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7	Situated food safety behavior
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19	Paper accepted in Appetite, May, 2020
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23 Abstract

Previous studies indicate that many consumers eat rare hamburgers and that information about microbiological hazards related to undercooked meat does not necessarily lead to changed behavior. With this study we aim to investigate whether consumers' willingness to eat hamburgers, both risky and safe, depends on the situation where they are confronted with the food.

A representative sample of 1046 Norwegian consumers participated in a web experiment. Participants were randomly divided into four groups. Each group was told to imagine a specific eating situation (at their friend's place, at home, at a restaurant abroad, at a domestic restaurant). Four pictures of hamburgers (rare, medium rare, medium, well-done) were presented in randomized order, and participants rated their intentions to eat each hamburger. Situated risk perception was measured as the stated likelihood of food poisoning from consuming hamburgers in eight different situations.

The results show that both risk perception and risk taking vary depending on the situation. In general, participants perceive their own home to be the safest place to consume a hamburger, but they are significantly more likely to consume an undercooked hamburger when at a friend's place. These findings indicate that situations play an important role for consumers' likelihood of eating unsafe food, and that risk taking does not always follow risk perception. That risk taking is elevated in situations that may have social consequences should be taken into consideration when developing food safety strategies.

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43 Key words: Perceived risk, situated risk, food behavior, hamburger risk.

44 **1. Introduction**

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46 Consumption of undercooked hamburgers contaminated with E.coli (Escherichia coli 47 O157:H7 and other shigatoxigenic E.coli, STEC) can result in severe illnesses, hospitalization and, 48 in worst case, death (Kiermeier, Jenson, Sumner, 2015; Kassenborg et al, 2004). Despite past 49 outbreaks with fatal outcome in both US and Europe (Omer, Alvarez-Ordonez, Prieto M, Skjerve, 50 Asehun, 2018; Alvseike; King et al., 2005), and widespread news coverage informing consumers 51 of the importance of heating their hamburgers to above 68°C to inactivate the bacteria, many 52 consumers still make and eat undercooked hamburgers (Røssvoll, Lavik, Ueland, Jacobsen, 53 Hagtvedt, Langsrud, 2013; Taylor, Holt, Mahon, Ayers, Norton, Gould, 2012; Olsen, Røssvoll, 54 Langsrud, Scholderer, 2014). Studies show that education and food safety information do not 55 always result in proper food handling behavior (Brennan, McCarthy, Ritson, 2007). To be able to 56 develop better prevention strategies, we need to understand the mechanisms that make some 57 consumers eat potentially hazardous foods.

58 Consumers behave differently in different situations. Already 40 years ago, Belk described 59 the situational effect on buying behavior (Belk, 1974; Belk, 1975). We know that consumption of 60 food not only depends on the product, but also on the person, the place and the time where the 61 product is to be consumed (Jaeger et al. 2011, Scholderer et al. 2013). What we do not know much 62 about, is if these situational factors also influence consumption of risky food. Are there situations 63 where people are more likely to consume products that might make them sick? One of the few 64 studies investigating this is Veflen, Scholderer, & Langsrud (2020), which found that both risk 65 perception and social norms influence risk taking.

66 There has been a considerable research interest in investigating people's perception of risk 67 under various choice domains, and perception of risk has been shown to be influenced by whether

68 the risk is voluntary, whether the distribution of risk and benefit is equitable, the extent to which 69 the risk is unknown, the degree of personal control, individual dread etc. (Slovic, 1987). One 70 seminal example of the *domain-specific* aspects of risk is the framing effect of prospect theory, 71 stating that people code the possible outcomes as gains and losses rather than as final states 72 (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979; 1981, 2000). Kahneman and Tversky argue that a person's 73 perception of financial options can be changed, even reversed, with changes of perspective. A 74 given change in a value may be viewed as a gain or a loss depending on the framing (Wang & 75 Johnston, 1995). Weber, Blais, Betz (2002) and Blais and Weber (2006) did also report, in their 76 investigation of five content domains (financial decisions, health/ safety, recreational, ethical, and 77 social decisions), that respondents' degree of risk taking was highly domain specific. People may 78 be risk averse in one domain and risk seeking in others.

