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Eating and eating practices of higher education professionals during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic : rearrangements and new meanings

O comer e as práticas alimentares de profissionais da educação superior na primeira onda da pandemia pela Covid-19: rearranjos e ressignificados

Abstract

Introduction: The pandemic period brought about numerous changes, with food being one of the affected elements. **Objective:** To understand the new arrangements and meanings of eating practices experienced during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic by higher education professionals. **Methods:** This research is qualitative and exploratory. Ten professionals from the higher education sector of two federal universities in the interior of Minas Gerais were interviewed individually and remotely. The interviews were analyzed using Bardin's Thematic Analysis in conjunction with Similitude Analysis via IRAMUTEQ. **Results:** The interviews allowed for the identification of three thematic axes: (1) "Management of food and the body: pleasure, guilt and fear of weight gain", exploring the conflicts that intensified in regards to the body and food choices; (2) "Social rearrangements, commensality and eating practices"; and (3) "The practice of cooking in confinement: polysemy, temporality and gender", discussing the dynamism of food when experiencing changes in household composition, routine and work obligations. **Discussion:** It was possible to identify relationships between social distancing, home confinement and individual and collective eating practices. Due to the different social rearrangements, structured by the participants to deal with the pandemic-imposed restrictions, dichotomous behaviors emerged, reflecting conflicts in the face of adjusted eating practices. The nutrient-food relationship (nutritionism) was very present in the narratives, influencing thoughts and behaviors about the body and well-being. **Conclusion:** It is concluded that the pandemic context generated changes regarding the arrangements, representations and meanings of eating and food.

Keywords: Eating practices. Covid-19. Eating behavior. Emotional eating. Social isolation. Mental health.

Resumo

Introdução: O período pandêmico provocou inúmeras alterações, sendo a alimentação um dos contextos afetados. **Objetivo:** Compreender os novos arranjos e significados das práticas alimentares vivenciados durante a primeira onda da pandemia pela Covid-19 por profissionais da educação superior. **Métodos:** Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa e de caráter exploratório. Foram entrevistados, individualmente e de forma remota, dez profissionais do setor da educação superior de duas universidades federais do interior de Minas Gerais. As entrevistas foram analisadas por meio da Análise Temática de Bardin em conjunto com a Análise de Similitude via IRAMUTEQ. **Resultados:** As entrevistas permitiram a identificação de três eixos temáticos: (1) "Manejos da comida e do corpo: prazer, culpa e

medo do ganho de peso”, explorando os embates que se intensificaram no que tange ao corpo e às escolhas alimentares; (2) “Re-arranjos sociais, comensalidade e práticas alimentares”; e (3) “O exercício do cozinhar no confinamento: polissemias, temporalidades e gênero”, discorrendo sobre o dinamismo da alimentação ao vivenciar alterações na composição domiciliar, rotina e obrigações de trabalho. **Discussão:** Foi possível identificar relações entre o distanciamento social, o confinamento domiciliar e as práticas alimentares individuais e coletivas. Em razão dos diferentes rearranjos sociais, estruturados pelos participantes para lidar com as restrições impostas pela pandemia, comportamentos dicotômicos emergiram, refletindo conflitos frente aos ajustes nas práticas alimentares. A relação nutriente-alimento (nutricionismo) esteve muito presente nas narrativas, influenciando pensamentos e comportamentos sobre o corpo e o bem-estar. **Conclusão:** Conclui-se que o contexto pandêmico gerou alterações em relação aos arranjos, representações e significados do comer e da alimentação.

Palavras-chave: Práticas alimentares. Covid-19. Comportamento alimentar. Comer emocional. Isolamento social. Saúde mental.

INTRODUCTION

All nations experienced, between 2020 and 2021, the most intense phase of the Covid-19 pandemic,¹ which imposed major health restrictions such as physical isolation.²⁻⁴ With that came the need for social reorganization, one anchored in the transformation from face-to-face activities to activities practiced at home, taking social and professional interactions to the virtual environment.

