 1) /eating/social/diet/prac lifestyle/junk**

Definition: Refers to the 'culture' of fast food.

**(1 1 2 1 2) /eating/social/diet/prac lifestyle/frozen culture**

Definition: Refers to the 'culture' of convenience foods.

**(1 1 2 1 3) /eating/social/diet/prac lifestyle/fatty**

Definition: Refers to the 'culture' of greasy foods.

**(1 1 2 2) /eating/social/diet/urban life**

Definition: Lifestyle is a category associated with urban ways. Includes dietary practices related to modern life.

**(1 2) /eating/transitions**

Definition: All references to transformations and current trends in food consumption as exemplified in the sub-nodes.

**(1 2 1) /eating/transitions/market**

Definition: All reference to transformations, transitions and nutritional overlapping, particularly related to economic issues.

**(1 2 1 1) /eating/transitions/market/trend**

Definition: Encompass the categories that represent the trend.

**(1 2 1 1 1) /eating/transitions/market/trend/vegetarian**

Definition: The trend is characterised by the increase in the consumption of vegetarian foods.

**(1 2 1 1 2) /eating/transitions/market/trend/convenience**

Definition: The trend is characterised by the increase in the consumption of convenience foods.

**(1 2 1 1 3) /eating/transitions/market/trend/American**

Definition: The trend is characterised by the increase in the consumption of 'American' foods. The term 'American' is made explicit in the description.

**(1 2 1 1 4) /eating/transitions/market/trend/increased consumption**

Definition: The trend is characterised by the increase in the purchase of food products.

**(1 2 1 1 4 1) /eating/transitions/market/trend/increased consumption/reasons**

Definition: Reasons for the increased consumption.

**(1 2 1 1 4 1 1) /eating/transitions/market/trend/increased consumption/reasons/supply**

Definition: Supply as a reason for increased consumption.

**(1 2 1 1 4 1 2) /eating/transitions/market/trend/increased consumption/reasons/convenience**

Definition: Convenience as a reason for increased consumption.

**(1 2 1 1 4 1 3) /eating/transitions/market/trend/increased consumption/reasons/income**

Definition: Income as a reason for increased consumption.

**(1 2 1 1 4 1 4) /eating/transitions/market/trend/increase consumption/reasons/world markets**

Definition: World trade and globalisation as reasons for increased consumption.

**(1 2 1 1 4 1 5) /eating/transitions/market/trend/increase consumption/reasons/marketing**

Definition: Marketing strategies as reasons for increased consumption.

**(1 2 1 2) /eating/transitions/market/marketing**

Definition: References to strategies and/or techniques used to attract consumers and promote the consumption of particular foods.

**(1 3) /eating/processes**

Definition: Production, factoring and trading of food particularly related to (a) preservation of quality (b) food's safety.

**(1 3 1) /eating/processes/food quality**

Definition: Preservation of the quality of food for processed and not processed foods.

**(1 3 1 1) /eating/processes/food quality/food safety**

Definition: Measures to enhance food safety and to prevent (a) contamination (b) intoxication.

**(1 3 1 1 1) /eating/processes/food quality/food safety/labels**

Definition: Labelling as the most important component of food safety.

**(1 3 1 1 1 1) /eating/processes/food quality/food safety/labels/intoxication**

Definition: The consequences in terms of signs and symptoms of food contamination. Contamination refers to food while intoxication to the person who eats it.

**(1 3 1 1 2) /eating/processes/food quality/food safety/contamination**

Definition: Any physical, biological, or chemical alteration of a food product that may lead to an intoxication.

**(1 3 1 1 2 1) /eating/processes/food quality/food safety/contamination/cleanliness**

Definition: Measures to prevent and/or eliminate contamination.

**(1 3 1 2) /eating/processes/food quality/access**

Definition: Accessibility to food products.

**(1 3 1 3) /eating/processes/food quality/responsibility**

Definition: References to the responsibility in the assurance of food quality.

**(1 3 1 3 1) /eating/processes/food quality/responsibility/individual**

Definition: The responsibility is attributed to the individual.

**(1 3 1 3 2) /eating/processes/food quality/responsibility/government**

Definition: The responsibility is attributed to governmental policies.

**(1 4) /eating/healthy eating**

Definition: Explicit references to health and eating in the same text.

