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## Body Image from the Psychoanalysis perspective: contributions to the Field of Food and Nutrition

### *Imagem corporal pelo olhar da Psicanálise: contribuições para o campo da Alimentação e Nutrição*

#### Abstract

**Introduction:** The present work brings together contributions from the psychoanalytic theory to discuss the use of the "body image" category in works in the field of Food and Nutrition. **Objective:** to map the use of the concept of "body image" in scientific papers in the field of Nutrition and to compare its use in different approaches in Human and Social Sciences. **Methods:** A bibliographic review was carried out in all editions of *Revista de Nutrição* until September 2019, using the term "body image" as an indexer on the magazine's database. **Results:** Eight papers containing the expression "body image" in the title or keywords were analyzed and it was possible to observe that the concept receives a reductionist approach, mainly related to the application of tests and evaluation scales, leading to simplifying understanding of the subject-body relationship. **Discussion:** To clarify the concept, the main references in psychoanalysis on the topic of body image and the psychoanalytic debate related to the concepts of body and subject are used. The Freudian concept of narcissism is used to demonstrate the complexity of the construction of the image of oneself in the psychoanalytic perspective, pointing out how this category is often employed based on its use by common sense, which requires a better conceptualization of it in the field of Food and Nutrition. **Conclusion:** This work demonstrates how the use of psychoanalytic theory can contribute to a better understanding of the complex relationships that involve subject, body and food, so that this dialogue is reflected in studies that produce not only quantitative evidence, but also enable the construction of new approaches to eating disorders and obesity.

**Keywords:** Body Image. Human Body. Eating disorder. Psychoanalysis.

#### Resumo

**Introdução:** O presente trabalho reúne contribuições da teoria psicanalítica, a fim de discutir o uso da categoria "imagem corporal" em trabalhos do campo da Alimentação e Nutrição. **Objetivo:** mapear o emprego do conceito de "imagem corporal" em artigos científicos da área da Nutrição e comparar seu uso nas diferentes abordagens nas Ciências Humanas e Sociais. **Métodos:** Realizou-se revisão bibliográfica na *Revista de Nutrição* em todas as edições do periódico até setembro de 2019 utilizando o termo "imagem corporal" como indexador na plataforma da revista. **Resultados:** Foram analisados oito artigos que continham a expressão "imagem corporal" no título ou nas palavras-chave e observou-se que o conceito destacado é tratado de forma reducionista, relacionado principalmente à aplicação de testes e escalas de avaliação,

levando a compreensões simplificadoras da relação sujeito-corpo. **Discussão:** Para esclarecer o conceito, recorre-se às principais referências na psicanálise sobre a temática da imagem corporal e ao debate psicanalítico referente às noções de corpo e sujeito. Utiliza-se o conceito freudiano de narcisismo para demonstrar a complexidade da construção da imagem de si na perspectiva psicanalítica, apontando como essa categoria é, muitas vezes, empregada a partir de seu uso pelo senso comum, demandando melhor conceituação do mesmo no campo da Alimentação e Nutrição. **Conclusão:** O trabalho demonstra como o recurso à teoria psicanalítica pode contribuir para um melhor entendimento das complexas relações que envolvem sujeito, corpo e alimentação, para que esse diálogo se reflita em estudos que produzam não somente evidências quantitativas, mas também possibilitem a construção de novas abordagens para os transtornos alimentares e a obesidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Imagem Corporal. Corpo Humano. Transtorno Alimentar. Psicanálise.

## INTRODUCTION

Our life experience takes place entirely by means of our body. However, with regard to the understanding of what this body is, we live in times of dispute between scientifically recognized perspectives and others that, although irrefutable, lack academic legitimation. Not always converging, the understanding of the human body generates a number of discourses, which transform the body into a field of many controversies and epistemic disputes. After all, knowledge is power, and when determining the field of knowledge used to understand the body, a discourse of power that legitimizes one of the positions in the scientific field is also determined. The speech about the body is never neutral. In this text, we will approach the discourses in the field of Nutrition and Psychoanalysis, by problematizing the concept of “body image”.

