



Children's nutrition from the perspective of parents: A qualitative research

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Abstract

This article presents the research results of a qualitative study on children's nutrition from the perspective of parents. The research question I started from was the following: In what way do parents contribute to the construction of their children's food consumption behaviors? In order to answer this question, I used a qualitative survey based on 20 interviews conducted using the semi-structured interview technique (Kauffman, 2008). Therefore, in the following, I will analyze in detail the themes that constitute the symbolic universe of parents regarding children's food consumption, as I discovered them following the research interviews. Likewise, each thematic category will be theoretically anchored with the aim of building a sociological explanation both for the way parents construct their representation of children's food consumption, and for the existence of their food consumption practices.

Keywords

Food behaviour construction; Medicalization; Family;

Introduction

Eating habits are especially formed in the interactional setting of the family (Kaufman, 2010; Lupton, 1998). Social interactions take place in social settings and are a function of time. So, the social-family space is the place where, during childhood, through socialization mechanisms, children make the transition from eating as a necessity to social eating governed by a series of norms, rules and constraints, which later they will internalize to a

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large extent. In other words, in Bourdieu's (1984) terms, childhood is the period when individuals form their eating habit which becomes embedded in their social identity. This happens because "we continue to associate food, especially food served to children, with the private sphere of the home" (Best, 2017, p X). Some of these norms and rules are visible, such as sitting at the table, the way food is served and eaten, and others are invisible, but deeply imprinted in the culture of generations and inherited, without realizing it, by the future adult. Thus, eating, as a social practice, is characterized by a high degree of cultural inertia, a fact noticed by some authors: "It is said that the tastes of a society regarding food have undergone an imperceptible change over time, much more slowly than others aspects of culture" (Mennell, 2017, p. 130). In other words, in general, it can be said that the methods, the ways of eating and the content of food have changed slowly over the ages. However, one of the major changes in eating behaviour was determined by modernity (Conrad 2007; Mennell, 2017).

Specifically, from a sociological perspective, modernity influenced eating practices through two important factors: 1) with the industrial revolution, societies began to be increasingly characterized by mobility (Sheller and Urry, 2006), therefore cultural and food exchanges intensified; 2) the emergence and widespread imposition of biomedicine as a science, an institution that began to exert its hegemony over the body (Conrad, 2007; Le Breton, 2009) gave rise to standards considered scientific in terms of eating practices. Thus, on the one hand, the mobility of people and goods at the level of societies increased (Sheller and Urry, 2006), and on the other hand, a process of "medicalization of society" arose, expressed in the emergence of a tendency to often define non-medical problems "in terms of illness and condition" (Conrad, 2007, p. 4). These two structural factors had a massive influence on shaping bodies, changing consumption habits and tastes as social forms of expression of eating behaviours. These processes are in full progress today and are being accelerated by discoveries in the area of technology and medical sciences. In this sense, Bauman and May (2008, p. 141) stated: "...who knows which of the foods now recommended by experts will not be condemned as harmful in the future?"

Thus, over the past few decades, as argued by Bauman and May (2008), the meanings regarding the benefits and risks of consuming various types of food have changed a lot, sometimes even radically. The change in the medical discourse also results in a change in food consumption behaviour, but in the process of communication between the medical world and the patients there are also many interposed sources of information. Nutrition influencers are now very prominent social figures who stand between the medical world and individuals, in some cases producing a jamming of the official medical discourse.

It is expected that the change in the medical discourse will result in the change of food consumption behaviour, but there are also many sources of erroneous information in the process of communication between the medical world and patients. This makes the medical discourse often lose its confidence, people building their food and body projects based, often, on their own searches, so it is the result of agentivity in relation to the dissonances related to what is good or bad about food consumption.

Bauman and May (2008) highlighted how medical recommendations change over time. These changes in medical discourse also have implications for the social construction of eating practices and, implicitly, of bodies. In relation to children's eating practices, at least two questions become relevant: how to change the way in which people construct food consumption behaviour both for themselves and for their children, and how to change the perception of traditional medicine that does not seem to be able to fully offer solutions to patients' problems, thus opening the way to replace these solutions by alternative medical practices qualified by biomedicine as non-scientific (Rughinis and Vasile, 2016).