Eating practices are closely related to social organization and culture, constituting ways of living, identity and daily life.⁵ Food, therefore, contributes to social identity construction, being full of symbolism and subjectivities,⁶ and materializes new representations and meanings in the face of new ways of being, existing, living and relating in the pandemic context.⁷

In regards to the pandemic's effects on eating habits, the literature points out that seeking food as a form of reward was enhanced as a coping mechanism for the stressful situations experienced,⁸⁻¹⁰ with stress and depression having a positive correlation with food consumption in general and the intake of alcoholic beverages.¹¹⁻¹⁴ In that respect, there was an increase in the consumption of more palatable foods rich in fat and sugar, such as ultra-processed foods, while there was a decrease in the intake of natural foods⁸⁻¹⁰ despite the recognized benefits their consumption has on immune response - something desirable in the Covid-19 context.⁸ This eating phenomenon also had repercussions in specific social segments in which eating practices are already differentiated, such as among vegetarians. These individuals also decreased consumption of natural foods and increased consumption of foods high in fat and sugar.⁸

Alongside this reflection, it is worth noting that family income is also identified as a factor that influences changes in eating habits. In the pandemic context, Vidal et al.¹⁵ observed that dietary changes considered negative were associated with a reduction in family income. Such changes include an increase in the amount of food consumed, an increase in the consumption frequency of ultra-processed foods and a reduction in the consumption of fruits and vegetables.

Based on the epistemological assumption of the complexity of eating and eating practices, and how they relate to social and cultural contexts, it is assumed that social isolation and the changes resulting from it during the Covid-19 pandemic promoted the need for subjects' to rearrange their eating practices. Knowing the changes related to experiences that involve eating and food during social isolation, as well as their linked meanings, is of great relevance for the Food and Nutrition field because it exposes subjective aspects of food, going beyond the biological-nutritional theme on which studies in this field are usually centered. Nevertheless, in the field of national and international literature, such biological-nutritional themed studies, supported by the quantitative methodology, took precedence during the pandemic period.^{9,16,17}

In this regard, the present study aimed to understand the new arrangements and meanings of eating practices experienced by higher education professionals during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

METHODS

This research is based on a qualitative and exploratory approach with the participation of ten professionals from higher education health area courses. These professionals were from the teaching and technical-administrative sectors of two federal universities in the interior of Minas Gerais, and female. Due to the physical and social isolation measures in effect in Brazil at the time, the participants were working remotely at the time of their participation.

A priori, teaching and technical-administrative staff belonging to the researchers' contact network were invited to participate in the research. The invitations to the other participants were conducted by the snowball sampling technique,¹⁸ represented by non-probabilistic sampling and fed by indication of new volunteers through the current interviewee. The sample size was defined by the saturation criterion, which advocates that the number of participants can be defined since the interviews respond to the objectives sufficiently and satisfactorily.¹⁹

The semi-structured interviews, conducted online, were guided by a script of open questions (Chart 1). To assess whether such questions had the potential to generate narratives that met the study's objective, two test interviews were carried out with individuals with different profiles, configuring the awareness study. The interviews took place between July and September 2020 and were conducted by a researcher with experience in qualitative studies. The average duration was 90 minutes, and all were recorded and later transcribed fully and literally, composing the study's corpus analysis.

Chart 1. Script of the guiding questions used in the interviews.

1	Since the beginning of social isolation, do you believe that your diet and/or your eating routine have changed?
2	Do you think there is any food that can provide some protection against the virus? Did you ever consume different foods than usual, considering the periods before and after the start of isolation?
3	Have you felt emotional changes since the beginning of social isolation? If so, do you believe it affected your diet? If so, how?
4	Have you been looking for new information about food since the beginning of social isolation? Did you participate in events or groups about food?
5	Since the beginning of social isolation, has the process/routine/place/frequency of home purchases changed? Was there any food that you felt was difficult to find?
6	Did you seek, during this period, integrative health practices?
7	Do you believe that confinement can affect a balanced diet?