**(1 4 1) /eating/healthy eating/illness**

Definition: Explicit links between eating and (a) prevention (b) risk of developing a particular condition and its treatment.

**(1 4 1 1) /eating/healthy eating/illness/consequences**

Definition: Consequences of disease.

**(1 4 1 2) /eating/healthy eating/illness/prevention**

Definition: All measures aimed for the preservation of health with specific reference to recommendations and medical advice.

**(1 4 1 2 1) /eating/healthy eating/illness/prevention/recomm regula**

Definition: General recommendations and regulations to prevent disease.

**(1 4 1 2 1 1) /eating/healthy eating/illness/prevention/recomm regula/fruits and vegs**

Definition: Specific reference to the consumption of fruits and vegetables as recommendations to prevent disease.

**(1 4 1 2 1 2) /eating/healthy eating/illness/prevention/recomm regula/education**

Definition: Specific reference to education as a recommendation to prevent disease.

**(1 4 1 2 1 3) /eating/healthy eating/illness/prevention/recomm regula/exercise**

Definition: Specific reference to exercise as a recommendation to prevent disease.

**(1 4 1 2 1 4) /eating/healthy eating/illness/prevention/recomm regula/variety**

Definition: Specific reference to variety as a recommendation to prevent disease.

**(1 4 1 2 1 5) /eating/healthy eating/illness/prevention/recomm regula/regularity**

Definition: Specific reference to regularity as a recommendation to prevent disease.

**(1 4 1 2 1 6) /eating/healthy eating/illness/prevention/recomm regula/moderation**

Definition: Specific reference to moderation as a recommendation to prevent disease.

**(1 4 1 2 1 7) /eating/healthy eating/illness/prevention/recomm regula/balance**

Definition: Specific reference to balance eating as a recommendation to prevent disease.

**(1 4 1 2 1 8) /eating/healthy eating/illness/prevention/recomm  
regula/breastfeeding**

Definition: Specific reference to breastfeeding as a recommendation to prevent disease.

**(1 4 1 2 1 9) /eating/healthy eating/illness/prevention/recomm regula/fibre**

Definition: Specific reference to the consumption of fibre as a recommendation to prevent disease.

**(1 4 1 3) /eating/healthy eating/illness/risk factors**

Definition: All factors associated with the probability of developing a particular condition.

**(1 4 1 3 1) /eating/healthy eating/illness/risk factors/modern life**

Definition: Specific reference to modern life as a risk factor.

**(1 4 1 4) /eating/healthy eating/illness/cancer**

Definition: Association between cancer and diet.

**(1 4 1 5) /eating/healthy eating/illness/cardiovascular**

Definition: Association between cardiovascular disease and diet.

**(1 4 1 6) /eating/healthy eating/illness/cholesterol**

Definition: Association between cholesterol levels and diet.

**(1 4 1 7) /eating/healthy eating/illness/aids**

Definition: References to nutritional care in aids.

**(1 4 1 8) /eating/healthy eating/illness/obesity**

Definition: Association between obesity and diet.

**(1 4 1 9) /eating/healthy eating/illness/digestive**

Definition: Association between digestive problems and diet.

**(1 4 1 10) /eating/healthy eating/illness/diabetes**

Definition: Association between diabetes and diet.

**(1 4 2) /eating/healthy eating/body**

Definition: Explicit links between eating and a de-contextualised body: body as an organism/ body as a biological system but not in relation to illness.

**(1 4 2 1) /eating/healthy eating/body/beauty**

Definition: The body in specific relation to physical attractiveness.

**(1 4 2 1 1) /eating/healthy eating/body/beauty/slimness**

Definition: Attractiveness is associated with slim bodies.

**(1 4 2 1 2) /eating/healthy eating/body/beauty/youth**

Definition: Attractiveness is associated with youth.