Starting from the previously stated distinction between eating and socially constructed "eating", we formulated the following research questions: How is children's eating behaviour constructed? What, when, how and with whom do children eat? How did the medical discourse influence the social construction of food consumption and implicitly the body projects of individuals? Amy Best (2017) believes that not only what children eat is important, but especially the fact that "we need to understand what food represents for children and how the social context forms these meanings" (Best, 2017, pX). There is a complex relationship between social identity and food consumption. Thus, studying the ways in which eating practices are socially constructed in children can help us understand how eating practices and meanings are incorporated into adult social identity.

Methodological considerations

In this research, we started from the assumption that the family represents the social space in which eating habits are formed and consolidated, so the environment in which what we call food consumption behaviour is constantly negotiated and renegotiated. With these ideas in mind, I developed an interview guide based on which I conducted 20 interviews with people who have dependent children, that is, with fathers and mothers. Therefore, I will describe and analyze the following categories of themes: the relationship between food consumption and the stages of children's development; how "good food" and "bad food" are represented; natural food representations; how the first eating habits are constructed; time and food - meal times, weekend meal. Thus, the question I sought to answer throughout this paper is: What are the ways in which children's eating practices are constructed interactively and socially? The interviews were conducted with the people responsible for preparing the meal in the house. In order to capture the diversity of subjective constructions underlying food consumption behaviour, I used several sociodemographic criteria, including the residential environment and the level of education.

Food consumption in children in the various stages of development

As I stated, in this research I started from the idea that eating practices develop and are shaped within the family and at the same time expand the sphere of independence as the child goes through the various stages of development from baby to adolescent. If in the first years of life children are totally dependent on their parents both from the point of

view of food and from the point of view of physical, bodily help, as they move towards the period of adolescence, they “start to make choices within a behavioural ecology that was not available to them during childhood” (Rodgers and Bard, 2009, p. 26). Thus, in the first years of life, parents are very careful with their children’s nutrition. There are opinions that express the existence of even excessive attention from parents, especially mothers, in the first two or three years of life, when the child is perceived as very vulnerable. Then, this attention becomes more nuanced. Thus “...I had a period when I took into account every (A/N: medical) advice, that is, up to 2 years...” (Ana, 45 years old, 15-year-old boy). So, as we can see, there is also that barrier of 2-3 years where the child must follow some strict dietary rules, to help his growth and development. Analyzing in depth the statements of the interviewee, we notice that, although she does not mention that she still uses the advice of specialists, she is no longer so rigid in the application of medicalized rules.

“Good” food versus “Bad” food

There are many views on what is “Good” or “Bad” for food consumption. First of all, we must specify that, in order to be eaten, a product must be edible, so it must meet some scientific standards that allow manufacturers to market it. But “edibility” is at the same time the result of a social definition. In this sense, people develop a rich imaginary about what is appropriate for human consumption and what is not. From a legal point of view, there are regulations that specify which foods and ingredients are suitable for human consumption. Thus, there is an approved list at the level of the European Union, a list that is approved by EFSA (European Food Safety Authority), a body that deals with regulations in the field of food safety, attached to the European Commission. But, when we come to discuss about “good” and “bad” food, the points of view differ greatly on this axis. On one side of the axis are those who produce these foods or those who regulate them and who claim that they are suitable for human consumption. On the other hand, there are nutritionists, consumer associations, doctors or simple consumers who state that some of the foods and/or ingredients declared edible and legally sold on the market are practically harmful for human consumption, leading to a degradation of the body over time.