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Data analysis was supported by Bardin's Content Analysis ²⁰ together with Similitude Analysis via IRAMUTEQ Version 0.7 ALPHA 2, aiming to better understand the data and reduce possible biases inherent to qualitative research. For the content analysis, the recommended pre-analysis steps were followed (floating reading); exploration of the material (titling of probable thematic axes); treatment of the data obtained (grouping of the contents in the axes defined *a posteriori*); and interpretation (understanding the data supported by the scientific literature).

Similitude analysis via IRAMUTEQ was carried out exclusively with the participants' responses to the question "Do you believe that confinement can affect a balanced diet in the population in general?". The responses were unified into a single paragraph in plain text format, free of diacritical marks and language vices - "erm", "right", "ah" - respecting the rules for using the resources offered by the program. Adjectives, adverbs, common nouns, verbs and unrecognized forms (literal translation) were left active for analysis, and the others as additional. And finally, the text size "40" was adhered to.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, MG, Brazil (Opinion CEP 4.103.379, CAAE 32049020.7.0000.5152), and all participants signed the Informed Consent Form, sent via an online form.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants

10 women were interviewed. The majority (n=06) held a teaching position and half (n=05) lived with their partner. Most interviewees (n=09) self-reported being in partial physical isolation since they went out for essential activities, such as shopping, and maintained sporadic face-to-face contact with close people who did not live with them. At the time of the interview, none of the participants had been diagnosed with Covid-19. All reported to have started physical isolation in March of 2020 when the establishment of remote work in the public education sector was decreed. Chart 2 provides a summary of the participants' characterization, presented by fictitious names.

Chart 2. Characterization (occupation and social arrangement) of the research participants.

Fictitious Name	Profession	Social Arrangement
Flor	Teaching	Lives with partner
Aurora	Teaching	Lives with partner
Éster	Teaching	Lives alone
Maria Luz	Teaching	Lives with partner and two children
Beneditte	Teaching	Lives with mother
Estefany	Teaching	Lives with family
Rosa Linda	Tech-Admin	Lives with partner
Larissa	Tech-Admin	Lives with parents
Shara	Tech-Admin	Lives alone
Valquiria	Tech-Admin	Lives with partner

*All the professionals are from the health area

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Categories of analysis

The similarity analysis allowed identifying the two main branches guided by the adverbs “more” and “no”. It was observed that words such as “able to maintain”, “jointly”, “socioeconomic”, “purchase” and “result” were intertwined with “no” in the participants' discourse, probably indicating difficulties in such processes. Yet “yes” was present when they expressed words mainly referring to the social context, emotional issues and body/food, such as “healthy”, “anxiety”, “nutrition”, “change”, “isolation” and “informational”.

Figure 1. Similitude Analysis – IRAMUTEQ



The analysis of the narratives allowed for the final extraction of three thematic axes: (1) Food and body management: pleasure, guilt and fear of weight gain; (2) Social rearrangements, commensality and eating practices; and (3) The exercise of cooking in confinement: polysemy, temporality and gender; all of which are presented and discussed below.

(1) Food and body management: pleasure, guilt and fear of weight gain

This first thematic axis was marked by dichotomies regarding relationships surrounding food and the body, permeated with questions related to pleasure versus guilt and to discipline, norms and control versus care and affection. The confinement imposed by the pandemic reconfigured such relationships and, from this perspective, also the role of food as a source of pleasure, affection, connection, comfort and indulgence, related to the anxieties and uncertainties experienced. At the same time, feelings of guilt and inadequacy

emerged and were strengthened, based on the medicalized view of food and concerns about the body and weight gain.