Although previous studies have shown that consumers' food choices are influenced by context and that risk perception is domain specific, few studies have investigated how different situations influence consumers' decision to eat risky food. In this study, we want to investigate if consumers' inconsistency in preferences for risky food may have a deeper reason. We propose that different situations may change the social meaning of the problem and thereby influence consumers' decisions.

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86 1.1 Situated risk perception

Risk perception, how vulnerable to danger or harm people consider themselves to be, is typically defined as a function of two factors: perceived likelihood of experiencing the harm and perceived severity of the harm (Slovic, 1987). The first of these factors, the perceived likelihood of experiencing harm, may vary in different situations. A kitchen's perceived hygiene level and ability to prepare food, may influence the perceived risk of consuming the same product (Tiozzo et al 2017). The lower perceived quality of the kitchen, the higher perceived risk of consumption.
Accordingly, we hypothesis that the perceived risk of consuming a hamburger from a not so good
kitchen (e.g. a takeaway or petrol station) will be higher than the perceived risk of consuming the
same burger from a good kitchen (e.g. at a restaurant).

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97 H1: The perceived likelihood of food poisoning from consuming a hamburger is higher at a98 takeaway than at a restaurant.

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100 Another factor that may influence risk perception is familiarity. Since Zajonc (1968) 101 published his seminal work on "mere exposure", illustrating that "mere repeated exposure to a 102 stimulus object enhances his attitude toward it", many empirical studies have demonstrated that 103 people prefer the familiar to the unfamiliar. Familiarity seems to create warm feelings (Garcia-104 Marques & Mackie, 2000) and people often use affect as a heuristic in everyday judgment 105 (Schwarz, 1990). In relation to risk perception, Slovic (1987) shows that unknown risks, like DNA 106 technology and satellite crashes, are more dreaded by laypersons than known risks, like downhill 107 skiing and smoking. Since familiarity has been found also to influence consumers' evaluation of 108 restaurants' service quality (Patterson & Mattila, 2007), we propose that consumers will be biased 109 and perceive eating in a familiar setting to be less risky than eating in a more unfamiliar setting.

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111 H2: The perceived likelihood of food poisoning from consuming a hamburger is higher at a
112 restaurant than at home.

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114 1.2 Situated risk taking

115 According to numerous theories in social and health psychology, risk perception plays a 116 central role in determining behavior. In the health belief model (Rosenstock, 1974), behavior is a 117 trade-off of risk perception, motivation (defined as the perceived benefits minus the perceived 118 barriers of conducting the behavior) and volitional aspects (cues that prompt action). In protection 119 motivation theory (Rogers, 1983), perceived risk is traded off against the reward offered by the 120 behavior (this is labeled "threat appraisal"). Together with "coping appraisal" (defined as 121 motivational and volitional resources minus response cost) "threat appraisal" forms people's 122 protection motivation. In both these theories and in many extensions, perceived risk explains 123 behavior. The higher the perceived risk, the less likely the behavior. Some meta-analyses conclude 124 that risk perception is enough to trigger safer behavior (Brewer et al. 2007; Floyd, Prentice, Roger, 125 2000), while others claim the process is more complex. In their meta-analysis of experimental 126 studies of risk behavior, Sheeran, Harris and Epton (2014) found only a small main effect from risk 127 perception. However, risk perception had a stronger effect on behavior when it also triggered 128 emotions such as fear, worry, regret and guilt.

129 One reason that the findings for risk perception on behavior, differ in strength, may be that 130 most studies of risk taking investigate risk taking on an individual level. Both expected utility 131 theory (Van Neuman and Morgenstern, 1944) and prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky, 1978), 132 to mention two very influential theories, look at individual decision-making. In real life, risk taking 133 is usually made in a social context where other people's opinions may influence the decision 134 (Friedl, Pondorfer, and Schmidt, 2019). While risk perception may have a strong effect on behavior 135 when people make individual decisions, especially when these behaviors are easy to carry out, this 136 may not be the case in social situations. Not all risks and benefits related to food are health related. 137 Environmental sustainability, economic, cultural and social factors need also to be considered 138 (Rideout and Kosatsky, 2017). As for the social aspect, the fear of interpersonal rejection has been found to improve the effect of health communication. Emphasizing the social consequences of negative health outcomes, increases perceived vulnerability and affects both risk perception and behavioral intention (Murdock and Rajagopal, 2017). Feeling isolated and ostracized is one of the greatest sufferings in life and something people will go to great length to avoid. Individuals may accordingly perceive a behavior to contain a food safety risk, but choose to accept it due to social factors (Wachinger, Renn, Begg, and Kuhlicke, 2013).