Within a positivist scientific tradition, the hegemonic discourse of the biomedical sciences on the body has shown its inability to cope with so many bodily expressions present today, prompting the development of new ways of understanding the body in the field of Nutrition. Different from “traditional” Nutrition, whose foundations are the classic biomedicine paradigms, these new perspectives are aimed at bringing Nutrition closer to the field of Human and Social Sciences, which approach food in a more complex way, also considering it as a social and subjective phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

In the traditional scientific model, the production of knowledge is based on the principles of reasoning, logic and mathematical thinking, aiming at an active and objective interference in nature.<sup>2</sup> The body is now seen as a machine, a biological organism inscribed in a mechanical rationality. On the other hand, the perceptions of the body produced from the emergence of Human and Social Sciences will incorporate subjectivity, affections, the discussion about morality, sensitivity and culture, acting on the body as a second nature. This more sensitive perspective on the body starts to increasingly distance itself from the ideal of clarity, objectivity and truth, which are the pillars of modern scientific thought. The question then arises: how to sustain a discourse on the body that is scientific but that does not operate only on the mechanistic and positivist model?

Edgar Morin<sup>3</sup> states that the supremacy of knowledge fragmented according to the disciplines prevents us from linking the parts and their totality and must be replaced by a type of knowledge capable of understanding objects in their context, their complexity and their set. Addressing a complex problem requires considering the whole, the different actors and points of view.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, to think about the body and produce knowledge about it, we should use methods and knowledge that allow us to establish mutual relations and reciprocal influences between the parts and the whole in a complex world. We then need to make the effort to build bridges between knowledge, in order to establish a dialogue that considers the body, its affections, its construction, its history and its own sensitivity.

Certain concepts do not apply exclusively to one or another field of knowledge of the body. They are located at the frontier of different approaches and, just like a “hinge”, connect the different fields, allowing for an articulation without necessarily being in unison. We have chosen “body image” as one of those concepts that pass through common sense and several fields of science, articulating knowledge and discourses.<sup>5</sup> Body image includes subjective and intersubjective experiences, and the body, in this perspective, is a motor device, dedicated to the perception and interaction with objects in the world. The present work seeks to map the use of the concept of “body image” in scientific papers in the field of the Nutrition area and to compare its use in different approaches in the Humanities.

## METHODS

For this study, we used the *Revista de Nutrição*, published by the Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas, as a source of bibliographic research. This bimonthly magazine has contributions from the national and international scientific community, as well as a considerable impact factor, and publishes articles that contribute to the study of the field in its various sub-areas and interfaces. We chose this magazine because it is one of the main journals in the area of Nutrition in Brazil and because we consider that it reflects a recurring reality in national and international publications in the area, in Brazil and worldwide. The research was initially carried out in October 2017 in all editions of the magazine, using the term “body image” as subject heading in the search field of the magazine's database. Eight articles were found, of which seven were initially selected to guide the debate, since one of them specifically addressed HIV/AIDS patients. The research was reconducted in September 2019 and resulted in one more paper, which was added to the study *corpus*, totaling eight papers for analysis.

## RESULTS

In the paper “Obesity and body dissatisfaction amongst adolescents” Conti et al.<sup>6</sup> verified the association between overweight and body dissatisfaction in adolescents but stated that this fact is not decisive, and that body dissatisfaction is a particular feature of adolescents who develop eating disorders. As for the use of the concept discussed here, unlike some results presented below, the authors distinguish between body image, body dissatisfaction and body perception. They recommend that secondary and elementary schools develop “prophylactic activities aimed at raising awareness of the teenagers’ personal and social perception, as well as the pressures to which they are compelled”<sup>6</sup> (p. 491). This recommendation raises the question of understanding what the authors mean by “prophylactic activities”, a subject that we will approach later on.

Triches & Giugliani,<sup>7</sup> in the work entitled “Insatisfação corporal em escolares de dois municípios da Região Sul do Brasil” (Body dissatisfaction in schoolchildren from two municipalities in the Southern Region of Brazil), approach the term searched using Smolak's definition as a reference, according to which body image consists of self-esteem and dissatisfaction with the body. A Body Image Scale was used and the variable “body dissatisfaction” was categorized into two strata: satisfied and dissatisfied. According to the authors, an important point to consider is the “influence of the mother on the body image of her children” and they conclude that the data generated by the study are “sufficient to warn parents, educators and health professionals of the need to develop strategies aimed at greater satisfaction of children with their bodies”<sup>7</sup> (p. 126).