The restrictions and changes in daily life experienced during the pandemic significantly affected the psychological well-being of the subjects²¹⁻²⁴ and, consequently, their eating practices, with emphasis on emotional eating.^{21,22,25-28} It should be noted that, in the face of negative emotions and adverse situations, eating behavior changes. There is a redirection of food choices towards foods that generate comfort and pleasure, such as sweet foods, as a resource used by subjects for accommodation, relaxation and coping with these emotions.^{29,30}

[...] I can't go out, I can't see anyone, I can't do anything, I'm going to eat, I'm going to make up for it right here, I'm going to go down for pleasure, right? [...](Shara)

[...] Ahh! One thing that changed a lot, a lot, a lot, I think what changed the most and what hurt me the most during the pandemic was eating sweets. Because I'm not one for sweets! [...](Shara)

Yes, in my case it's sweets, everything that has sugar, chocolate especially [...] I ate sweets and my anxiety decreased, maybe I don't know, it's psychological, I don't know anymore, ingesting any sugar I already feel relaxed.(RosaLinda)

[...] but I didn't have that, that voracity to eat, to eat, especially sweet things, I didn't have it [...].(Estefany)

But, you know, I think that the pandemic context generated anxiety, you know, and this anxiety ends up influencing, you know, our eating habits, we end up taking it out on food [...]. Yes, in my case it's sweets, everything that has sugar, especially chocolate.(Larissa)

A study carried out with primary and secondary school teachers in Minas Gerais also observed an increase in the consumption of sweets (19.5%) during the pandemic, which was also observed in other adult populations in different countries.^{8,31-33} It is also worth noting that previous research has indicated an increase in both anxiety and stress levels, as well as in emotional eating, during the pandemic period.^{9,34-40}

Within this discussion, the concern about preserving health, especially physical health, emerges and is strengthened through the search for a healthy diet, aiming mainly to maintain good immune status.⁴¹ In this context, the act of eating is rationalized from the understanding of healthy eating based exclusively on the biological perspective (food-nutrient), resorting to the consumption of "correct" nutrients as an effective strategy to achieve "health".⁴²

Such a partial view of food is translated by the term "nutritionism" or "nutritional reductionism". This term was initially described by Gyorgy Scrinis,⁴³ who questions the power and media spotlight given to isolated nutrients to classify food as either "healthy" or "unhealthy", ignoring the other processes undergone by every final product, in addition to consumption itself.

Still in this discussion, it is known that the regulation of eating, with the establishment of dietary rules, is based on restricting or promoting the consumption of certain foods, evaluated by the presence or absence of "demonized" nutrients within the context of "healthy eating"/diet and health in contemporary times.⁴⁴ Based on this understanding, the understanding of what health is is also contaminated, which is currently seen superficially, mistakenly and camouflaged by aesthetic rules as a simple absence of disease, which is guaranteed by a lean body and the intake of the "correct" nutrients. This partial view of health, supported by the biomedical model, contributes to the overvaluation of aesthetic parameters as health determinants,

strengthening the aestheticization of health,⁴⁵ and reinforces disciplinary practices related to eating and the body within the pandemic context.

No, at first I even tried to have a more balanced diet because of that, but I ended up not being able to. I tried to eat only vegetables more, only food at home, I think I managed to stick with it for a couple of weeks [...], not ordering anything industrialized during the week [...].(Valquiria)

I fasted for a period too [...] Then I gave up fasting, then I went back to being irregular again, so it is difficult to maintain a diet [...] it comes and goes [...] I stick to the diet one day, then the next day it's like I forgot that I had to continue, you know. Ah, it already fell through, fell through again. Do you get it? That's it! [...].(Shara)

In this direction, the fear of weight gain - a phenomenon potentiated in the pandemic context, especially due to the consequences of isolation, such as an increased sedentary lifestyle and emotional eating,⁴⁶ stands out in this category. This phenomenon opens up the disciplinary power exercised over bodies, with the aim of socializing them,⁴⁷ based on lipophobia and on the aesthetic-corporal norms that govern Western culture.⁴⁸ In the meantime, the body internalizes the commands of disciplinary power, and also of submission and control.⁴⁹ Such a perspective strengthens the process of "lightening" existence, which concerns appreciating life for the lightness represented by young, thin and healthy bodies, occurring from dietary changes and new body patterns.⁵⁰

[...] I gained a lot of weight during this period, you know, then I started to see it. There comes a time when we really start to worry about our health, so anyway, I've been trying to control myself, the urge is here, I have it all the time, still wanting to eat [...] If we need to go back to school and I need to go out on the street I don't even have anything to wear because my clothes don't fit me, yeah, I have to control myself, it doesn't matter, right, the only thing we control is what we put into our mouths [...].(Estefany)

