

## **'Savoir Fare': Are cooking skills a new morality?**

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*There has been a recent surge of interest in cooking skills in a diverse range of fields, such as health, education and public policy. There appears to be an assumption that cooking skills are in decline and that this is having an adverse impact on individual health and well-being, and family wholesomeness. The problematisation of cooking skills is not new, and can be seen in a number of historical developments that have specified particular pedagogies about food and eating. The purpose of this paper is to examine pedagogies on cooking skills and the importance accorded them. The paper draws on Foucault's work on governmentality. By using examples from the USA, UK and Australia, the paper demonstrates the ways that authoritative discourses on the know how and the know what about*

*food and cooking – called here ‘savoir fare’ – are developed and promulgated. These discourses, and the moral panics in which they are embedded, require individuals to make choices about what to cook and how to cook, and in doing so establish moral pedagogies concerning good and bad cooking. The development of food literacy programmes, which see cooking skills as life skills, further extends the obligations to ‘cook properly’ to wider populations. The emphasis on cooking knowledge and skills has ushered in new forms of government, firstly, through a relationship between expertise and politics which is readily visible through the authority that underpins the need to develop skills in food provisioning and preparation; secondly, through a new pluralisation of ‘social’ technologies which invites a range of private-public interest through, for example, television cooking programmes featuring cooking skills, albeit it set in a particular milieu of entertainment; and lastly, through a new specification of the subject can be seen in the formation of a choosing subject, one which has to problematise food choice in relation to expert advice and guidance. A governmentality focus shows that as discourses develop about what is the correct level of ‘savoir fare’, new discursive subject positions are opened up. Armed with the understanding of what is considered expert-endorsed acceptable food knowledge, subjects judge themselves through self-surveillance. The result is a powerful food and family morality that is both disciplined and disciplinary.*

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## **Introduction**

In his book, *The omnivore’s dilemma*, Michael Pollan (2007) begins by asking how was it that, almost overnight, the American idea of eating ‘healthily’ was revolutionised? Referring to newspaper stories about the role of high protein, low carbohydrate diets to promote weight loss, Pollan describes how this idea moved rapidly through the US food system, garnering support from experts and industry alike,

creating new markets for so-called 'low carb' foods, increasing sales of books based on Dr Atkin's-style high protein diets. The process also saw a rapid decline in the status of so-called tradition staple foods, like bread, potatoes and pasta, which were now deemed detrimental to health.

Pollan believes that this development was only possible because a culture, like that of the US, has no food tradition of its own. In other words, when there are no longstanding rules and rituals about what to eat and when to eat it, people's diets are at the whim of whatever popular discourse is served up whether this be from science, commerce or even journalistic wisdom. In the Australian context, Symons makes the same point when he describes Australian food culture as being industrial cuisine and having "a history without peasants" (Symons, 1982:10).

Pollan's point is that 'deep' food cultures – for example, those of France and Italy, which have been developed over a long period of time – are resilient to change, or at least change slowly, such is the case of the so-called 'Mediterranean diet'. This resilience to change comes from a number of sources, including strong anchoring in the ecological links about what foods can be grown and when, and how foods are transformed for human consumption using appropriate food processing methods. Embedded in 'deep' food culinary wisdom is knowledge not just about what to eat, but also how to find food, prepare it to create a dish and therefore make a meal. Thus the provisioning of food – food procurement, processing and cooking - is at the very centre of food cultures, and many cuisines give pride of place to the longevity of traditional recipes and cooking techniques as an indication of not only the integrity of food and eating patterns, but of the culture itself. At the heart of these processes are skills in cooking. The belief that cooking skills are passed down from one generation to the next supports a confidence in particular social and cultural structures which see the domestic sphere as central.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the salience of cooking skills and the importance accorded them. It will argue that the centrality given to cooking becomes most visible when cooking skills are thought to be declining, or found wanting, limited or inadequate. As will be shown, a concern for cooking skills in many western cultures often emerges as a 'moral panic' at times when questions are raised about basic human skills, and even survival itself. Part of this panic speaks to a belief that without a tradition of cooking family harmony is at risk and family life is precarious.