The article “Translation, adaptation and internal consistency evaluation of the Eating Behaviors and Body Image Test for female children”<sup>8</sup> aims to translate, adapt and validate a test that relates eating behavior to body image in children. The authors use, in most applications of the term, the direct association with dissatisfaction, reducing the body image to an object that can be evaluated through the test, not referring to its limitations, since its exclusive purpose is to standardize a test in a language adapted to the proposed reality.

In the approach adopted by Fortes et al.,<sup>9</sup> the concept of body image is understood as the mental image of the body, while body dissatisfaction refers to discontent regarding weight and physical appearance, making up part of the attitudinal dimension of body image. The paper emphasizes the influence of the maturation process on body image.

The paper “Risk of eating disorders in school children from Salvador, Bahia according to race”<sup>10</sup> used the ethnic-racial dimension to analyze risk factors associated with eating disorders in schoolchildren. The authors

consider that the concern with body image, the dissatisfaction with size, shape and body contours predispose to dissatisfaction with body image, which is consequently related to eating disorders.

It is worth noting that, in the excerpts highlighted in this article, the reference for addressing body image is satisfaction or dissatisfaction and concern with body image. Even using questionnaires that assess the existence of abnormal eating patterns, the intensity of concerns that are common among people with eating disorders and dissatisfaction with the size, shape and contours of the body, the article permanently refers to dissatisfaction or concern with body image using "body dissatisfaction" and "dissatisfaction with body image" indiscriminately. The discussion also shows the comparison of studies that theoretically use different variables. Despite claiming that dissatisfaction with size, shape and body contours predisposes to dissatisfaction with body image, the question is: in the midst of so many dissatisfactions, what is actually being evaluated and measured?

Fortes et al.,<sup>11</sup> in the text entitled "Disordered eating, body dissatisfaction, perfectionism, and mood state in female adolescents", seek to analyze whether dissatisfaction with body image alone determines the presence of pathological behaviors in relation to food. They conclude that body dissatisfaction was the main determinant of risk behavior for eating disorder, but point out that even though body dissatisfaction is present in the absolute majority of their research results, perfectionism and mood states are also strongly associated with eating disorders, even to a lesser extent. It is curious to note that, although one of the keywords used in the paper is "body image", the subject addressed is body dissatisfaction, that is, dissatisfaction or dislike with the features of the body. The association between these two terms is evasive and shallow, appearing only once throughout the text.

The same authors, in the article "Can self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and internalization of the thinness ideal influence risk behaviors for eating disorders?",<sup>12</sup> conclude that body dissatisfaction and internalization of the ideal of slimness influence risk behaviors for eating disorders in female adolescents, without identifying the same influence for self-esteem. The paper presents the same theoretical mistake as the previous one, although there is a greater contextualization of body image in relation to adolescence. In the text mentioned, the authors state that "this construct can be understood as the mental representation that the individual has of his/her own body, and one of its attitudinal components is body dissatisfaction", referring to Rodgers, Cabrol and Paxton's tripartite model.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, in the recently published "Body image distortion and dissatisfaction in incarcerated women",<sup>14</sup> the authors sought to estimate the prevalence of distortion and dissatisfaction with body image in a population of women imprisoned in a closed regime. Supported by the concept of body image defined by Cash,<sup>15</sup> the authors do not clearly define what would be dissatisfaction and distortion of body image, but conclude that, because of the condition of deprivation of freedom, almost all prisoners were dissatisfied with their body image and one-third wanted to increase their body size, including those overweight. Despite the relevance of the data found, the authors mainly analyze data related to weight gain after incarceration, attributing it to diet and physical inactivity or other factors, such as the absence of work programs, depression, use of antipsychotics and abstinence from drugs. They also try to explain objectively the reasons for the inaccuracy in assessing body size.