And then I put on a lot of weight, I think, I'm very close to my heaviest weight[...].(Shara)

Thus, it is clear that the pandemic context intensified the conflicts, concerns and paradoxes related to food and the body, based on the medicalized view of food and nutritional rationality⁴² and on body-aesthetic norms.⁵¹ The disciplinary practices related to eating and the body gain prominence due to the fear of weight gain, coming from a perspective of normalization and controlling pleasure with food, and also of normalization and controlling the body.⁵² From this perspective, it can be noticed that even the relaxation of controls and rules is a paradoxical process. Food, as affection and reception, provides an opportunity for self-care. It is, however, permeated with guilt caused by the transgression of dietary and aesthetic norms, and by the loss of control and discipline. In such a normative context related to eating and the body, we are inserted into the contemporary lipophobic society, where even moments of relaxation, subjectively, gain contours of control.

(2) Social rearrangements, commensality and eating practices

The contextualization of the second axis is based on the expansion of individual and collective food dimensions caused by the dynamics of social isolation, and therefore, home confinement. To the extent that eating practices are intertwined with social organization,⁵³ changes in everyday life and new ways of working, being and living during the pandemic constituted new practices related to eating, shaped by new ways of living and engaging.

From this perspective, the question of commensality is identified. Meal preparation, from choosing to cooking, carries with it a notorious and relevant social perspective, providing interactions between members belonging or not to the same group, reflecting dietary rules and regulations created in the civilizing process of the culture in which we live.⁵³ In Brazil, sharing meals is present in the Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population (*Guia Alimentar para a População Brasileira*),⁵⁴ suggested as a guide for Brazilians seeking a healthy eating life. Although this eating ritual is strongly recognized, reinforcing this habit becomes necessary due to the way modern families live, represented by the individualization and acceleration of meals prepared in the home environment, mainly due to the introduction of women into the labor market.^{53,54}

In the pandemic context, it is clear that the confinement and social reorganizations of coexistence determined changes regarding commensality, with dichotomous representations between gains and losses depending on how the social rearrangements took place for each subject.

[...] So, we had lunch together, something we couldn't do and how important this is for the family, because it's a time for the family to talk, for the family to interact, for questions to be asked, it's also a space for learning between parents and children [...]. (Maria Luz)

The practice of commensality, that is, the social function of meals, is an important human characteristic, denoting us as social beings and not just biological ones;⁵⁵ this practice also plays a role in distinguishing food as a social act and not just a biological one. However, contemporary eating practices tend to distort the discourse of commensalism attributed to food as an important symbol of connection and unity between individuals, given the increased intake of ready-to-eat food and cross-cultural preparations/recipes, leading to an increase in solitary meals and a reduction in the time devoted to shared meals.^{56,57} According to Fischler,⁵⁸ current commensality represents a social action equipped with behavioral and food rules, which segregate individuals into groups.⁵⁹ Such segregation can generate atypical reactions, hijacking the senses of commensality and distancing subjects from this important aspect of eating.

Still in this reflection, it should be noted that the current consumer society, which rushes eating, eating practices and relationships, is marked by a devaluation of commensality as a group practice. Oliveira and collaborators⁶⁰ bring an interesting analysis of the presence and absence of commensality as symbols of belonging or not to a group, especially when they exemplify the affection given by the family to a child when inserting them into eating rituals at the table and meals taking place together.

In this sense, paralleling the period of social isolation in which the study was carried out, retrieving the practice of eating together and other eating practices at home may even have significance in regards to rescuing customs and symbolism involving food and to affection. In daily confinement, the appreciation of commensality materializes the possibility of socialization as a form of belonging. In times of fast food and fast life, in a culture that surpasses the importance of sitting down at the table, the pandemic has made it possible, for some, to rescue the practice of sharing food, giving value to this important aspect of eating.