145 Evolutionary psychology suggests that the decision between entering or not entering social 146 relationships has been so important to our ancestors' evolutionary success that natural selection has 147 designed domain specific cognitive architecture for how to behave in social settings (Johnson, 148 Myagkov, Orbell, 2013). The fear of a solitary life or to be expelled from your in-group is so 149 overwhelming that humans are biased towards entering social relationships regardless of the 150 possible losses from doing so. A review of the social facilitation of eating shows that people eat 151 more food in groups than when alone (Herman, 2015). This social facilitation effect has often been 152 explained by the fact that social meals have a longer duration than individual meals (Pliner, Bell, 153 Hirsch, and Kinchlab, 2006). Herman (2015) proposes that expectations and impression 154 management might be alternative explanations. In some situations it is a matter of common 155 courtesy to serve guests a lot of food, and for guests to eat what is offered. Studies have found that 156 it is not only the size of the group, but also whom the group consists of that matters. We eat more 157 with family and friends, than with strangers (Herman, Roth, & Polivy, 2003). This can be explained 158 by impression management. We become highly self-conscious when we eat with strangers, since 159 we know they will evaluate us. Such self-consciousness may suppress eating that might be 160 interpreted negatively (see Vartanian, Herman, & Polivy, 2007). These explanations are supported 161 by Veflen, Scholderer, & Langsrud (2020) who found that the pressure to eat disliked food, varied 162 across situations. The expected consequences of non-compliance and the average empathy participants felt with the imagined other were factors found to explain the pressure to comply withthe social norm in a particular situation were.

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166 Based on these findings, we propose that consumers will be more willing to eat risky food, 167 such as an undercooked hamburger, if it is offered by a friend than by a stranger. To turn down a 168 food offer may feel like declining a request for friendship, and may for some people be perceived 169 as riskier than a foodborne illness. In such a situation the fear of hurting your friend, which may 170 negatively affect your relationship, is weighted against the fear of food poisoning. We propose that 171 while risk taking will follow risk perception in a situation where avoiding the risk will have no social consequences (such as at home or at a restaurant), risk taking will diverge from risk 172 173 perception and be significantly elevated when avoiding the risk may have social consequences 174 (such as at a friend's place).

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176 *H3:* Both perception of the product and perception of the situation influence the intention to eat a177 hamburger.

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H4: Intention to consume a risky hamburger (Risk taking) follows perceived likelihood of food
poisoning (Risk perception) at home and at a restaurant, but increases and diverges from risk
perception at a friend's place.

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183 **2. Materials and methods**

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185 2.1 Participants186

A representative sample of 1046 Norwegian consumers was randomly selected from a consumer panel maintained by TNS Gallup, a professional market research company. The consumer panel consists of 49,000 people living in Norway (about 1% of the Norwegian population). A sample of respondents 18 years or older, with gender and age (average: 45 years) proportional to the population in Norway, was selected (Table 1). All respondents who completed the web survey were awarded 10 points from the market research company's own incentive program (TNS Gallup, 2012).

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195 *2.1 Stimuli*

Hamburgers were made from vacuum-packed ground meat and cooked to four different core temperatures of 55°C (rare), 65°C (medium rare), 73°C (medium well-done) and 80°C (well-done). Immediately after reaching the predefined core temperature, the hamburgers were sliced perpendicular across the center of the flat surface of the patty to reveal the internal color and arranged together with hamburger buns, salad and French fries. Pictures were taken of each of the four different hamburgers (Figure 1).