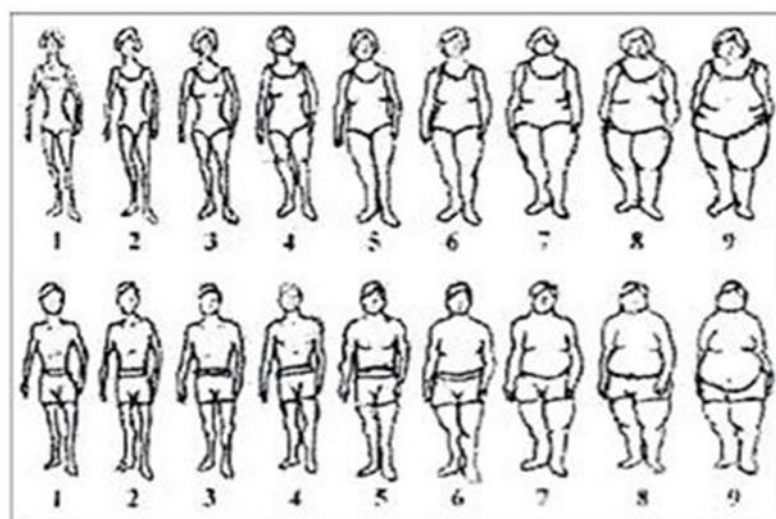
## DISCUSSION

The idea of being able to assess "body image" using tests or scales is controversial. These instruments make it possible to ascertain some elements of the body representation of the evaluated subject, associating them with some behaviors and feelings, but they certainly do not allow us to specify the complexity inherent

to the concept of body image. The evaluation of one or more parts should not be taken as an evaluation of the whole, in order to disregard other equally determinant elements.

In Nutrition, to be aware of this alleged perception of body image, the evaluation using body silhouette scales, also called “countourline drawing” or “figural drawing scales” has been widely used.<sup>16</sup> Among the scales available for measurement, Stunkard et al.<sup>17</sup> proposed a scale of body silhouettes, which represents a continuum from thinnest to the severely obese (figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Set of silhouettes to assess body image



Source: (Stunkard et al. 1983, p. 115)

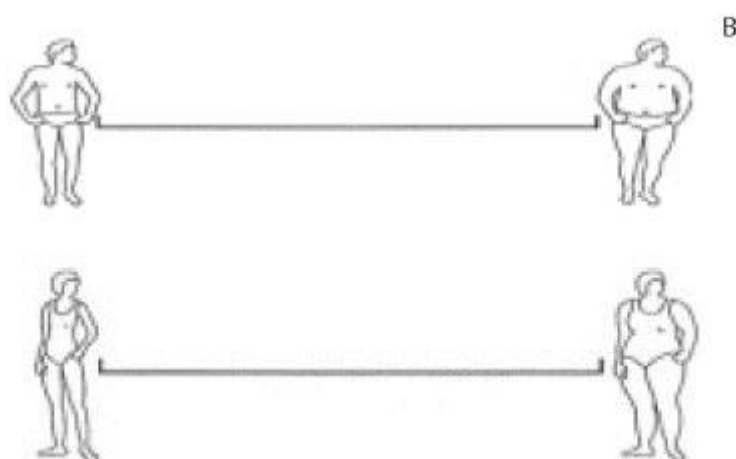
There are other scales and adaptations for different ethnicities and ages. These adaptations are intended to make the figures more plausible and minimize the influences on their application. Kakeshita & Almeida,<sup>16</sup> for example, propose two different scales, one with a figure of body silhouettes created based on photographs taken by an expert and computer graphics (figure 2) and another visual analogue scale with two figures of silhouettes at both ends connected by a continuous line of 12 cm, in which the subjects are invited to make a vertical mark at the point on the scale that would most closely represent their body size (figure 3).

**Figure 2.** Figure scale of silhouettes



Source: (Kakeshita e Almeida, 2006)

Figure 3. Visual analog scale



Source: (Kakeshita e Almeida, 2006)

In general, to be tested, the individual must choose the image on the scale that he/she considers to be consistent with his/her real silhouette and the image that he/she believes to be the one that represents his/her ideal body appearance. To assess body satisfaction, the value corresponding to the actual body appearance is subtracted from the value of the ideal body appearance. The result equal to zero shows that the individual is satisfied with the appearance and a result other than zero shows dissatisfaction. A positive difference shows dissatisfaction with overweight and, when it is negative, there is dissatisfaction with slimness.<sup>18</sup>

This measurement method shows that the idea of “body image” is closely linked to an individual's immediate *perception* of his/her body. However, the subject's judgment of this perception is influenced by a huge variety of vectors that cross family history, culture and social factors, among others. In the results shown, the importance of considering other influences such as social, family and media factors is recurrently stated, because they conflict with the assessment of “body image” reduced by choosing two figures on a scale.