The paper begins by demonstrating some examples of where in recent history, public sentiment has reacted to the idea that cooking skills, especially those that abide by particular standards, have declined. It then goes on to examine recent cases where cooking skills have been addressed in public policy. This examination is important in view of the current enthusiasm and uncritical acceptance of cooking skills in health and education sectors.

Theoretically, the paper draws on the work of Michel Foucault, especially the ideas related to governmentality (Foucault, 1991). By governmentality, Foucault refers to the emergence of a concern for the governing of a complex of 'men and things'. By 'men and things', Foucault is referring to individual and collective wealth, resources, customs and habits, as well as the consequences of drought, famine and other calamities. In other words, governmentality has a major concern with populations, a role we now attribute to the state. Indeed, Foucault's point is that governmentality was in fact an art around which crystallised the organising technologies and concepts of the modern state. Within governmentality there developed a range of techniques for knowing the population, and managing it through that knowledge. So statistical surveys, demography, medicine, and discourses on sanity and reason were deployed in order to take care of the population's health and welfare. The knowledge arising from these new disciplines are what Foucault describes as 'technologies of

power'. They demarcate the necessary boundaries of understanding, **endorsing particular certainties and dispelling others. In so doing they create what Foucault calls 'regimes of truth'**.

However, governmentality does not only mean the government of others; it also means the government of oneself. In other words, individuals come to know themselves through discipline and training that are required by appreciation of particular forms of knowledge acting as discourse. These 'technologies of the self', constitute the modern subject as one who knows him or herself; the self-reflective, self-regulating individual. The appropriate forms of 'technologies of the self' made available during the emergence of governmentality was that administered by the Christian church. According to Hunter (1994: 37), what happened was that the state inherited the moral **training of the church because of "the cultural scarcity of pedagogical relationships and disciplines"**. In other words, the state adopted and promoted Christian practices of the self because there was a rarity of pedagogical models available at the time. Foucault's point, and it is one amplified by Mitchell (1994) and Hunter (1994), is that the new form of political technology ushered in by governmentality comprised two adjacent but autonomous forms of 'technologies for living'. These were "the government of the state, and the Christian (soon to be humanist) spiritual perfection of the self" (Hunter, 1994: 42). The practices of 'spiritual' or ethical perfection multiplied and spread outside of the ecclesiastical institution and became available in many modern institutions, the family, the school and the clinic where they were practised in terms of the ethical comportment of individuals (Foucault, 1982). In other words, the technologies of the self, which constitute the modern subject, were appropriated from practices of the formation of the Christian soul - practices such as self-observation, self-examination, confession, and self-renunciation (Petersen, 2003).

It is within this set of possibilities offered by governmentality that we can see the emergence of a new subject: the food choosing subject - **one who needs to acquire particular cooking knowledges and skills to choose one path over another.** As we shall see discourses generated through nutrition and home management pedagogies produced technologies of power prescribing what is to be practiced, how and when. The term ‘power’ is not used here to describe some form of oppression or domination. It is used to denote a more positive property; one that provides the necessary rationale to achieve positive ends prescribed and endorsed by expert understanding. According to Rose (1990) expert understanding infuses and shapes the personal investments of individuals, in the ways that they form, regulate and evaluate their lives, actions and goals. However, in order to “form, regulate and evaluate their lives, actions and goals” individuals need to actively apply themselves as self-reflexive subjects with respect to expert understandings. That is to say, they need to subject themselves to its authority, its credibility and its integrity. As we shall see, the imperative of knowing how to prepare and cook food has been problematised at various stages in a number of western cultures, providing an opportunity for pedagogical advice and correction on **cooking.**

