

Food, body, gender and subjectivity

Alimentação, corpo, gênero e subjetividade

This issue *DEMETRA: Food, Nutrition & Health* brings together articles that articulate the themes “food”, “body”, “gender “and” subjectivity”. This initiative was based on reflections made within the scope of three Graduate Programs: Food, Nutrition and Health, Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ); Bioscience and Health Education, Instituto Oswaldo Cruz (IOC), the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ); and Nutrition, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), through common courses taught across the programs and technical cooperation among teachers, including the partnership with the Rural Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ).

Over time, there has been growing interest from scholars in studies on food/culture and body/gender. However, these categories have been addressed separately in different fields of knowledge, especially in the context of nutrition, with prevalence of research studies about food and culture over those that are focused on body and gender. Therefore, a challenge to be faced by researchers in the field of Food and Nutrition is to incorporate the analytical categories “body and gender” as one of the dimensions in the analysis of culture involving commensality, even though studies focused on women and men have been considered previously.

“Body” and “gender” are recurrent categories in social practice and in common sense, and concomitantly, they are part of a strategy of a theoretical-conceptual approach in the context of Social Sciences. Through this framework, we sought to problematize and potentiate the definition of these concepts in research studies on food and culture. Our goal was to stress how these concepts point to an important dimension of social reality because, historically, differences in the construction of social identities with regard to gender and sexuality have not always been present in the construction of scientific knowledge. By exploring these differences, we reiterate the fact that social life consists of various dimensions, such as time and space, which just like commensality and relations between sexes, are socially sanctioned. The difference between sexes, in this sense,

also expresses the values that organize life in society; this difference is produced by society, and it is often expressed as these dimensions are intertwined, which is of our interest to explore.

This special issue is dedicated, therefore, to the relationship between FOOD, BODY, GENDER and SUBJECTIVITY as social constructions which pervade not only the experience of everyday life, but also the ways of doing science and the scientific and technological development in health.

The works that are part of this issue correspond to empirical and/or theoretical research, especially those that highlight the problems of the genderized body that models subjectivity. In this effort, we have brought together works that show possible interfaces between one or more of these related terms, in view of the incidence of links between body, gender relations and subjectivity in the food and health habits of contemporary society. On the whole, they present different analytical perspectives (historical, sociological, anthropological or psychological) that favor such associations.

We selected studies and/or essays which discuss the social and cultural nature of eating in terms of norms, regulations and/or naturalizations of the body, with implications for individual and collective existence, namely: conceptions and practices with reference to construction of body image, including eating disorders linked to obesity and anorexia; social reproduction through the analysis of the processes of breastfeeding and criticism of contemporary approaches involving family and sexual diversity in terms of the construction of social identities; teaching practices linked to the body and gender in different educational contexts; processes of working, training and professional identity and commensality. All these aspects are covered in different research scenarios, including the production of media, films and the arts.

It is worth noting that, although some studies do not take commensality as a central axis of analysis, they have the merit of problematizing and potentiating the definition of these concepts in the field of food and nutrition as oriented to culture. However, what those have in common with the latter is the complex processes of biomedical and/or technological interventions and medicalization, as a broad social process of the genderized body, whose laws/norms and policies/institutionalizations reflect subjective experiences. We also highlight that part of the production included in this issue associates gender with sex - an approach closer to a biologist understanding of bodies based on sexual dimorphism - thus bringing hardly any new contribution to the conceptual discussion already established within Social Sciences. However, we chose to accept them because we understand the importance of encouraging the continuity and advancement of analysis on these issues in the field of food and nutrition, considering also the incipient nature of these reflections in terms of the more general production in the field, as previously mentioned.

We believe, finally, that we have had good acceptance of this initiative, given the large number of articles submitted, which can be regarded as high interest in the theme. It was not only rewarding but also a great opportunity to present the possible relations between food and culture

with the themes “body”, “gender” and “subjectivity”, configured historically as devices for the production of truths about oneself and others, as previously pointed out by the anthropological and sociological literature.

We have observed, by the effort undertaken, the existence of significant differences relative to gender in various processes of intervention in bodies, which should thus be food for thought.

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