

## « Supervising healthy eating, Swedish women fighting the gender barrier »

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Feeding the family is generally regarded as women's work, sometimes considered enjoyable and sometimes a hassle. It is also considered an act of caring, love and relation-building; constructing and maintaining the family as a reality and an ideal. The work of feeding the family is therefore generally regarded as intimately bound to identities as a woman, spouse and mother, leading to the trauma of the "empty nest" when children are leaving home. This contribution challenges these statements, using examples from an ongoing project of Swedish "baby-boomer" women born in the 1940's. The women taking part in the study all have academic degrees and have all held full time employments since their children's infancy. The results indicate that for these women cooking and the preparation of food for the family is not intertwined with their identities as women. There seems to be no natural relation between femininity and the preparation and cooking of meals. The women have generally accepted the main responsibility for feeding the family, but not as a devotional work of love on their own, but rather as supervisors of the children and the husband, who in many instances are the ones doing most part of the practical work, or at least an equal part. There is a huge amount of delegation going on. The joy of working together and of togetherness at work and around the dinner table is more prominent than sacrifice. Cooking is not an essential part of motherhood and femininity, but something that might be undertaken by any family member (although in most cases supervised by the mother). And many men like cooking too. The empty nest stage might involve some frustration, but most of all a new freedom to indulge in all kinds of food, freed from the constraints of supervising healthy eating and mealtimes. Now the culinary act is associated more fully with sensual pleasures, the joy of shopping, preparing and eating together. To summarize: For the baby-boomer women in this study, cooking and provisioning is not an essential part of female identity, but is seen as something that might be undertaken by any family member regardless of sex. The main roles in regard to food and the family for the women are the supervisor and the pedagogue.

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