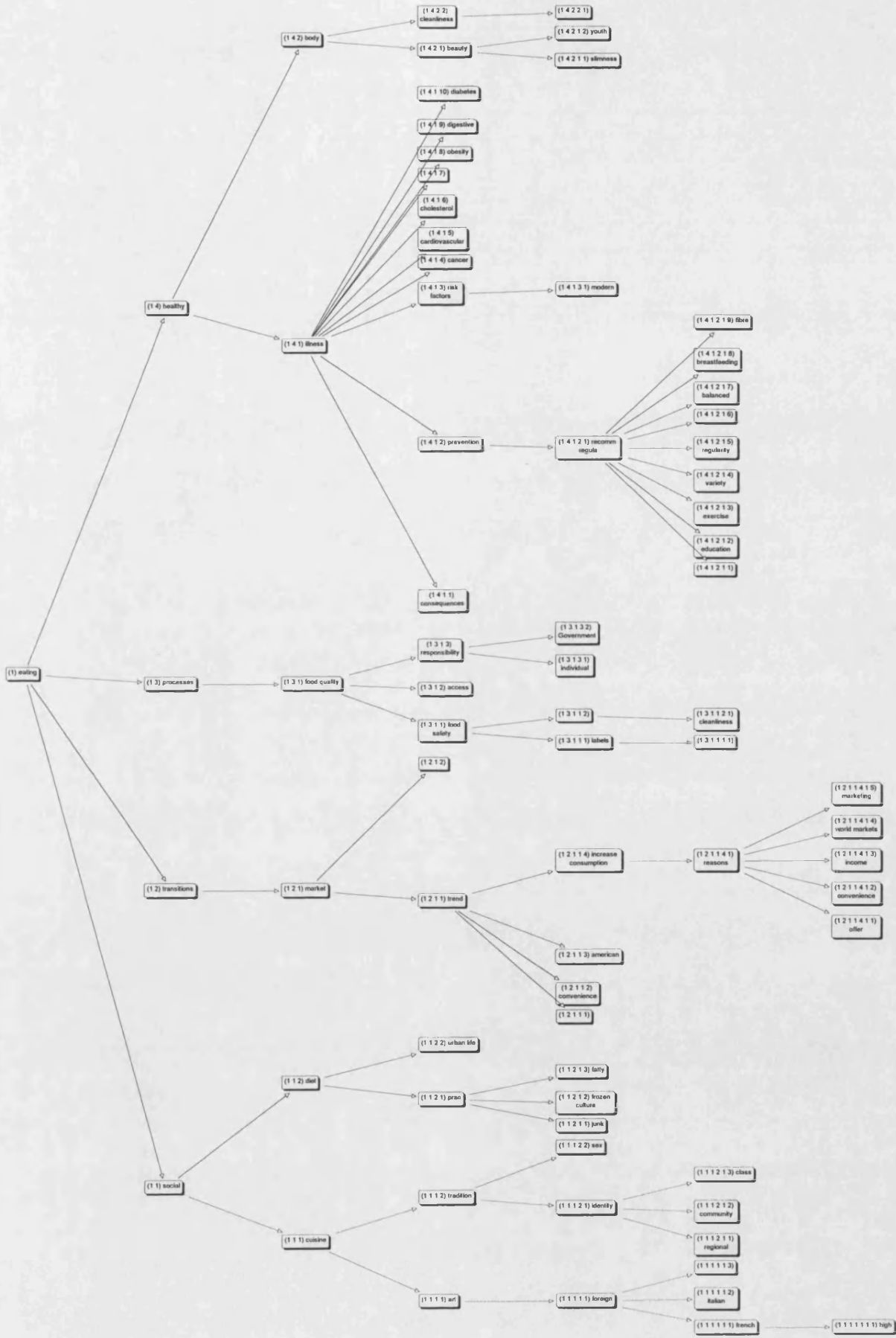
**(1 4 2 2) /eating/healthy eating/body/cleanliness**

Definition: Any reference to the body and its 'internal cleanliness', including the elimination of toxins.

**(1 4 2 2 1)** /eating/healthy eating/body/cleanliness/colon irrig

Definition: Colon irrigation as a method to clean the body.

# Appendix 7 Index system media analysis



Tree display

**11.8 Appendix 8 Examples of the advertising of clustering.**  
 Promotion of products to cleanse the colon.

*Usted puede tener acumulada hasta 15 libras de materia.*

# Estreñimiento?

Si usted no lo utiliza regularmente...  
 se puede estar intoxicando.  
 Desintoxique su cuerpo, "barriendo"  
 de basura tóxica el sistema digestivo  
 y de eliminación.