Related to this, there is a recognition of a need to develop “prophylactic activities” aimed at the perception of the adolescent<sup>6</sup> or at strategies focused on providing the best satisfaction of the children with their bodies.<sup>7</sup> Both observations point to the normative character of the research and ignore the complexity of the phenomena discussed, since, as we will see later, body image is an element or constitutive process of the Ego, whose related dissatisfaction cannot be prevented with prophylactic activities of individual or social nature.

Another relevant aspect that stood out in the research in general is the lack of differentiation between the terms “body image”, “dissatisfaction with body image” and “body dissatisfaction”. It is interesting to note that in one of the papers analyzed,<sup>6</sup> although the expression “body image” is in the keywords, the authors mention the concept twice throughout the text, while in another article,<sup>11</sup> the expression appears only once, despite appearing in the title of five references used.

Therefore, we found that the term “body image” is used as a reference defined by common sense. They refer to body image as a synonym of perception of the figure, the silhouette, as well as to classify it in a satisfied or dissatisfied binomial, without taking into account what it is, why and how that relationship with the body itself took place. The expression “dissatisfaction with body image” is in itself a recurring theme and its appearance in the most varied texts is relevant, not only because of the current nature of the subject, but also because of the definitions that we either consider generic or reductionist. For Neves et al.,<sup>19</sup> when talking about body image, we need to be constantly aware of the use of the terms, as there are several ones with the same



definition and different terms with similar definitions, to ensure that conclusions and statements are well understood even by readers of other fields of knowledge.

According to the results shown, it is possible to state that there is basic criterion in the application of the concept, as the following terms are used indistinctly: body image, body dissatisfaction, body scheme. This fact can be understood from the appropriation of common sense by science and vice versa, without any epistemological conceptualization or problematization.

Common sense is not totally bad, after all, science was born to it, which, in turn, is not all good in itself. Thus, it is not a matter of either demonizing common sense or deifying science. In the scope of science, operating with concepts is essential. In the case of the concept of body image, the scientific field has often been adopting common sense expressions related to the ways of apprehending the body, instead of resorting to reflections based on analytical categories specific to the scientific approach, which “retain historically fundamental social relations, serving as theoretical guides and limits for the knowledge of an object”<sup>20</sup> (p. 178).

When applying the term used by common sense within academic research, we fall into a reductionism that excludes any conceptual construction that would allow us to sustain scientific associations and “truths”. Studies that use body image as a synonym for perception of the figure or silhouette ultimately seek to account for a “satisfied or dissatisfied” Manichaean binomial. According to Neves et al.,<sup>19</sup> the quantitative assessment of body image needs to dialogue with a theoretical framework that supports the numerical data, thus preventing the numbers from overshadowing the conceptual discussion, in addition to consistent theoretical knowledge that goes beyond mathematical evidence. And yet, in this case, we can admit a complementary relationship between qualitative and quantitative research, where “the psychometric evidence of a scale must present the observed confirmation of theoretical assumptions”<sup>19</sup> (p. 377).

### **Body image from the Psychoanalysis perspective**

The expression “body image” was conceptualized by Schilder,<sup>21</sup> psychoanalyst, psychiatrist and philosopher whose work “The image and appearance of the human body” is frequently used in various fields of research. For Schilder, “the image of the human body means the picture of our body which we form in our mind, that is, the way in which the body appears to ourselves” (p. 11), adding that all perception already enters into consciousness charged with its relation to something that has happened before, that is, previous events change our perception. In addition, he states that body image is a social phenomenon, highlighting that there is a deep connection between the individual's body image and that of others.

In this perspective, up to a certain age, parents or caregivers embody the social issue for a child. They are the ones who mediate and represent social references and demands, like a compass on the path of investments that a child will make in his/her body, in objects and in his/her relationships. According to Schilder,<sup>21</sup>

[...] children discover their bodies through the words and observations of others. The parents' attitude towards scars and other people's comments provoke a great interest in the child's own body. Family conversations about health, appearance, or illness can also increase the child's interest on his/her own body (p. 225).