Thus, there is a whole series of foods that are considered more or less dangerous. Obviously, things are not black and white and contain many shades of grey, different from one person to another or even for the same person, depending on the context in which the interaction takes place within the feeding process. Nutrition plays an essential role in the bodily existence of the individual. However, we notice that the body’s relation to food is done differently in the multiple stages of the individual’s development. Thus, if in children nutrition has a character accentuated towards the ontogenetic development of the individual, as they advance in age, nutrition acquires a strong character of risk that is the basis of the appearance and development of diseases. Even within these limits, the range of opinions regarding children’s nutrition goes from a more relaxed view on nutrition and implicitly on the body, as we can see: “it is important not to make serious mistakes... to make serious mistakes means that he gets sick, to have diagnosed problems with the stomach, gastritis....I don’t know, he is overweight, he is obese...” (Claudia, 43 years old,

14-year-old boy) to a strict organization of meals and their composition “that is, they eat from soup, the second course, the breakfast is quite varied...” (Ana). As it can be seen, an important element of configuring a food consumption behaviour of parents for their children is today the fear of disease and obesity. These two elements generate reflexivity and orientation towards the configuration of food strategies to avoid or cope with disease and obesity.

But let's return to the “good-bad” dichotomy. Obviously, this dichotomy has many variations depending on the subjective construction that each individual has developed over time. However, beyond these individual differences, we must note that this construct also has certain regularities given by sex, age, social class, education, culture, etc. To better define this we should also bring taste into the discussion. Thus, as Deborah Lupton (1998) said, good-bad taste has a strong cultural character. In her book, the author specifies that one of the classical sociologists who spoke about the problem of taste was Pierre Bourdieu who linked the issue of taste to the characteristics of social classes, the latter being a kind of lens of perception and relation to the body. Thus, “the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste and preferences, which it manifests in several ways (for example, its shape, its dimensions, the way to treat and care for it” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 190 apud Lupton, 1998, p. 95).

The so-called “processed products” are part of the social construction of what is bad from a food point of view. Many consumers share this negative image about processed products even though they continue to consume these types of foods. Here is what one of the persons I talked to said in an interview: “...in the salami, in fact, in the minced meat there are all the leftovers, so it's not like there's a ham or a muscle meat or a... which is harder for the “producers” to improve (Ana, 45 years old, 15-year-old boy). In this narrative context, the expression “to improve” has behind it the idea that the product becomes tastier, therefore more attractive for consumption, through the use of food additives that enhance its taste, but at the same time represents a shift away from the idea of natural, therefore suitable for consumption. Also, one of the general ideas promoted by nutritionists is that, in nutrition, the excess of any kind is not recommended. As Simona Tivadar says in her book “Medicine, nutrition and good mood”: “...as if there was no difference between use and abuse” (Tivadar, 2017, p. 30). On the other hand, it is recommended to eat fruits and vegetables, everyone knows that. Obviously, fruits and vegetables are important for nutrition, as are fats in certain quantities, but in recent years, fruits and vegetables can be even harmful, containing a series of pesticides, insecticides and other substances “specific to modern agriculture”, which remain in the soil and in fruits for long periods of time. Obviously, in this regard regulations have also begun to appear in Romania, including regulations warning the consumer, for example, not to eat the peel of certain fruits. But what if they are cherries? Even in these cases, timid signs appeared in supermarkets warning that the peel in question is unfit for human consumption.

Returning to charcuterie, and especially to processed and mixed ones, it seems that they represent a category frequently used by interlocutors to emphasize a product with potential danger to human health. Thus “charcuterie is not good... it is made I don't know

how long ago, there are all kinds of spices, all kinds of these in them...” (Ioana, 42 years old, 8-year-old girl, 4-year-old boy).

As a conclusion, the good food-bad food dichotomy has a strong subjective character constructed by each individual respondent, depending on the circles, groups and information they hold. In fact, this dichotomy has changed frequently, including when we talk about the media or nutritionists.