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204 2.3 Procedure
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We conducted an online experiment with a between sample design for situation. To measure situated risk taking, the participants were randomly divided into four groups and asked to imagine that they had ordered a hamburger in a specific situation (either at their friend's place (n=246), at home (n=266), at a domestic restaurant (n=269), or at a restaurant abroad (n=266). Confronted with a picture of all the four hamburgers (rare, medium rare, medium well-done, well-done) in a randomized order they were asked "What is the likelihood that you would eat this hamburger if served in this situation"?". They answered on a five-point scale with response categories "very
low", "low", "neither high nor low", "high" and "very high". A "do not know" alternative was also
included.

214 To measure situated risk perception, all respondents were asked to indicate their perceived 215 likelihood of being food poisoned by eating a hamburger under different situations (Take-away, 216 petrol station, catering, fast food chain, restaurant/café, garden party, friend's place and at home). 217 No information related to the hamburgers' core temperature was given. They answered on a five-218 point scale with response categories "very unlikely (1)", "unlikely (2)", "neither unlikely nor likely (3)", "likely (4)", "very likely" (5), or "do not know". Since data for perceived risk at a restaurant 219 220 abroad was not collected, we decided to conduct the comparative analysis of risk perception and 221 risk takings for the three specific situations where we had both risk perception and risk taking data 222 (at home, at a friend's place, at a restaurant).

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224 2.3 Statistical analysis

To test H1, H2 and H3 the data from the experiment were analyzed by means of a mixed model ANOVA, with *hamburger* (rare, medium rare, medium well-done, well-done) as a fixed effect within subjects factor, *situational context* (at their friend's place, at home, at a domestic restaurant, at a restaurant abroad) as a fixed effect between subjects factor, and *participant* as a random factor.

After reporting the mean results for the situated risk perception, the data from three of the four between sample groups in the experiment were analyzed by means of a mixed-model ANOVA, with dimension (risk perception, risk taking) as a within-subjects factor, situational context (at home, at a friend's place, at a restaurant) as a mixed within-between subjects factor (within subjects for the risk perception dimension, between subjects for the risk taking dimension), and participant as a random factor. This analysis was done to test H4. All analyses were conducted in SAS 9.3.

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237 3. Results238

239 In this study, we find that people perceive the likelihood of food poisoning from consuming a 240 hamburger to vary under different situations. As illustrated in Figure 2, the least squares mean 241 scores for perceived risk of consuming a takeaway hamburger is higher than when the hamburger 242 is from a restaurant (support for H1), and higher at a restaurant than at home (support for H2). We 243 also find significant differences both between the intention to eat the different hamburgers and 244 between intended consumption of a hamburger under different situations (support of H3), but no 245 interaction effect between these two factors. The parsimonious model tested explained 67% of the 246 variance in intention to eat a hamburger. From Figure 3 we can see that out of the four hamburgers, 247 the respondents are least likely to consume the rare hamburger, while the medium rare hamburger, 248 cooked to 65 °C core temperature and therefore still a risky hamburger, is the hamburger with the 249 highest likelihood of intended eating (p<0.001). We can also see that out of the four situations the 250 respondents are most likely to eat all hamburgers when offered at their friend's place, followed by 251 at home, at a domestic restaurant, and least likely when offered at a restaurant abroad (p<0.001). 252 No interaction effects between doneness and situation were found (p=0.4).

There was a significant main effect of situational context (see Table 3): risk perception and risk taking were generally lower in the situational context of participants' own homes than in the two social contexts of a friend's place or a restaurant (p<.001). The effect was qualified by a significant interaction between situational context and dimension (p<.001). As hypothesized in H4, a significant effect was only found in the situational context of a friend's place: here, risk perception and risk taking were significantly increased relative to participant's own homes, whereas in the context of a restaurant, risk perception was increased but risk taking was not (Figure 4).