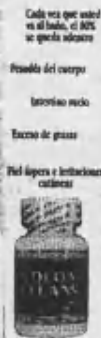
**Colon Cleanser®** Solución 100% natural 255-8560

INFORMACIÓN VITAL PARA MEJORAR SU SALUD

## El estreñimiento es una intoxicación crónica acumulada en sus intestinos

Cuando no se eliminan adecuadamente los desechos producidos por los alimentos que se descomponen en su organismo, se genera una serie de toxinas que invade el colon provocando una auto-intoxicación. Las paredes intestinales presentan las cristalizaciones de toxinas fecales no expulsadas que impiden la absorción de nutrientes vitales que alimentan los tejidos del cuerpo a través de la corriente sanguínea que pasa por el intestino. Cuando el intestino está sucio, la sangre también se contamina y por consiguiente todos los órganos y tejidos del cuerpo. Un aparato digestivo enfermo provoca los siguientes problemas: mala digestión, gases, piel áspera e irritaciones cutáneas, mal olor corporal, mala eliminación o estreñimiento, estómago pronunciado o inflamado, fujas respiratorias, dolor en la zona baja de la espalda, y otros problemas de orden crónico.

### Síntomas de un Estómago Enfermo



- Gases
- Fatiga respiratoria
- Mala digestión
- Mal olor corporal
- Estómago pronunciado o inflamado

Usted puede tener más de 7 libras de materia fecal y desperdicios tóxicos de comidas no digeridas en sus intestinos.

Estreñimiento y mala eliminación

Una buena eliminación diaria reduce de peso, mejora su salud y lo llena de vitalidad.

Una función correcta del intestino permitirá una normal limpieza de las mucosidades y evacuación de desperdicios de las comidas no digeridas que afectan de muchas formas a su organismo sin que usted se de cuenta. Los males más comunes provocados por la auto-intoxicación que hoy usted sufre desaparecerán con el uso del suplemento nutricional COLON CLEANSER. Gracias a su alto contenido de fibras naturales y hierbas le permitirá que mejore su digestión, aumente su energía, se sienta más ligero, rejuvenezca su piel, elimine la pesadez del cuerpo, el agotamiento y evacúe el exceso de grasas de su organismo.

212 610 1901 - HOKUS: Av. Caracas #70-54 Tel: 217 3015  
 NUTRICION NATURAL: Carrero 7ma. #12-66 Tel: 235 3693 - CHAMPINOR: Carrero Bc. #16-36

**NO ACEPTE IMITACIONES - UN PRODUCTO GARANTIZADO**

## 11.9 Appendix 9 Codes and definitions: focus groups.

### **(1 1) /eating/definition**

Definition: all categories defining healthy eating.

### **(1 1 1) /eating/definition/vegetarian**

Definition: Healthy eating is understood in terms of a] fruits and vegetables consumption b] avoidance of meat.

### **(1 1 1 1) /eating/definition/vegetarian/fruits and veg**

Definition: The definition specifies code 1 1 1 as fruits and vegetables consumption.

### **(1 1 1 2) /eating/definition/vegetarian/avoid meat**

Definition: The definition specifies 1 1 1 as avoidance of meat.

### **(1 1 2) /eating/definition/civilising**

Definition: Healthy eating is understood as a modern practice; it indicates progress.

### **(1 1 3) /eating/definition/pleasant**

Definition: Healthy eating is understood as enjoyment; healthy eating is to eat what one likes. This is strongly linked to psychological effects but may have negative consequences for physical health.

### **(1 1 3 1) /eating/definition/pleasant/psychological**

Definition: Specification of the psychological effects of healthy eating when healthy eating is enjoyed.

### **(1 1 3 2) /eating/definition/pleasant/negative aspects**

Definition: Specification of the negative aspects of healthy eating for physical health, when healthy eating is enjoyed.

### **(1 1 4) /eating/definition/dieting**

Definition: HE is defined as dieting with the specific objective of losing weight.

### **(1 1 4 1) /eating/definition/dieting/slim-female**

Definition: Dieting is associated with being slim and female.

### **(1 1 4 2) /eating/definition/dieting/slim-youth**

Definition: Dieting is associated with being slim and youth.

### **(1 1 5) /eating/definition/not harmful**

Definition: Any edible material could be considered HE as long as does not cause any particular problem; it does not need to be beneficial for health.

### **(1 1 6) /eating/definition/medical advice**

Definition: HE is linked to medical prescriptions.

### **(1 1 6 1) /eating/definition/medical advice/MD questioned**

Definition: The medical prescription is questioned.



**(1 1 7) /eating/definition/restricted**

Definition: Healthy eating is seen as a constrained eating, basically due to a] illness and b] age.