Natural food

In the modern world, where intensive agriculture is done using pesticides, herbicides, insecticides, soil disinfectants, etc., finding and using untouched products is a real challenge. Even products considered natural and healthy, such as bee honey, may contain substances with which, for example, sunflower has been sprayed in agriculture. That is precisely why, lately, terms like natural, bio, ecological or organic have come to “certify” the fact that the products we consume are produced without the use of these substances, or anyway, with their use in a much smaller amount or derived from nature. In an excellent research, in her paper “The Taste of the Place” (“Gustul Locului”), Monica Stroe makes an analysis of the dimensions and situation of organic ecological agriculture in the Târnava area in Transylvania. She presents here both the positive sides of practicing this kind of agriculture, as well as the impediments and problems faced by those who practice it. There are many elements captured by her in this book and I will detail some of them. One of the remarks highlighted by her is that “the confusion or synonymy between organic agriculture and traditional agriculture has been a constant finding of research” (Stroe, 2016, p.227). But, from my point of view, this confusion is generated by a historical imaginary of production and consumption, the word “traditional” suggesting an image from a not very defined past in which agriculture did not involve the use of chemical compounds. When talking about organic, natural, ecological products, it has come to the point where miraculous properties are attributed to them, even though they are just a simple food. This was also noted by Belton (2003, p. 9), who says: “The way in which organic food is grown does not of course protect it from spoilage, but the fact that it is grown organically seems to imply to some people that the process rather offers to food special properties similar to food that has been ritually blessed or has magical properties”. With all the exaggerations often built as a marketing element of such products, we must still note that there is a concern of people to eat healthier. Thus, besides supermarkets, one of the sources of “natural” consumption is represented by local producers. And when it comes to safety, the safest products are considered to be those grown by yourself or family members, most often grandparents. For some people, grandparents are the foundation of a healthy nutrition. Here is what a participant in the interview related about the food obtained from her grandparents: “...and that egg from the countryside, from the yard, from the grandparents” (Ana). It seems that grandparents, especially if they live in the countryside, are the guarantor of healthy food. Thus, the meat, eggs, fruits and vegetables from the grandparents are the guarantor of a healthy nutrition untouched or very little touched by chemical products. Moreover, the rural environment and the products coming from

Romanian farmers are the guarantor, even if it is often not true that these products are natural or as close to natural as possible. Thus, here is what a participant in the interviews says: “My husband still has some outbursts. We don't go to Mega...we go to the market....we don't buy beautiful apples, we buy small wrinkled ones and the taste is infinitely better, we don't buy those tomatoes, we go to market to buy tomatoes” (Claudia, 43 years old, 14-year-old boy). In this type of discourse, the market represents, in contrast to the supermarket, the place where we “still find” untouched products which are as close to natural as possible. We also notice the phrase “wrinkled apples” based on the popular representation that has at its centre the idea that smaller, more wrinkled vegetables and fruits, possibly with traces of worms, are the ones that are natural, a construction that is based on an intrinsic truth. The reasoning that constitutes the essence of this discourse is that if the apple has traces of worms it has not been sprayed with insecticides, or if the eggplant is smaller, all kinds of fertilizers have not been used to make it grow to abnormal sizes. We observe from all these accounts that the construction of a healthy product is based on the tradition and the countryside, grandparents and peasant landscapes, “bucolic” landscapes, as Monica Stroe (2016) calls them, landscapes perceived socially as not yet altered by the consequences of the social modernization process.

Family - the place where the first eating habits are built

The family is, in addition to the individual, the closest circle that influences food consumption, followed by the rest of the circles such as friends, colleagues, acquaintances and society as a whole. Therefore, the family framework becomes the closest link that connects the individual with the society, being also the framework in which the bodily meanings attributed to food are constructed and reconstructed. “In the context of the family – states Lupton (1996, p. 37) - the social dimensions of nutrition and those of emotion are especially linked to each other. Food beliefs and behaviours are developed from early childhood and are closely related to the family unit”. Thus, the family framework becomes the social space where the individual learns the first meanings attributed to food, learns what is good and what is bad in terms of food consumption, learns meal times, learns rules regarding nutrition and its meaning for his body, in other words, they “get familiar” with different types of food in different social and cultural contexts. In Bourdieu's terms (1984), the family represents the social field in which the eating habit is formed. Each one of us remembers, with good and bad, the meals we had in the bosom of the family. We also think of grandparents who represent the extended family and who leave their mark on the children both indirectly through the parents, but also directly during holidays and weekends. This appears in the accounts of several interviewees. Here is what one of the interviewees says: “... many of the table rules ... he also got from his grandparents, since during holidays and when he was little in those years when he didn't go to kindergarten, he grew up with his grandparents” (Ana, 45 years old, 15-year-old boy). In other words, even under the pressure of high food mobility, food consumption behaviours and practices are constantly changing and are intertwined with the biographies and history of the

society. The relative stability of food consumption practices that becomes part of social identity is built in close relationship with family members.