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4.Discussion

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263 To improve our understanding of why some people consume potentially hazardous foods, we 264 investigated how both perception of the product and perception of the situation influence risk 265 perception and risk taking. We find that the likelihood of eating hamburgers varies with both the 266 products' doneness and the situation (Support for H3). The perceived likelihood of food poisoning 267 from consuming a hamburger also varies across situation. That the risk of consuming a hamburger 268 is perceived higher at a takeaway place than at a restaurant, and lowest at home, indicates that both 269 the perceived quality of a kitchen and familiarity of a place matters for the perception of a product's 270 safety (supports H1 and H2).

271 Our finding that consumers are more likely to eat a risky hamburger when this is offered 272 by a friend, indicates that the social context influences consumers' risk behavior. That the decision 273 to eat a hamburger is influenced by who offers it, is in line with previous research showing that 274 people eat more in a social situation (Herman, 2015), and when together with friends (Herman, 275 Roth, & Polivy, 2003). They even eat risky food in situations with a pressure to comply with the 276 social norm (Veflen, Scholderer, Langsrud, 2020). In this study, we find that social aspects of a 277 situation influences people's consumption of risky food. As an explanation we propose, based on 278 the findings from Veflen, Scholderer, & Langsrud (2020), that people consider the social risk of 279 hurting their friend, which may negatively affect the friendship, when deciding to eat an 280 undercooked hamburger or not. This is why consumers are less likely to eat a hamburger with the 281 same degree of doneness when they are at their own home compared to when they are at their

friend's place. That consumers are more likely to eat hamburgers, both rare and well-done, at a domestic restaurant than at a restaurant abroad, indicates that familiarity removes skepticism. The warm feeling, evoked by something familiar, bias consumers and make them more likely to consume risky food from a restaurant in their own country than from a restaurant in a less known country (Patterson & Mattila, 2007).

287 Our finding that situation has an effect on risk taking independent of risk perception, 288 supports our proposition that situational context influences the risk perception—risk taking 289 relationship. That the decision to eat an undercooked hamburger is influenced by where it is offered, is in line with previous research showing that situation specific social norms influence the 290 291 consumption of risky food (Veflen, Scholderer, & Langsrud, 2020). In some situations, the 292 anticipated social consequences become more salient than the food safety risk, and risk taking does 293 not follow risk perception. We observe that even though people perceive hamburgers offered at 294 their friend's place to be more risky than the hamburgers served at home (Figure 2, 3, 4), they are 295 still more likely to consume the hamburgers offered by their friend's. Accordingly, we find support 296 for our hypothesis (H4) that in the absence of social consequences, differences in risk taking follow 297 differences in risk perception, while risk taking diverges from risk perception and becomes 298 significantly elevated in situations that may have social consequences. These findings support the 299 idea proposed by Sjøberg (2000) that "risk perception is a reflection of the social context an 300 individual finds him- or herself in (p. 9)". But while Sjøberg (2000) claims it is risk perception that 301 is influenced by the social context, we find that it is risk taking that is mostly affected. We can of 302 course only speculate why. Is it because they are afraid of being evaluated negatively? Is it because 303 they are afraid of hurting their friends? Is it because the social setting triggers positive emotions 304 and inhibits their skepticism? More studies are needed to investigate these different explanations.

306 *4.1 Limitations and future studies*

307 That people perceive it less risky to eat hamburgers at home, compared to at a restaurant or at 308 a friend's place, indicates that familiarity removes skepticism. The positive affect evoked by 309 something familiar appears to bias consumers and make them perceive undercooked hamburgers 310 from their own kitchen to be safer than the same hamburgers when served by friends or when 311 bought at a restaurant. In future studies, the well-known familiarity effect observed here needs to 312 be investigated in more depth. How does interaction between the familiarity of the product, the 313 place (situation) and the presence of people influence the risk taking? We might expect that an 314 undercooked hamburger, which is a familiar food, will be perceived safer than a raw salmon tartar, 315 but we do not know how risk taking will vary under different familiar and unfamiliar situations. 316 The interaction effects between familiarity and social context deserve further investigation. How 317 will risky products offered by friends at an unfamiliar situation affect risk taking?