### **What’s (not) cooking?**

The recent interest in cooking skills by a number of scholars have raised questions about the exact nature of cooking. While there is some agreement about the fact that cooking involves the transformation of the state of food – for example, from raw to cooked – numerous other possibilities present themselves. Does reheating amount to cooking? Does putting together a meal from pre-prepared ingredients count as ‘real’ cooking? Or is this merely assembling? These questions are not of major concern for this paper, but point to the fact that cooking and the skills required to complete cooking tasks are currently being problematised. This problematisation is usually

undertaken by experts who privilege cooking from scratch – that is from basic or raw ingredients – as the gold standard, especially with respect to fostering improvements in eating behaviours and ultimately diet quality (Huntley, 2008:97).

This problematisation can be seen in a number of historical developments that have involved a reconsideration of the quality of food eaten by individuals and communities. Some of the earliest examples of an almost evangelistic 19th Century movement promoting the need to improve cooking skills can be found in the work of Wilbur Atwater in the USA (Coveney, 2006:61). Atwater is regarded to be the founding father of nutritional science. **Building upon the popularity of newly arising facts about nutritional food components, especially energy and protein, Atwater's work supported community crusades to spread new knowledge about food and cooking to households and communities (Crotty, 1995:16).** Community-based movements rallied to take this knowledge of cooking to towns and cities across the USA. With later government involvement, the new knowledge was introduced into the school curriculum, becoming part of US national domestic science initiatives (Berlage, 1998). The pedagogical priority of domestic science also became embedded in the school curriculum in the UK (Mennell, Murcott, and van Otterloo, 1993:89) and Australia (Reiger, 1986:57).

Movements in the UK and Australia were given particular impetus with the finding from surveys that, by the standards of the new nutrition discourses, populations were often poorly fed (Coveney, 2006:63). Moreover, the monitoring and surveillance of school children's health (New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, 1908) and the examination of physique of army recruits (Winter, 1980) – all of which were believed to be less than satisfactory – gave strength to the importance of spreading new knowledge of cooking.

A number of publications sprang up to provide knowledge of cooking with nutrition principles in mind. In the USA a monthly

magazine, *Century Illustrated*, provided advice about what to eat and how to prepare it. At the time, nutrition principles concerned only the requirements for so-called macronutrients, protein, fat and carbohydrate. By relating nutrient intake to nutrient need, Atwater was able to estimate the wisdom of family food purchases. He related his findings to calculations of spending power and household budgeting. Thus Atwater was able to calculate nutritious and economical menus for families, which were published for popular audiences (Crotty, 1995:18). Atwater regarded fruits and ‘water rich’ green vegetables as unnecessarily extravagant purchases since at the time there was a limited understanding of the need for vitamins and minerals (Coveney, 2006:61).

Atwater was very outspoken about the importance of learning the correct ‘domestic pecuniary economy’ for preparing and eating food, saying:

The true Anti-poverty Society is the Society of ‘Toil, Thrift and Temperance’. One of the articles of its constitution demands that the principles of intelligent economy shall be learned by patient study and followed in daily life. Of the many worthy ways in which the charity we shall call Christian is being exercised, none seems to me more worthy of appellation than the movement in industrial education of which teaching the daughters of working-people how to do housework and how to select food and cook it forms a part. (Atwater, 1888:445).

In the same edition, Atwater strengthens his stand by pointing out “If Christianity is to defend society against socialism must it not make such homely, non-theological teachings as these part of its gospel?” (Atwater, 1888:445). In other words, should not the home, the hearth, and even the stove be at the very centre of Christian pedagogy?

An important spin-off from Atwater’s work was the development of the field of domestic science, later known as home economics. According to Rossiter (1980) American cities at the end of the



nineteenth century, like many in Europe, had major public health problems, which accounted for a large percentage of mortality and morbidity. Half of all deaths were children. The need for families to be taught better hygiene and nutrition appeared to be self-evident. Thus began a training in science for women who, up to that time had been prevented from doing scientific research, and domestic science began as a tertiary degree. Training programmes taught topics such as cookery, nutrition, hygiene and mothercraft, the pre-requisites for which were often sciences like chemistry, bacteriology and psychology. Crotty (1995:23) shows how in Australia, these ideas spawned a number of cooking and food preparation movements, such as the Australia Health Society which further popularised food and nutrition.