The importance of the family environment for the development of eating habits and for the formation of bodily food consumption projects is also invoked by nutritionists: “this happens because: “parents are the only life model of the child until the age of 10-14 years, you deserve this unconditional admiration, it is priceless” (Tivadar, 2017, p. 45). Here is what a participant in the interview says: “I mean, if he saw that this thing is done in the house, he slowly starts to learn” (Ana, 45 years old, 15-year-old boy). At the same time, the first rules regarding food and its influence on our body are learned within the family. Here we learn how to eat, what to eat and why we do it, when to eat and how we as individuals relate to food and our bodies. One of the rules of a healthy nutrition is diversity and moderation: “... every day, every day of the week, breakfast looks different” (Ana, 45 years old, 15-year-old boy). In this phrase we notice two distinct elements regarding the organization of the child’s meal. First of all, we notice the constant “breakfast” that is served every day, something that denotes an element of stability and organization of meals. This also has a structuralist dimension because serving breakfast depends on moments such as parents leaving for work or children for school. Secondly, we notice the fact that breakfast is diverse, “every day...it looks different” as a constant of the fact that diversity represents an element that is the basis of a healthy nutrition. However, from the perspective of dramaturgical theory (Goffman, 2003), we can distinguish the rules related to food consumption that, in the family, act on children from the outside, as structural elements and the performance of eating. Many times, children do not agree with these rules, there can be deviations and, in some situations, these deviations are observed and accepted by the parents precisely with the aim of emphasizing the importance of the rules: “...there were rules that were broken knowingly exactly so that you don’t forbid everything” (Ana, 45 years old, 15-year-old boy). In other words, every now and then a small deviation from the rule helps us to increase the force of the rule. We will see later that there are certain situations and social contexts in which these rules regarding food consumption are broken in various proportions. Thus, on weekends or holidays, the possibility of these rules being broken is greater. All these social rules of consumption built within the family are related to the way parents represent their children’s bodies and their own bodies. Within these representations, an important element is the fear of disease, which becomes an important factor in disciplining and regulating food consumption practices.

Meal times, weekend meal

In an article on the sociology of sleep published in 1993, Brian Taylor showed us that the performance of sleep has many conditionings and constraints. Thus, “the manner in which sleep is commonly conceived will depend on the individual’s social location and their economic function” (Taylor, 1993, p. 468). Drawing a parallel with those detailed by Taylor in this article, we can show that this also happens in the case of eating behaviour. There are a number of conditions of economic nature, social class and organization of activities

that condition the eating practice. In this paragraph, I will refer to two of these conditionings, namely: the time and place where the feeding process takes place. Thus, if in the case of babies, the activity of feeding, just like sleep, is “a necessary activity” (Taylor, 1993, p. 466), which does not depend too much on a predetermined societal schedule, being carried out exactly when it is needed and where it is necessary, as it develops, the individual is subjected to external pressures and regulations that shape its feeding process. If in the past people's feeding schedule was mainly based on the sequence of days and nights, with modernity, this has changed. Other factors have also entered the social arena according to which the meal times are disciplined. Thus, parents' jobs, the school schedule, breaks, shop opening hours are just some of the elements that began to mark and govern the feeding process. This primary view is the structuralist perspective in which “societies are considered to be largely consensual, predictable and stable, supported by the moral order enforced by cultural and social systems” (Lupton, 1996, p. 8). However, a social constructionist approach is necessary “to understand the ways in which food preferences develop and are reproduced as sociocultural phenomena” (Lupton, 1996, p. 12). Therefore, I will analyze the way in which these constraints shape the eating behaviour of individuals, but the main focus will be on how these behaviours are constructed and permanently changed and how they influence the ways in which individuals relate to the feeding process and their own bodies.