Another point observed in this category concerns dietary practices, which also underwent changes due to new social rearrangements and new everyday organizations, in the face of protective measures put in place to contain the pandemic. At this juncture, the transformation of face-to-face work to the remote format is highlighted. A study carried out with 508 higher education professors in Brazil revealed that such changes generated work overload, insecurity, lack of division of the home-work space, physical and mental exhaustion, anxiety and stress,⁶¹ elements that can have a direct impact on eating practices. Added to this are the family reorganizations that took place due to the pandemic, observed in the present study, such as subjects who lived alone and started to live with their parents due to the new work format.

[...] I'm not at my house, you know, I came to my parents' house in another city, and then there's the routine, you know, eating here is different from my house, in my house I live alone so I'm used to it [...]. (Estefany)

[...] as I don't have time to prepare my food here, so I eat what they prepare (family), or there isn't much space in the fridge for me, so I don't have much to make [...]. (Larissa)

The temporal disruption related to food was also a point identified in the participants' narratives, revealing how the organization of food helps in the organization of one's own life. From this perspective, the disorganization of everyday life, related to the new context of work and life imposed by the pandemic, highlights disorganization in routines and eating practices.

[...] And this issue of schedules was something that was compromised, right [...] so that's it, I realize that it was a change due to the pandemic, because I was more at home and the routine of schedules changed a lot. (Flor)

Yeah, well, first I realized that I try to control myself more, you know, because at home, at the time, I live alone, so and working remotely, it turns out that sometimes I lose track of time a little bit [...]. (Éster)

The power of choice over food variants - what to eat, when to eat, where to eat and with whom to eat - is, in part, established by the individual according to the social, economic, educational, cultural and ideological determinants that make up their routine, making it synonymous with their own identities.⁵⁰ From this perspective, changes in these determinants also generate changes in eating habits, as shown in the narratives above. A breakdown in these practices can be seen due to the new ways of social interaction generated by the pandemic.

It should be noted, in this discussion, that within the food dimension of eating practices, it is essential that there be availability and income to enable the acquisition of food. The fundamental role that this socioeconomic aspect played in remodeling eating practices during the pandemic in the public of the present study is perceived. In the range of problems fostered by Covid-19, one cannot disregard the increased vulnerability of the economic situation of countless Brazilian families, especially those in situations of social abandonment, enhancing conditions of poverty and hunger.⁶² Such a scenario is not the reality of the current participants, who had the social, material and financial circumstances to maintain work and decent living and food conditions during the pandemic, in addition to high education levels.

Finally, it is clear that the participants' eating practices seem to have been adjusted as adaptation strategies, in a broad sense, to a new daily life, with the aim of (re)organizing routines, finding stability, facilitating coexistence and (re)configuring ways of relating socially. In this context, what stands out is the reconfiguration of individual dietary demands caused by the pandemic - typical of contemporary society, in the face of the omnipresent family community, involving a daily exercise of negotiations and readjustments between personal choices and concerns with other family members,⁴¹ limiting the subject's ability to exercise food autonomy.

(3) The practice of cooking in confinement: polysemy, temporality and gender

In this category, questions related to the experience of cooking emerged, which presented polysemic and contradictory nuances, permeated with the temporality of the (extensive) confinement period. The act

of cooking, which was initially re-signified in the sense of acquiring contours of pleasure, socialization, belonging, rescue and care, returned to the status of a task / burden as time passed.

[...] I see that it was positive in the sense of looking to cook more, of having greater contact with food [...].(Flor)

And so I think I've empowered myself more, nowadays I go a lot more, there's not a day that I don't go to the kitchen to make something [...]. (Beneditte)

[...] I started to make some recipes that I didn't use to make, ehh, so testing recipes [...] Beans were one of the achievements I had during quarantine.[...] (Aurora)

[...] because even though I like to cook sporadically, that routine of having to cook every day is difficult for me and another issue that I saw in the beginning was that it was very difficult to reconcile housework with working from home. So I knew what I was doing at that moment, and there was no option of working at home, having to prepare lunch and that break to make lunch for example, distracting me, because I kept answering emails making lunch and everything started to snowball. (RosaLinda)