Another important reference on the topic is Thomas Cash,<sup>22</sup> whose understanding of body image came from the perception that individual's subjective experiences of their appearance, in most cases, had more psychosocial power than the objective appearance or social reality of their appearance. This self-perception was named by the author as "inside view", which was later correlated to "body image". Thus, body image is referred to a multifaceted psychological experience of embodiment, especially but not exclusively, of one's physical appearance. This conception led the author to affirm several times that the body image is composed of "images" – "body image is body images".

The author, however, points out that the interest in studies related to body image has developed regarding eating disorders, which reinforced the limiting notion that body image is only relevant to girls and women, and only concerns weight and body shape, indicating the need to transcend this narrow focus towards the rich diversity of human experiences of embodiment.

From the psychoanalytic perspective, the body image is supported by a notion of the body that goes beyond biological limits, as well as the boundaries of the contour and the perception of its image. For Psychoanalysis, the body is not reduced to muscles, bones and organs organized into systems that work like a machine. The body that Psychoanalysis deals with is a body that speaks, of which one speaks, perceives and knows something about it.<sup>23</sup> According to the Freudian theory, the Ego and the Body are not given a priori and, therefore, the assessment of the body image by means of a universal evaluation would be an impossible task in itself, considering that it is an image that is permanently under reformulation.<sup>24</sup> The association of this body image with certain pathological behaviors is also questionable. The apprehension of the body image and its identification as the "Ego" is due to complex and fundamental psychic operations.

These operations are organized by Freud<sup>24</sup> under the name of narcissism, a phase of psychical development in which the image of the body is invested libidinally, allowing the subject to recognize himself in it. Freud<sup>24</sup> points out that there is a stage prior to narcissism – autoerotism – in which the libido<sup>a</sup> is in its initial state, the body is fragmented and there is no difference between the internal and external worlds. In this extremely important moment of psychic development, it is essential that there is another human figure so that the foundations of the psyche and the appropriation of the body image as its Own body happens. In this sense, the "Ego" must be built, developed, which occurs concurrently with the "adoption" of the idea of his/he own body, which, after all, is what will physically sustain the possibility of a separation between the Ego and the external world.

Thus, body and psyche are intertwined in a web that we can only see untied in cases of psychotic patients. When a subject identified with his/her image looks in the mirror, he/she not only sees that body, but at the same time, feels it as his/her own: "this image, which is, the image of my body, it's me". This is the psychical process necessary for the emergence of an Ego, a body and body image.

It is also possible to find other ways of understanding body image that have some relationship with this complexity brought about by Psychoanalysis, such as that of Françoise Dolto,<sup>25</sup> who makes an important reservation when stating that body image should not be confused with body scheme. The latter is the same for everyone and sets up the body as human, while the body image is unique. In the same way, Jerusaleminky<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> According to the psychoanalytic theory, the concept of libido is equivalent to the psychical expression of the sexual drive. Drive, in turn, is an energy that is part of the psyche, acting as a booster for it. It is the limit concept between the psychic and the somatic disorders. The drive theory is one of the key points of Psychoanalysis and its consequences have implications for a series of fundamental concepts, including the body and the body image. After several transformations in the drive theory, Freud classified them based on the duality "life drive" (which includes sexual drives – or libido – and self-preservative drives) and "death drive".

understands that the body scheme concerns the subject's domain over his motor actions, while the body image is the way each subject appropriates this body with his/her desire, forming an image of himself/herself, with which he offers himself to the Other's gaze.<sup>27</sup>

The body image would therefore be the support for narcissism. It is from the adoption of body image as its representative in the world of things that one is able to say that there is an Ego, the result of the cohesion provided by a body image. However, the body image apprehended is never as it is, a unique reality, but it is as we can assimilate it. From the perspective of Psychoanalysis, the body is necessarily a source of dissatisfaction. It is cut out, shaped by the drive that, in principle, is not satisfied.<sup>24</sup> In the field of Food and Nutrition, "dissatisfaction with body image" is used to refer to an aesthetic dislike. To speak of dissatisfaction with the body based on the "body image" is to treat an unspecified object, believing that it is closed as the contour of itself reflected in the mirror. In this sense, any therapy that is based exclusively on quantitative data on body image aiming at its adequacy is at least questionable. According to Neves et al.,<sup>19</sup>

[...] the lack of theoretical deepening of the concept of body image and the understanding of the scope of the various methodological paths already available lead to mistaken statements such as: "it is impossible to assess body image" or "there are body image disorders that need to be fixed". Since body image is a singular, dynamic and multifaceted construct, it is essential to know the limits of the data obtained (p. 376).