We can observe two specific elements that characterize food consumption behaviours and which, often, can also represent poles in terms of the healthy-unhealthy food consumption axis and the family-friends-society axis. One of these specific times is the weekend, which represents the time when the family gets together, or at least the time when there are the greatest chances for the family to get together. Corresponding to this social time, as some of the subjects state, we have “...weekend meals” (Ana, 45 years old, 15-year-old boy), meals that are different from weekday meals, because the time available is greater, and perhaps even more important is the fact that these meals are made in the family circle, that circle that represents the basis of individual constructions regarding subsequent food consumption. Even for those families in which, due to the lack of time during the week, the food comes from outside sources, the weekend represents the period of the week where these behaviours change: “on the weekend, usually, ...we cook ...and at lunch we eat what we cooked ... and when the reproaches hit us, we cook soup ...” (Claudia, 43 years old, 14-year-old boy). In this case, one can observe both the intimate, family setting where these activities take place, and a moment of reflexivity regarding one's own body, in Crossley's (2006) terms, regarding the categories of food used. Changes in dietary practices become even more visible during holidays and vacations, periods of time when most of the barriers, rules and restrictions are, if not eliminated, at least greatly diminished in importance: “... but now that we have been on vacation he also ate burgers, chips...yes” (Claudia, 43 years old, 14-year-old boy). Even for people with a rigorous food program and reflective with their own body, the holidays represent the period when, apparently, if the body relaxes physically, it is also allowed to consume products that are in no way recommended by doctors and nutritionists, but which are desired.

What are we cooking today? Meal planning

When planning the meals for the next period, several situations can be identified and there is a permanent negotiation between the agentivity of individuals and external pressures. Thus, when we talk about small children, the elderly or people who have certain diseases (example: allergies, diabetes), the possibility of building a specific meal is strongly subject to medicalization. Then, as I mentioned before, young children are strongly restricted in terms of the types of menus available. We can say that there is even a kind of, let's call it, "hysteria" of the parents that takes the measurement, analysis and way of cooking the products to an extreme, in the case of some of them.

But what happens in most cases when we are dealing with children without health problems? How is the menu of the day or of the following days constructed and negotiated? Are the children involved or does the entire responsibility fall on the one who prepares the meal? In these cases, as far as I found from the interviews, there is a permanent negotiation between the child and the parents, which can sometimes have a coercive character, depending on the given situation. Thus, Elena (63 years old), grandmother of three grandchildren (13-year-old boy, 11-year-old boy, 4-year-old girl), declares: "I cook or ask them what they want so that they don't go to fast food restaurants or to buy something else" (Elena). Thus, in this case, we can see that cooked food takes precedence over that which can be bought ready-made. To avoid this, the grandmother cooks for the children what they want and consults them about the menu. Of course, we can't know if what she cooks is objectively better than what can be bought. This construction of ways of assigning food possibilities makes the grandmother give in to a certain healthy bodily project, negotiating a middle way with her grandchildren. The phrase "I ask them what they want" shows us that there may be dishes that are considered not the healthiest (example: French fries), but which from her point of view are better than those obtained commercially, since she believes that they contain unhealthy elements: "What do they put in the shawarma? Meat and French fries made a month ago and that mayonnaise that is spoiled" (Elena, 63 years old). We note here the way in which the subject contrasts cooked food with bought food, constructing a positive discourse for cooked food. First of all, we notice the distrust regarding the ingredients used. Without making it clear, we realize that what she uses in cooking is better than what is bought. Secondly, the use of the exaggeration "a month ago" (obviously untrue) shows that what is produced at home, on the spot, is anyway better than what is bought, in her representation.

Two ideas consistently emerged from the research: firstly, the constant struggle of the one who makes the food (mainly the mothers) to discover a dish that is accepted by the children, but that also responds to the food project assumed. Secondly, the negotiation of dishes should be noted, so that there is reconciliation between the possibilities and abilities of the one who cooks and the desires of the one who eats, in this case the children. In many cases, the cook is left alone when faced with the decision, failing to obtain relevant answers to help support the decision. That is precisely why, for example, Teodora "used to ask them what they would like to eat so that they would also help her with what to cook"

(Teodora, 34 years old, 6-year-old boy, 4-year-old boy). We notice here the permanent struggle of the parent who has to equalize the children's desires, the possibilities to cook, the existence of certain ingredients and, lastly, but perhaps most importantly, the approach of the food project built for children through the way of cooking.