**(1 1 7 1) /eating/definition/restricted/illness**

Definition: Specification of code 1 1 7 in terms of illness.

**(1 1 7 2) /eating/definition/restricted/age**

Definition: Specification of code 1 1 7 in terms of age.

**(1 1 8) /eating/definition/beneficial**

Definition: Healthy eating is portrayed as the eating that is beneficial for health.

**(1 1 9) /eating/definition/balanced**

Definition: Healthy eating is portrayed as balanced eating in terms of a] composition, b] moderation, c] liquids (water) and d]fibre

**(1 1 10) /eating/definition/lifestyle**

Definition: The concept of healthy eating is linked to other areas of life beyond food intake.

**(1 1 10 1) /eating/definition/lifestyle/exercise**

Definition: Exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle.

**(1 1 10 2) /eating/definition/lifestyle/relaxed**

Definition: Relaxation as part of a healthy lifestyle.

**(1 1 10 3) /eating/definition/lifestyle/kosher**

Definition: Kosher food as part of a healthy lifestyle.

**(1 1 11) /eating/definition/new concept**

Definition: The concept of healthy eating is associated to modern life, social transformations, and their consequences.

**(1 1 11 1) /eating/definition/new concept/social transition**

Definition: The concept of healthy eating is product of social transformations

**(1 1 11 2) /eating/definition/new concept/epidemiology**

Definition: Epidemiological transitions, risk factors, risk perception

**(1 1 12) /eating/definition/natural**

Definition: Healthy eating is defined as free from affectations and from any kind of artificial treatment.

**(1 1 13) /eating/definition/obliged**

Definition: Healthy eating is an imposition and it can be maintained through self-discipline.

**(1 1 14) /eating/definition/non-existent**

Definition: Healthy eating does not exist because all foods are contaminated.

**(1 1 15) /eating/definition/home made**

Definition: Healthy eating is the consumption of food prepared at home and opposed to street food, which is unhealthy.

**(1 1 16) /eating/definition/unpleasant**

Definition: Healthy eating is displeasing and distasteful.

**(1 1 17) /eating/definition/individual**

Definition: Healthy eating is relative as everyone has his own needs, so it depends on each person.

**(1 2) /eating/practices**

Definition: All references to actions, group and collective, in the realm of eating.

**(1 2 1) /eating/practices/past practices**

Definition: References to practices carried out in past times; they are referred to as '*antes*'.

**(1 2 2) /eating/practices/present practices**

Definition: Current practices referred to as '*ahora*'.

**(1 2 2 1) /eating/practices/present practices/habits**

Definition: Present practices are described in terms of habits.

**(1 2 2 1 1) /eating/practices/present practices/habits/carnivorous**

Definition: Habits are specified in terms of a high consumption of meat.

**(1 2 2 1 2) /eating/practices/present practices/habits/attenuating**

Definition: Factors attenuating the unhealthy character of habits.

**(1 2 2 1 2 1) /eating/practices/present practices/habits/attenuating/moderation**

Definition: Moderation as an attenuating factor.

**(1 2 2 1 2 2) /eating/practices/present practices/habits/attenuating/low**

Definition: Content as an attenuating factor.

**(1 2 2 1 2 3) /eating/practices/present practices/habits/attenuating/white and red meat**

Definition: White meat as an attenuating factor.

**(1 2 2 1 2 4) /eating/practices/present practices/habits/attenuating/customs**

Definition: Cultural tradition as an attenuating factor.

**(1 2 2 1 3) /eating/practices/present practices/habits/junk**

Definition: Present practices are characterised in terms of junk food.

**(1 2 2 1 4) /eating/practices/present practices/habits/starchy**

Definition: Present practices are characterised as rich in starchy staples.

**(1 2 2 1 5) /eating/practices/present practices/habits/tanking**

Definition: Under present practices, eating is characterised as tanking.

**(1 2 2 1 6) /eating/practices/present practices/habits/healthy**

Definition: Under present practices, habits are considered to be healthy.

**(1 2 2 1 7) /eating/practices/present practices/habits/advertising**

Definition: Advertising is perceived as playing an essential role in the conformation of dietary habits.

**(1 2 2 1 8) /eating/practices/present practices/habits/social pressure**

Definition: Social pressure is considered important in keeping dietary habits.