[...] so, the only thing that I think has changed is the dynamics that I have in leaving it ready, so many times I usually do it at dinner, leave it ready, not because I'm going to eat it, but leave it ready for the next day so that on my break I don't have to stop my things and make it, and lose, lose in quotes right, have more time in relation to work right [...].(Éster)

[...] I felt a little distressed at times because it was preparation time, so we have an understanding of food, real food, but preparing real food takes time, which sometimes, most of the time, in the work routine of the week you can't fit it in, this is a given reality [...].(Maria Luz)

During the pandemic, confinement was seen as a period in which, initially, time was “gained”. From this new routine, cooking, which routinely had an obligatory status, was given a positive new meaning. The willingness to cook intensified, especially for those who were more distant from this activity, as a form of social and emotional rescue. In this sense, food preparation and the practice of cooking in this confinement period may have even assumed a role in communication between individuals, becoming an aiding resource in the management of emotions such as stress and anxiety.⁶³

On the other hand, there were readjustments in temporality, moving towards the perception of “not having time available” with the long duration of isolation. The readaptation of individuals in the pandemic context took place through a unidirectional movement, mainly identified by the transformation of face-to-face work to mandatory remote work. During this time, the previously existing division between the “way of working” and the “way of living” was blurred, and this blending of environments resulted in longer working hours.⁶⁴

In this discussion, it is important to highlight the issue of the participants' gender. During confinement, the overload of tasks assumed by women was accentuated due to the incorporation, at home, of previously outsourced care; and the tasks multiplied with staying at home.⁴¹ In the social history of the female gender, despite the struggles and achievements, home activities still remain highly linked to women, in addition to the obligation to be docile and caring. Women, culturally, carry a social role of multitasking,⁶⁵ experiencing conflict between domestic chores and labor production, thus represented in the pandemic by scientific production, in which men dedicated to science tend to produce more at home than their partners.⁶⁶ With regard to cooking, women, except those who are part of elite groups in different societies, were and are, historically, the people responsible for daily food, especially in relation to the tasks of supplying and preparing family meals. Especially with regard to the task of cooking, in most cultures, the daily routine of the domestic kitchen is assigned to women.⁶⁷

From these reflections, it is clear that specifically for females there was an increase in the overload of tasks already commonly experienced by this gender, involving greater and different work demands, child care in the absence of usual support networks, and household chores.

In this scenario, cooking and all the activities that constitute it, which go beyond the hours spent in the kitchen, such as planning, organization, shopping, cleaning, attention to individual needs and preferences,⁴¹ catalyze the difficulty in managing this activity.

Some limitations of the study must be considered. The public evaluated in this research presents a specific cut, professionals from public higher education institutions in the Triângulo Mineiro, in addition to the fact that the participants were, in their entirety, female. The presence of male professionals and the research's expansion to other universities and higher education workers with different socioeconomic strata could provide new data to further research the subject.

CONCLUSION

This research sought to understand the new arrangements and meanings related to the eating practices of higher education professionals during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. At that moment, the reconstruction of these arrangements was evident, with changes also in their attributed meanings, by the individuals who had their daily lives profoundly altered.

The narratives brought dichotomies and the reinforcement of disciplining feelings in relation to eating and the body due to indulgence versus guilt versus fear of weight gain. That is, the hedonism of food, which was an important anchor for facing this very challenging pandemic phase, is contaminated by the guilt of eating "incorrectly", according to nutritional rules, and by the fear of gaining weight and violating aesthetic-corporal regulations. Eating practices and commensality were re/disstructured, depending on the subjects' social rearrangements. Cooking expressed, during confinement, dualities between the search for connection and rescue and the burden attributed mainly to the female gender.

It is also worth mentioning that different periods of the pandemic and social isolation, specifically referring to the recommendation of total or partial isolation, can generate different impacts on the lives of individuals and, consequently, on their eating practices and behaviors. Therefore, it is important to carry out studies at the current moment of the pandemic in order to understand how dietary practices are currently configured after this long period of restrictions, uncertainties and profound social and economic changes.

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Contributors

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