As I observed, there are a lot of possibilities and nuances on the scale of "the food is entirely cooked to the chef's liking" and "the food is entirely cooked to the eater's liking", in this case, children. There are constant negotiations and constructions within the family regarding the ways and possibilities of making meals. Even within the same family there are frequent changes of situation. An eloquent example in this respect is provided by Gabriela. She talks about the ways in which the menu is created and mentions: "yes, I ask her what she wants to eat if I have more alternatives, if I don't, I don't ask her anymore, I put it in front of her and that's it. For more complex dishes, I don't involve her at all, because I do according to what I have in the fridge...but I know what she likes and what she doesn't like, and naturally I take that into account." (Gabriela, 46 years old, 15-year-old girl). We notice that even if what is cooked is not according to the child's stated wishes, her opinion is still taken into account. This fact shows us that the ways in which food is negotiated and made at home are the result of a process of joint construction carried out over time within the family, a construction influenced at a wider level by friends, colleagues, society. It is very likely that the expression used by this mother, "I do according to what I have in the fridge", means in itself that what is in the fridge also takes into account these common constructions. It is implied from the context that the ingredients available in the refrigerator take into account the common food projects, are an integral part of them. There won't be a brand new ingredient in that fridge. And even if there is a new ingredient, this is an element of a new construction negotiated within the family, a construction that can arise on the one hand from the need to diversify the menu, and on the other hand as a result of the influence of other food circles, such as: friends or society as a whole.

Conclusions

Eating and the body project are essential elements of family life in particular, but also of social life in general. The two concepts make sense only in the context offered by society and are built on the basis of the interactions of social actors on the different "stages" on which they play their role, whether we speak of the narrow stage of the family or the wider stages of friends, relatives, colleagues, neighbours or society as a whole. For most parents, children are the central axis of the construction of food consumption behaviour. In general, the food and bodily projects thought by parents for their children are projects focused on the concept of "healthy body", a concept which, as can be noted throughout the paper, has a subjective character for parents, but is built in close relation with social frameworks. This subjective character is also fuelled by the fact that biomedicine fails to keep up with people's expectations and to provide solutions to all health problems, although medicine is the scientific field in which great progress has been made lately (Le Breton, 2009). Nevertheless, the tendency to medicalize the society (Conrad, 2007) has also implicitly

extended to food consumption, there have also been numerous twists and turns in the field of nutrition that have raised many question marks in relation to this field of science. In this respect, an example is homeopathy, which, although it has no scientific basis, manages to attract many followers. On the other hand, the subjective character was fuelled by marketing campaigns, by the unprecedented proliferation of the circulation of information that allowed both the circulation of scientific information, therefore verified by studies, as well as of pseudoscientific or non-scientific information. Entire industries are known to rely on at least questionable information about the products they market. Thus, children's first food consumption behaviours are achieved by reporting to the parental authority, but, often, we observe a double measure in their behaviour. We have also identified cases in which parents do not respect the food consumption behaviour "recommended" by doctors for children. When we talk about healthy food projects that obviously aim for a healthy body for children, we must note that there are, in this society of risk, foods considered good and healthy and foods considered less good or even bad from the point of view of food consumption. A paradox in this sense is given by charcuterie, which although is almost unanimously seen as less beneficial food for health, but tends to be used by most parents due to the ease of use in sandwiches for the food packs that parents make for their children for kindergarten or school.

Starting from the good food - bad food dichotomy, we can see that, from the point of view of all respondents, good food is the one that comes closest to what is perceived as natural. However, we observe here, in most interviewees, a large dose of mistrust when it comes to natural, in the sense that modern natural also contains many other toxic elements. There were respondents who stated that even organic products are not what they should be, because they perceive that this is very difficult to achieve, and producers deviate from the standards set by the society for these products. But when we talk about the rest of the products that are not part of this category, most parents are aware that they contain compounds that are harmful to health (for instance, pesticides, stimulants, mercury – in the case of fish, etc.). A separate category is represented by people who live in rural areas. In these cases, self-consumption represents an important share of the total consumption. They perceive the fact that consuming products from their own household is better, healthier because they have control over their production. We thus observe how, in the case of these subjects, the justification of healthy food consumption behaviour is built on the basis of self-consumption, even if in many cases chemicals are used to treat the plants or feed purchased or treated with pesticides and herbicides is used.