**(1 2 2 2) /eating/practices/present practices/  
chemicals**

Definition: The affectation of a product considered natural by physical, biological, or chemical means.

**(1 2 2 2 1) /eating/practices/present practices/  
chemicals/contamination**

Definition: Contamination is seen as the consequence of the use of chemicals.

**(1 2 2 2 2) /eating/practices/present practices/  
chemicals/alteration**

Definition: Alteration is seen as the consequence of the use of chemicals.

**(1 2 2 2 3) /eating/practices/present practices/  
chemicals/positive aspects**

Definition: Positive aspects related to the use of chemicals.

**(1 2 2 3) /eating/practices/present practices/  
environment**

Definition: References to the relationships between food production, eating practices, and the environment.

**(1 2 2 4) /eating/practices/present practices/science**

Definition: References to the role of modern science in eating practices.

**(1 2 2 5) /eating/practices/present practices/rational and irrational**

Definition: References to the relationship between information and practice, either consistent or inconsistent.

**(1 3) /eating/barriers**

Definition: Factors preventing the adoption of healthier practices.

**(1 3 1) /eating/barriers/habits**

Definition: Local customs and culinary traditions prevent the adoption of healthier practices.

**(1 3 2) /eating/barriers/opportunities**

Definition: Factors that prevent the purchase, access, or preparation of healthy foods related to economic aspects.

**(1 3 2 1) /eating/barriers/opportunities/cost**

Definition: The opportunity is viewed in terms of cost.

**(1 3 2 1 1) /eating/barriers/opportunities/cost/distinction**

Definition: A link is established between cost and distinction.

**(1 3 2 2) /eating/barriers/opportunities/access**

Definition: The opportunity is viewed in terms of access.

**(1 3 2 3) /eating/barriers/opportunities/convenience**

Definition: The opportunity is viewed in terms of time available.

**(1 3 2 3 1) /eating/barriers/opportunities/convenience/rich**

Definition: Convenience food is associated with the upper class.

**(1 3 3) /eating/barriers/skills**

Definition: Those opportunities specifically related to education, information, training, and know-how.

**(1 3 3 1) /eating/barriers/skills/education**

Definition: Formal and informal education, including parenting.

**(1 3 3 2) /eating/barriers/skills/information**

Definition: News and knowledge acquired specifically in relation to the preparation and cooking of foods,

**(1 3 3 2 1) /eating/barriers/skills/information/men living alone**

Definition: Lack of knowledge among men about cooking.

**(1 3 4) /eating/barriers/taste**

Definition: References to taste as a barrier for healthy eating.

**(1 4) /eating/recommendations**

Definition: Suggestions and advice on how to promote healthy eating.

**(1 4 1) /eating/recommendations/information**

Definition: Information and access to knowledge but not as part of a continuous process.

**(1 4 2) /eating/recommendations/professional counselling**

Definition: References to advice given by a health professional, usually a nutritionist.

**(1 4 3) /eating/recommendations/education**

Definition: Formal and informal education as part of process, including not only the information but also the appropriation of practices.