Interest in cooking and related skills also reached a peak during times of necessary thrift and frugality, not only based on household income but, in the case of World War Two, on national food security. In the UK in particular, large-scale government information campaigns were launched to remind the public about the need for basic cooking skills (Hammond, 1954). Many campaigns were full of information on wise use of ingredients - many of which were in limited supply - and, as part of this, a need to reduce food waste (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1994:454). A range of means was used to educate and provide necessary instructions for preparing what were often ingredients unfamiliar to British consumers, including a regular morning radio programme *The Kitchen Front* that would present information about cooking in a light-hearted fashion (Coddington, 2011:392)

The effects of restraint and rationing of ingredients like fat and sugar were in the end to be of benefit to the British public, even though the hardship of rations continued until the early 1950s. Indeed, it is now believed that the population in Britain was at its healthiest during these times. The transformation is regarded to be responsible for a policy turn around. Unlike Germany, the British government entered

the war years believing that the state had no role to play in changing people's eating habits. But by the end of 1945 it had changed its mind believing that government had a primary responsibility to change attitudes to food and enhance well-being (Coddington, 2011:385).

### **Cooking skills in decline**

During the latter post war years of the 1960s and 1970s, a national emphasis on cooking skills fell into decline. This was in part due to the increased credibility and availability of so-called 'convenience foods', which were rapidly becoming features in household diets as quick ways to serve up meals to families, and the increasing rise of commentaries which were critical of women's domestic roles (Attar, 1990; Shapiro, 2004).

It should be noted that the moralisation around women emerging from the kitchen to paid employment is not a recent phenomenon. Walton (1992) describes the increased availability of prepared food (in this case fish and chips) was well received by women but criticised by health professionals. The consumption of food prepared outside the home was read as poor mothering, and a breakdown in the process of policing of 'proper' families (Walton, 1992). The same moral panics can be seen today where the demise of cooking skills, and of family meals are linked with a rise in fast food and convenience food consumption, and a rise in childhood obesity. Indeed, the rise in obesity in children has been linked directly with cooking skills, or rather, lack thereof (Pidd, 2008).

In Australia the need to teach students about cooking skills was demoted during the 1960s and 1970s, evidenced by a decision in many states to stop the training of home economics teachers, who had until that time been the traditional custodians of the knowledge and teaching of food and cooking skills (Pendergast, Garvis and Kanasa, 2011). The positioning of home economics as feminine, practical and unpaid meant that it had been and continues to be

marginalised particularly in secondary school curricula where a strong focus is retained on the ‘science’. Even in the development of national curricula the practical art of cooking is noticeably absent (ACARA, 2011). These events are viewed as leading to a decline or deskilling in cooking skills and a move away from cooking from scratch (Begley and Gallegos, 2010). However, the prominence of a loss of cooking skills was highlighted in the launch of Australia’s National Food and Nutrition Policy (FNP) in 1992. The policy states ‘The role of many women as ‘gatekeepers’ of their family’s health requires special attention. Women in poverty...may need improved food skills to obtain good nutrition from foods which they can afford’ (Commonwealth Department of Health, Housing and Community Services, 1992:5). Thus we see direct reference to the need to improve cooking knowledge and skills by targeting of the ‘nutrition gatekeeper’. The prominence of the nutrition gatekeeper as the person, usually female who has primary responsibility or moral judgment for household food choices, originated from US research during the 1940s (Mead, 1943). It gained further attention in work undertaken by Murcott (1982) and Charles and Kerr (1988) who described the role of women in ensuring “good” food made it to the table. Women have continued to be the traditional targets in many FNPs since that time via interventions aimed at making mothers moral guardians of family food choices. However, as the quote above suggests, it is low-income groups who are considered most in need of tutelage where cooking skills are concerned. This arises from the observation that diet-related diseases are more common in low-income populations (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010), and by implication, are a result of a deficit in nutrition and cooking knowledge. Thus, from what has been said already, women, as gatekeepers become the primary focus for pedagogical interventions designed to improve cooking skills and thus the quality of family meals.