The research emphasizes that the meanings of nutrition are socially constructed and an important role in the configuration of these meanings is played by culinary interactions within the family, at least in the early stages of children's lives. Then, to these habits are added new elements resulting from the social exchanges that children make once they come under the influence of other social frameworks such as: relatives, schoolmates, friends, community, society. The family is the social framework where the first eating habits are built, the social space where the first form of disciplining the individual and preparing him for society take place. Thus, the child incorporates these habits from the domestic environment, and later reconfigures, in the spirit of Bourdieu's

theory (1984), his food habits with his entry into other social fields. But what happens when the habits that are formed within the family are not to the children's liking? In this case, as I encountered during the interviews, it can happen that in the moments when they are temporarily not under the coercive pressure of their parents, they break them or, having reached the adult stage – as some of the parents told me with reference to their relationship with their own parents – to end up not reproducing for their own child habits that seemed constraining to them in childhood.

An important element in disciplining children's food consumption is represented by the meal times. The meal times function as an external influence on eating practices. Thus, to a large extent, during the week, the meal times are dependent on the cycle and planning of other daily activities. In these situations, in general, breakfast, so the first meal of the day, is eaten quickly, before the children leave for school or the parents for work. We observe how these social constructs, school and work, shape the way meals are served during the week. Going further, lunch is the meal at which the family gets together the least or not at all during the week. Thus, children eat a sandwich at school or kindergarten, or eat at the canteen or, if they are at home, consume what their grandmother offers them, while parents eat at work, in town with colleagues or simply on the street. Dinner is usually the daily meal at which the whole family gathers, and this itself, often during the week, is taken on the run, with dishes that are made quickly, consisting of sandwiches or snacks that family members often consume in front of the television. As I discovered during the research, we can talk about a tendency to individualize meals during the week, even at moments when all family members are gathered in the household, as is the case of dinners.

In a theoretical sense, it can be said that the weekend is the period of the week when "body reflexivity" (Crossley, 2006) in relation to children's nutrition is most strongly activated and acts, in a way, as a moral pressure to offer children a healthy nutrition. Therefore, escaping from the pressure of social time (Sorokin and Merton, 1937 apud Stein, 2012, p. 335) which is constructed (Flaherty, 1991, p. 76) and structured in strong connection with work, parents enter into another type of time they become more aware of children's bodies, of the importance of nutrition for children's healthy development. It is an important moment when the child becomes a social being and a body at the same time. Entering this time that can be called family time, socially centred on the configuration of relationships and parental roles, people reflect on the bodily projects of family members. The weekend seems to be the event that recreates the historical role of eating together, that of creating and strengthening social bonds.

Regarding the availability of products, although for different reasons, we eat almost anything, anytime. The man from today's societies eats whatever and whenever, and that because of the abundance and immediate availability of food. We practically bump into food at every step and have permanent "snacks". In connection with these, I encountered the following question at most of the subjects: "what are we cooking today?". This question reflects the ongoing negotiation between the cook and the rest of the family. The negotiation occurs on the one hand due to the ability of the cook to do certain things, but also because parents often pursue a healthy eating behaviour for children, which often ends up being in contradiction with what children want. Some foods that are liked by

children end up not matching the parents' representations of what children should eat, thus deviating from the parental food project built around the idea of a healthy body. Things begin to change when children grow up and escape from the influence of parental dietary rules and come under the influence of other social frameworks. For instance, in the school environment, children are exposed to fast food. In many cases, as we have found, going to fast food is not necessarily due to the fact that these products are perceived as good, but rather due to the influence of colleagues and the image built by marketing for these products. Likewise, another important factor for children's deviation from the consumption norms in the family, especially in the case of teenagers, is probably the sense of rebelliousness determined by the teenagers' need to be in opposition to their parents.

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