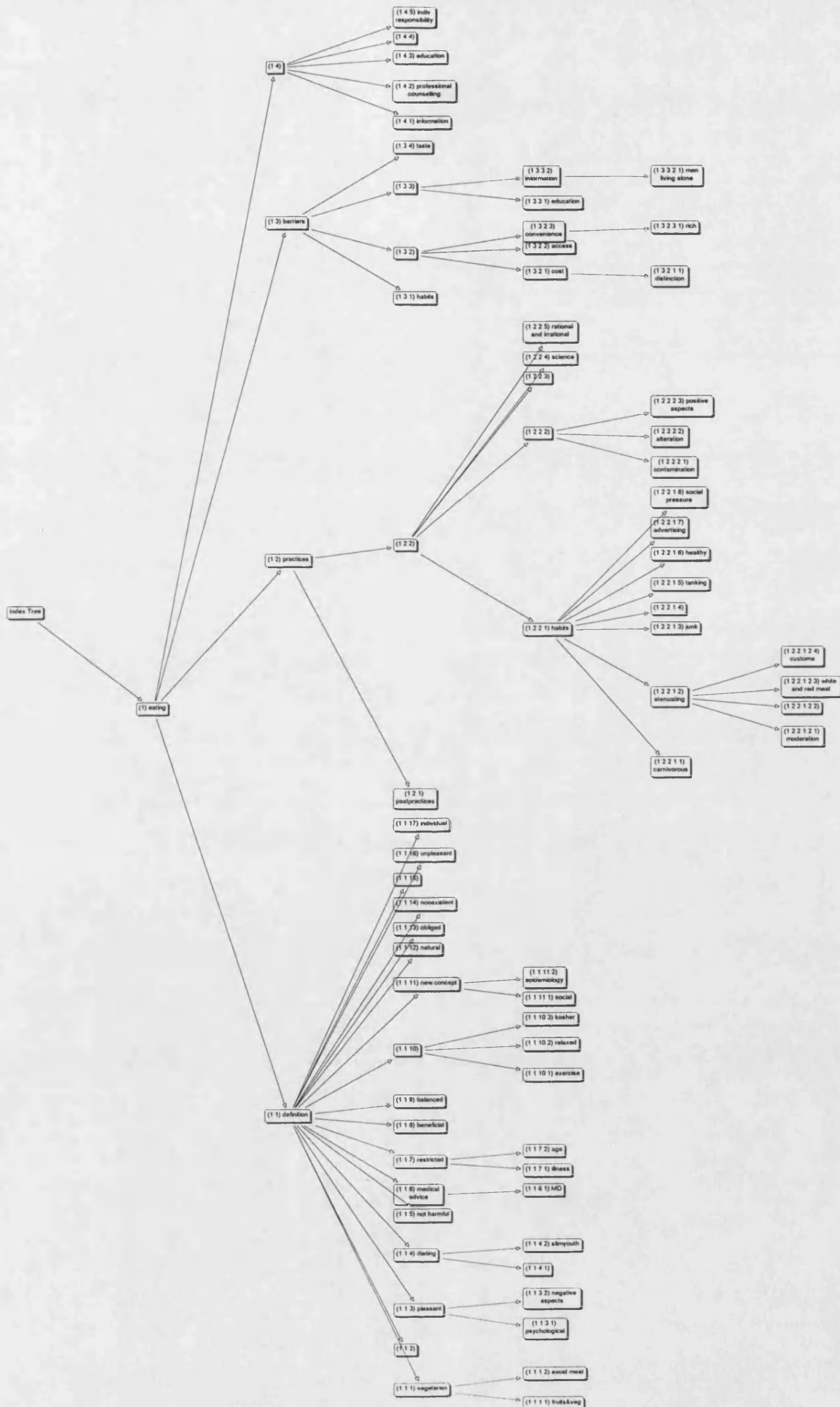
**(1 4 4) /eating/recommendations/marketing**

Definition: Use of marketing strategies and marketing techniques to market healthy eating.

**(1 4 5) /eating/recommendations/individual responsibility**

Definition: Emphasis on the individual as responsible for adopting healthier practices.

# Appendix 10 Index system focus groups



Tree display

### 11.11 Appendix 11 Focus groups: definition of healthy eating by group and gender

Definition	Rural non professionals		Rural professionals		Urban non professionals		Urban professionals		Rural professionals living urban	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
vegetarian	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
civilising		X								
pleasant	X			X					X	
dieting		X						X	X	X
not harmful	X	X								
medical advice	X					X	X	X	X	X
restricted	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X
beneficial			X					X		X
balanced			X		X	X	X	X	X	X
lifestyle							X	X		
new concept							X	X	X	X
natural	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
obliged			X					X		
non existent										X
home-made				X	X	X			X	
unpleasant							X	X		X
individual	X		X	X			X	X	X	

## 11.12 Appendix 12 Questionnaire of free association.

### Time To Eat

The topic of healthy eating is one that is of concern to most of us: it features in the media frequently in terms of diets, recipes, food and health, restaurants, etc.

I am conducting some research on people's eating habits and preferences and would be very grateful if you could spare a few minutes to complete this little questionnaire.

When you think about healthy eating, what words, images or phrases come into your mind? Just write down whatever associations you think of.

#### healthy eating

-----  
 -----  
 -----  
 -----  
 -----  
 -----  
 -----  
 -----  
 -----  
 -----

After completing the list, please fill in the following information by circling the answer or writing where appropriate. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Sex: 1.Male 2.Female

Age:

Education: 1.Primary 2.Secondary 3.University

Occupation:

### 11.13 Appendix 13 Questionnaire for verification of centrality (version for rural non-professionals)

#### Time to Eat

Healthy eating is a topic of concern to most of us. People think about healthy eating in terms of different words and images. When we hear of healthy eating, we immediately think on something. I am conducting some research on people's eating habits and preferences and would be very grateful if you could spare me a few minutes to complete this questionnaire.