The purported decline in cooking skills is often conflated with another observation in many western cultures: the decline in the family meal. In popular discourse, this refers to the fewer occasions for families to eat together. A number of claims have been made about the role of family meals in the health and welfare of children, not least of which is the assertion that children from families that do not share meals are more likely to have unhealthy eating habits, more likely to smoke or drink, and more likely to take part in illegal activities, such as drug taking (CASA, 2011). The association of family meals and cooking skills is being complicated, however, by the use of convenience foods that facilitates the ‘doing’ of cooking to produce family meals (Beck, 2007), and the use of fast food eating occasions as family occasions (Brembeck, 2005). Whether family meals produced by convenience actually count as family-oriented events is a matter of debate, given the importance accorded to meals cooked from scratch (Begley and Gallegos, 2010).

A number of scholars have questioned the purported decline in family meals and the decline in cooking skills, mostly on the basis of poor data or exaggerated claims. Indeed recent Australian data points to the maintenance of a family meal ideology, albeit transitioning into a range of diverse forms (Gallegos et al 2011). However, an emphasis on increasing cooking skills continues as a major theme in many health promotion programmes. For example, in the Australian *Go for 2&5 fruit and vegetable* campaign the targeting of the main meal preparer and promotion of suitable recipes have been key elements in the initiative (Pollard, 2009). Also, the recent developments of *Measure up*, the Australian Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing’s campaign to increase healthy weight, emphasises the so-called ‘Country Pantry’, where facts sheets with cooking skills ideas are a central part of message. Cooking skills interventions are now also seen as the new practical modality for improving individual eating behaviours as stand-alone techniques coming under the remit of health agencies and welfare agencies as the focus on low income

families continues. Examples include Jamie Oliver's *Ministry of food* (Adams, 2012), Stephanie Alexander's *Kitchen garden* (Australian Federal Government, 2011) and Diabetes Australia's *Need for feed* (Diabetes Australia, 2011).

In summing up so far, cooking skills have been at the centre of a number of concerns – some would say ‘moral panics’ –not only about eating habits, but also by implication, the nurturing of family and family life. These concerns often arise during national priorities or crises. For example, Atwater's work on food values was used extensively by industrialists in the USA, who wanted to show that, contrary to claims for higher basic wages by trade unions, households were in fact being paid enough; the solution to poverty was the optimisation of household expenditure along nutritional guidelines that emanated from Atwater's research (Aronson, 1982). A similar case was made during court hearings in Australia during the debates in 1920 by unions and employers for a basic living wage (Reiger, 1986). Cooking skills were also highlighted during times of national crisis, for example during the world wars. While different in nature from the Atwater-inspired causes, a national obsession during times of conflict and the battle on the ‘home front’ gave emphasis to cooking from basics and avoiding waste, and everyone doing their bit. Coming to the present, it could be said that the new battle is the preservation of the environment – with a renewed focus on the home front, growing your own and reducing waste emerging as important techniques to lessen the impact of climate change (Coveney, 2011).

### **What is the problem?**

The work of Carol Bacchi can provide a useful framework to unpack the preoccupations that underpinned concerns about food and cooking during these times. Bacchi seeks to highlight the discourses that are embedded in the problematisation of social issues and essentially ask ‘what is the problem represented to be?’ (Bacchi,

1999). In doing so, Bacchi is not asking for a rendering of the *real* problem or the *truth* of the issue. Instead, she seeks to find out how the problem being addressed is positioned and how this positioning acts to garner public or political support. Bacchi's work draws on Foucault's understanding of the government of conduct, especially as it is addressed in the seminal work on governmentality (Foucault, 1991).