318 Another factor that deserves more attention in future studies of risk taking is perceived control. 319 Previous research has found that people tend to see hazardous behavior as less risky if they have 320 some control of the risk (Slovic, 1986; Klein and Kunda, 1994). Although considerable amounts 321 of research have emphasized the importance of perceived control and even suggested that the desire 322 to have an influence on our environment is a universal preference (Langer and Rodin, 1976), little 323 attention has been paid to understand what is meant by control (Harris, 1996). In an attempt to 324 conceptualize perceived control in risk perception, Nordgren, van der Pligt, and van Harreveld (2007) distinguish between two distinct aspects: command over exposure to the risk (volition) and 325 326 command over the outcome (control). In three studies, they demonstrate that volition and control 327 exert opposing influences on risk perception: control deceases perceived risk while volition 328 increases perceived risk. The latter prediction, which may be seen as counterintuitive, is explained 329 in relation to regret. They propose that a voluntary appraisal elicits anticipated regret, which increases perceived risk. We found in this study that the intention to eat an undercooked hamburger at home was at the same level as the intention to eat the same hamburger at a restaurant. One explanation for why perceived control had no substantial effect on risk taking may be that the two contradictory aspects of perceived control, volition and outcome control neutralize each other. Future studies should therefore investigate these two aspects of perceived control separately to be able to see if they interact.

336 In a parallel study (Røssvoll, Sørheim, Heir, Møretrø, Olsen, Langsrud (2014), the inactivation 337 of STEC was determined for hamburgers cooked to the same temperatures as in the pictures used 338 in this study. For the rare and medium rare hamburger, the inactivation did not meet the 339 performance criteria for cooking meat (99.999% reduction) and they should be regarded as unsafe 340 to eat. From a food safety perspective it is very worrying that consumers tend to prefer undercooked 341 hamburgers, despite several outbreaks and subsequent risk communication from food safety 342 authorities. The present study demonstrates that not only do many consumers prefer hamburgers 343 that are unsafe, those who prefer well-done hamburgers tend to eat rare hamburgers in certain social 344 situations. It has been estimated that STEC causes 2.8 mill acute illnesses annually, and the impact 345 is highest in infants and children (Majowicz, Scallan, Jones-Bitton, Sargeant, Stapleton, Angulo, 346 et al. (2014). One possible path for future studies, would be to elaborate on the social pressure 347 people feel in specific situations and focus on investigating behavioural change where it will have 348 most impact: Target people that prepare and serve food to children.

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350 **5. Conclusion**

We found that a rare, risky hamburger that may cause an *E.coli* infection was more likely to be eaten if offered at their friend's place, and less likely when offered at a foreign restaurant or at home. These findings indicate that situation plays an important role for consumers' likelihood of eating unsafe food, and that social factors and familiarity should be taken into considerationwhen food safety strategies are developed.

356 This study shows that the effect of the situational context influences the relationship 357 between risk perception and risk taking. By conducting an experiment where risk taking was 358 measured under different situations, and comparing the results with risk perception for the same 359 situations, we were able to demonstrate that risk taking does not follow risk perception in situations 360 influenced by possible social consequences. All hamburgers, also undercooked hamburgers that 361 may cause an *E.coli* infection, were significantly more likely to be eaten if served at a friend's 362 place and less likely when served at a restaurant or at home. This indicates that a situation with 363 social consequences influences risk taking. These findings can help us understand why risk taking 364 not always follow risk perception and why information, which may affect risk perception, is not 365 enough to change risk behavior. If we are to contribute significantly to the understanding of risk 366 behavior, future studies need to move beyond the individualistic level and develop a more 367 ambitious socially-oriented agenda for risk behavior research. Studies that explain the mechanisms 368 for what we observe here (e.g. is risk taking explained mostly by the social aspects of a situations 369 or a situations familiarity?) are also needed.

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- 489 Fig. 1. The four hamburger pictures used as stimuli in the experiment. The respondents of the
- 490 survey were asked not to take the shape and thickness of the hamburgers into account when
- *considering the pictures, but to look at the meat color and texture.*





499

Figure 2: Least squares mean scores for perceived risk to eat hamburgers in different situational contexts, R^2 : 0.604 (error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals).



505
506 Figure 3: Mean scores for intention to eat hamburgers with different core temperatures (left) and
507 in different situational contexts (right).