The questionnaire consists of three parts. Please, read the instructions carefully.

Once you complete both tasks, please fill in some basic information such as age and profession. This questionnaire is completely anonymous and therefore your name and address are not necessary. Thank you very much for your collaboration.

#### Part One

In this first part, you will find a list of words people usually associate with **healthy eating**. Please read each word carefully and decide how important you consider the word for **healthy eating** by scoring it in a scale from 1 to 5. 1 means that the word is not important and 5 means that the word is very important. A high score means that the word is very important, in your opinion, for **healthy eating**. A low score means that the word is not important, in your opinion, for **healthy eating**.

Example: Let us suppose that you consider a word as very important for healthy eating. Then you must circle the number 5. If you consider that another word is slightly important for healthy eating, you must circle number 2.

Now is your turn. Below each word, you will find a scale. Score every word from 1 to 5 according to the importance you think each word has for healthy eating.

#### Eggs

1	2	3	4	5
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

#### Vegetables

1	2	3	4	5
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

#### Rice

1	2	3	4	5
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

#### Salads

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important



at all

### Cereals

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

### Fruits

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

### Meat

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

### Juices

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

### Tranquillity

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

### Fat free

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

### Fish

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

### At regular times

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

### Chicken

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

### Light

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

### Low fat

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

**Clean**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

**Tasty**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

**Dairy products**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

**Delicious**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

**Nice**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Not important at all	slightly important	indifferent	important	Very important

## Part Two

In this part, you are going to find the same list of words. Please, group them in groups between two and five words. The groups must include the words that you think are related. Below each group, write a title for each one of the groups or state the reason you had to make the grouping.

Here you have the words:

eggs  
fat free  
tranquillity  
juices  
rice  
low fat  
cereals  
delicious  
meat  
at regular times

vegetables  
salads  
fruits  
light  
clean  
dairy products  
chicken  
fish  
tasty  
nice

Group 1

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Title \_\_\_\_\_

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Group 2

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Title \_\_\_\_\_

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Group 3

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Title \_\_\_\_\_

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Group 4

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Title \_\_\_\_\_

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### Part Three

In this final part, you are going to find a number of questions. You must answer Yes, No, or I don't know, for each one of the words. Circle the answer you consider as the most appropriate.

Can we surely say that healthy eating is...

Eating in the countryside	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Eating vegetables	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Drinking juices	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Eating salads	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Eating meat	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Eating fruits	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Eating fish	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Eating chicken	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Eating cereals	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Eating in tranquillity	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Eating dairy products	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Eating at regular times	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Eating low fat	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Eating pulses	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know
Eating low in salt	1.Yes	2.No	3.Don't Know

After completing the list, please fill in the following information by circling the answer or writing where appropriate. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Sex: 1.Male 2.Female

Age:

Education: 1.Primary 2.Secondary 3.University

Occupation:

### 11.14 Appendix 14 Criteria for Scoring: Categorisation Task

**00 NA:** The categorisation is unsuccessful, either because the conceptual category employed is clearly wrong (it does not relate to a property of the elements), or because the subject lists more than one of the elements presented (e.g. fruits and juices because juices are made from fruits). It includes also all type of comments, such as "I love it!".

**01 Concrete:** The conceptual category employed to group the elements refers to concrete object (e.g. breakfast), or the subject employs one of the elements listed to complete the categorisation task (i.e. eggs, vegetables, fat-free, salads, tranquillity, fruits, juices, light, rice, clean, low fat, dairy products, cereals, chicken, delicious, fish, meat, tasty, at regular times, nice). Aesthetic categories, such as "provocative", are included in this class.

**02 Semi-concrete:** An attempt to group under an abstract concept is made but the subject cannot make a proper conceptualisation. This class includes all dietary prescriptions and recommendations.

**03 Abstract:** The individual employs a new conceptual category, or uses conceptual objects to make a proper categorisation (e.g. proteins, health, balance). He or she is also able to get out of the immediate context of the list and to re-consider the elements listed under a new conceptual category (e.g. clothes make the man).