In relation to the priority given to cooking skills, we can notice a number of features. Central to the problematisation of common food practices both during the Atwater campaigns in the late 19th Century and later movements during the world wars is the belief that a certain kind of knowledge is deficient or entirely missing. That is to say, there is a lack of so-called 'savoir fare', used here to point to practical *know how* and *know what* about food and cooking. For Atwater and related educational movements which were seeking to increase people's understanding of nutrition, this was to some extent understandable; nutrition discourse itself was a new way of thinking about food, one predicated on the belief that what mattered most was not the flavour or the tradition of food, but basic nutritional constituents. Essentially, people were being asked to re-calibrate their palates so as to not appreciate foods for flavour or taste or pleasure, but to valorise food's nutritional value instead. Atwater is famous for noting that pleasure of eating is unimportant because even bad tasting food can be shown to be digestible, metabolisable and therefore of nutritional value to the body. Of course, unlike traditional cultural understandings of food and cooking which rely on flavour and taste to indicate quality, nutritional qualities of food - calories, proteins, carbohydrates etc. - are not immediately available to the senses. One cannot taste a calorie. Thus the role of the expert in this discourse is crucial. The expert provides the necessary knowledge to rationalise food by exploring and making visible its essential nutritional ingredients. This rationality leads, literally, to rationing: within a nutritional discourse,

**food is portioned out on the basis of calculated physiological needs** which have been carefully measured and quantified.

Atwater's work was entirely consistent with the priorities of his day. The need to understand the thermodynamics of a system, its energy flows, and mechanical advantages were part of the nineteenth century industrialisation of everyday life. Machines powered by steam were increasingly used as substitutes for human labour, and the calibration of expenditure of energy conversion was a requirement if cost/benefits were to be realised. Three areas of research were of importance: first, establish relationship between gas exchange and heat production; second, evaluate foods in relation to energy requirements and expenditure; and third, establish the causes of energy expenditure (Johnson, Ferrell and Jenkins, 2003)

Atwater's work was the first to show that the human physiological system, fuelled by food energy, obeys the same thermodynamic principles as the steam engine and the Spinning Jenny: energy is neither created nor destroyed but is converted from one form to another. In this case it was energy in food, released as energy for physical work. Atwater's projects were able to include research on protein, pioneered by Justus Von Liebig and other scientists in Germany, who were examining the composition of foods (Rossiter, 1975). Thus the creation of this new knowledge of populations, and its use in making feeding more efficient, was central to the problematisation of the ways in which people chose food at that time.

The focus on cooking skills in the UK and Australia during world wars also emphasised food and cooking pedagogy, but with had different focus. Here the importance was to remind households of the need to be frugal and thrifty. During the Second World War in particular, a UK propaganda campaign was waged by a Ministry of Food (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1994:448) and it emphasised cooking skills that 'made more with less'. Nutrition was featured as part of

this, as was waste. Indeed, reducing waste became a national priority with the creation of the UK Nutrition and Food Conservation Branch, Food Distribution Administration. The role of the Food Distribution Administration was to reduce waste in the food system and conduct public awareness campaigns through “...the press, radio, civic and women’s organizations, trade groups and other outlets. The object of these efforts is to save every savable bit of food” (Kling, 1943). A pedagogy developed to remind consumers that it was at the level of the household that waste saving was mostly possible and, with a strong reference to earlier Victorian values, it was noted that “In this time of need, the Nation may well again practice the prudence of its forebears” (Kling, 1943).