Although it is possible to evaluate certain aspects of body image, it is necessary to be rigorous and careful in the use made of this small portion that can be captured through scales and questionnaires. Any preventive or prophylactic recommendation has the same fate, as there is no way to predict and prevent the psychological consequences that each individual experiences in life. In the field of Food and Nutrition, we can see that there is an intense search for a practice that makes it possible to achieve the ideal, lean and healthy body associated with equally ideal and healthy eating behaviors and habits. This is the danger that often finds support in research that is aimed at gaining knowledge, but, after all, appears to be normative and limiting.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Science and research work in favor of life. In the field of Food and Nutrition, it is quite the same, and we seek to build parameters for the good practice of nutritionists, whose training must be humanistic, generalist and critical, in addition to allowing for the understanding of the social, cultural, behavioral and psychological determinants of the health-disease process<sup>28</sup>. In this sense, the present research presents conceptual elements that favor the broadening of the understanding of this precious concept that is widely used by health professionals in addressing issues related to the body that exceed the biological aspect.

When looking for a nutritionist, doctor or physical education professional who bases their work on the complaint of "dissatisfaction with body image", an individual should not be detached from his/her environment. The individual's complaint is not limited to this demand, and even though the professional cannot handle the social aspect as a whole, it is important to be warned about the extension of this demand and what the professional can offer as a service and satisfaction. In a contemporary consumption logic, the issue is not only demand, but also the permanent creation of new product offers that aim to generically address all diversity of problems, but not for everyone.

When thinking about the construction of body image, we must then incorporate the production of subjectivity related to the body in its individual perspectives (psychical motivations, desires and instincts), collective (of disciplining and docilizing bodies) and institutional (with scientifically proven speeches). The understanding of the concept, however, should not be limited to any specific discipline or dominant field of knowledge, in order to determine its application by other instances, based on an explanation of univocal causality. In this sense, Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, Psychoanalysis or Nutrition are unable to understand and/or clarify the complexity of body image based on an explanation that restricts the discussion to a single pole of production of meanings or a binary model of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This is too little to cover the complexity of the phenomenon and the disciplines are limited to deal with the complexity and multiplicity of approaches to the body.

According to Ferreira,<sup>29</sup> “the production of meanings about the body image and the subject's perception of his/her own body is, at the same time, individual and collective, it operates in the social aspect, but is not limited to it” (p. 480). Thus, the approaches to body image identified in the *Revista de Nutrição* and discussed above are insufficient and limited to account for the complexity of the phenomenon. The plurality of perspectives that influence the construction of meanings about body image is inter- and transdisciplinary. Reducing it to a simple scheme of satisfaction and dissatisfaction is not perceiving what is the richest aspect in human beings, but ignoring subjectivity, sensitivity, and condemning the subject to a reductionism that imprisons him/her in an extremely poor web of senses and debatable effectiveness.

According to this expanded perspective, in which the body and the body image appear as a psychical arrangement that allows each individual to place himself/herself in the world with his/her body and the image he/she has of it, we can consider the importance of studies that consider approaches to eating disorders and obesity that do not start exclusively from the assessment of body image. Bearing in mind that body image is not something fixed, but an identity reference that undergoes changes and alterations throughout life,<sup>30</sup> it is necessary to consider it in its complexity to advance scientific knowledge, amplifying the qualitative aspects of the approaches.

Individuals' mental health and quality of life are directly related to body image, and their senses and meanings must be balanced and reconstructed over time and guided by each person's experiences. Without this theoretical, clinical and methodological advance, we will continue to produce more evidence without, however, producing new realities.

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### Contributors

Lucena BBV, Seixas CM, Ferreira FR and Prado SD collaborated in the idealization and conception of the study, in the writing and in the final approval of the manuscript for submission.

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