### **Cooking skills as governmentality**

The common feature that binds the examples given is the way in which the discourses being propagated constructs subjects who are now required to make choices. That is to say, the use of knowledge being generated is predicated on the individual choosing one path over another, with respect to the food they eat. And while this choice may be seen in the form of a freedom to choose, in fact it is a form of control that arises directly out of the problematisation of what, at an earlier time, did not require consideration or reflection. People mostly ate what had been part of their social milieu and endorsed by their social class.

The technologies of power, which is one armature of Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’, were generated through the development through Atwater’s work on nutritional discourses. These discourses not only prescribed what foods were regarded to be nutritious but the cooking skills needed to maximise health and wellbeing. The development of state funded programmes to support domestic economy movements in the USA, UK and Australia in



the early part of 20th Century promulgated the new knowledge as 'regimes of truth'.

However, as has been pointed out (Santich, 1995), nutrition discourses tend to produce a good/bad dichotomy, arising out of what is nutritionally good, (i.e., nutritionally sound) to eat, thus eating healthy foods tends to become a virtue, a better moral choice. Similarly, discourses around frugality and parsimony in food preparation tend to emphasis what is right, proper and correct in terms of efficiency and thrift. Conversely, within these discourses are inevitable notions of 'bad', 'profligate' or 'wasteful' or less morally worthy practices. The morality brought to bear on food and eating through the dichotomisation of good/bad has a long history in western culture. Nineteenth century nutritional proselytisers like Sylvester Graham and John Harvey Kellogg in the USA used the idea of correct eating habits as a platform for promoting a food morality: eating good food leads to good character. Even the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, used healthy food choice to support his ministry (Turner, 1992: 191). Thus the subjectifying effects of discourses on food perpetrated beliefs about morality and the self-worth of subjects: the 'good' or the 'bad' eater. And so the second armature of Foucault's 'governmentality', the technologies of the self, is realised in the self-reflection by individuals on what for them is good to eat, not only from a nutritional viewpoint but also from a moral perspective.

Within the present context which promotes the desirability of cooking skills, the moralisation of subjects continues with respect to good and bad cooking; good cooking is cooking at home from scratch and bad cooking is reconstituting/reheating and outsourcing the cooking 'work'. It should be of no surprise that the majority of government-sponsored cooking skills programmes are aimed at low income, socially disadvantaged populations who are required to improve

their knowledge of what is right and proper to eat. In Australia, food programmes like *Food cent\$* (Foley and Pollard, 1998) target low-income groups and furnish them with ideas about cooking on a budget and are commonly delivered by welfare organisations. In many ways these programmes rehearse those initially propagated more than 100 years ago by the Atwater movement. However, modern programmes also emphasise the idea that cooking skills and the resultant fare can create communality and thus bond family units together.

The fundamental necessity of cooking skills, and related tasks, have however turned towards a broader audience, supported by an understanding that cooking skills are, in fact, life skills (Lang and Caraher, 2001). The importance given to this understanding can be seen in programmes targeting young children (Burgess-Champoux, 2009). For example, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden programme in Australia is nationwide, supported by over 12.5 million dollars of public funding. According to the website, the aim of the programme is “The creation and care of a Kitchen Garden [which] teaches children about the natural world, about its beauty and how to care for it, how best to use the resources we have, and an appreciation for how easy it is to bring joy and wellbeing into one’s life through growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing fresh, seasonal produce” ([kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/](http://kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/)). The website points out that by taking part in the programme, children learn skills in gardening and cooking that will last them a lifetime.

In Australia there are also propositions to reintroduce home economics into the national school curriculum by positioning cooking skills as life skills (Home Economics Institute of Australia, 2010). Furthermore, a new discursive elaboration of cooking-as-lifeskills has developed with the arrival of ‘food literacy’, taken to mean “the capacity of an individual to obtain, interpret and understand basic food and nutrition information and services as well as the competence

to use that information and services in ways that are health enhancing” (Kolasa et al, 2001).

Thus the primacy accorded to cooking skills, once the province of the homemaker, or the ‘gatekeeper’, has now spread to include children and men (Szabo, 2011). The actual penetration of this more democratic rendering remains to be seen, however. Men and increasingly children still retain control over food preferences but women still undertake the bulk of the labour (Santich, 1995), even though the skills of cooking have supposedly become essential lifelong skills for all. Cooking skills have thus acquired a sense of morality, with them we become ethical subjects, with concern for our health and wellbeing; without them survival is precarious and life is risky. This is particularly true when low levels of skill in cooking and thus fewer home-cooked meals challenges the assumed loss of commensality, and shared family time. The consequences for the health and welfare of children, in particular, are thought to be dire.

Embedding the imperative of cooking skills within the discourse of health literacy provides a powerful lever for further pedagogical engagement with wider audiences. Now that cooking is seen as a ‘life skill’, it falls on a broad section of the population to acquire the necessary knowledge and associated competencies to provide the right and proper food. These pedagogies are not only needed to secure health, but also to maintain overall happiness. Thus good cooking becomes the ethical responsibility of all, just as the acquisition of good health – or as Crawford (1980) puts it, ‘healthism’ - has become the responsibility of each and all, not only to secure individual wellbeing, but also in order to secure a good society. Warin (2011) shows how for cooking this is played out in Jamie Oliver’s *Ministry of food* project, which, while seeking to empower individuals through the provision of cooking skills, essentially ‘responsibilise’ them within a

neoliberal discourse of model, and indeed moral, citizenship.

We can use the work of Rose (1996:54) to summarise the ways in which the emphasis on cooking knowledge and skills has ushered in new forms of government. Firstly, the relationship between expertise and politics is readily visible through the authority that underpins the need to develop skills in food provisioning and preparation. Experts have shown how low levels of cooking skills may lead to a reliance on pre-prepared foods which put at risk health and wellbeing and family time (Devine, 2002). Thus then need to create dishes and meals from basics, especially fresh ingredients, is now a requirement receiving strong support from the state and aligned groups. Secondly, a new pluralisation of 'social' technologies has opened up which invites a range of private-public interests. The proliferation of television cooking programmes demonstrates an intense public interest in cooking skills, albeit it set in a particular milieu of entertainment and even competition (de Solier, 2005). The partnership between broadcast industries and supermarkets creates new investment of private capital. While supermarket chains are no strangers to television channels, mostly through advertising and marketing, the opportunities through endorsement of foods from celebrity chefs opens up a new set of private sector possibilities. More broadly, state involvement in cooking skills can be seen in the investment in various programmes designed to improve diet. Televised cooking has privileged the masculinity of celebrity chefs over the domestic female construction of cooking (Swenson, 2009; Hollows, 2003). These are often manifested in the development of cookbooks and recipes that accompany campaigns that are aimed to improve diet. Often this requires the collaboration of government with private interests, for example, the fruit and vegetable or other food industry partner. Lastly, a new specification of the subject can be seen in the formation of a cooking subject, one that has to problematise food choice in relation to expert advice and guidance about what and how food is to be cooked. As we have seen, the cooking subject was once gender

specific. However, with the belief that knowledge of cooking is a now a life skill for all there is an obligation to broaden the scope of who is required to cook and under what circumstances.

A governmentality 'lens' shows that as discourses about what is the correct level of 'savoir faire', or food savvy, abound, new discursive subject positions are opened up. Thus while nutrition ushered in a food choosing subject, one that had to choose one food over another on the basis of nutritional calibration and calculation, the development of 'savoir faire' introduces another layer of subjectivity. That is to say, subjects who are food savvy not only know what is scientifically in food (nutrients, etc.), and properties, but also when and under what conditions food should be cooked. They are required to be food literate in every sense. Armed with the understanding of what is considered expert-endorsed acceptable food knowledge, both qualitatively and quantitatively, and what food is right for health and wellbeing, subjects judge themselves through self-surveillance (Warin, 2011). The result is a powerful food morality that is both disciplined and disciplinary.

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