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## ASSUMPTIONS OF FOOD BEHAVIOR AND THE RELEVANCE OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY

<sup>1</sup>Romano Deluque Júnior, <sup>2</sup>Cesar Augusto Marton and <sup>3</sup>Bianca dos Santos Cara

<sup>1</sup>Psychologist, Master student of the Postgraduate Program in Psychology at Universidade Católica Dom Bosco (UCDB)

<sup>2</sup>Graduating in Psychology at Universidade para o Desenvolvimento do Estado e da Região do Pantanal (UNIDERP),

<sup>3</sup>Psychologist, Specialist in Psychopedagogy from ULBRA

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\*Corresponding author: Romano Deluque Júnior

### ABSTRACT

For a healthy diet, mental health is a real and necessary assumption. Therefore, it is noted that the individual's eating attitude becomes even more interesting when it is observed that the personal selection of food becomes more dependent on psychic and social aspects than on the physiological needs themselves. The purpose of this article is to shed light on the aspects that influence and modulate the human food motivation process. From this perspective, it is possible to obtain the understanding that the motivational variables about the process of food change would be constituted by a multiplicity of relevant factors, among which, psychic, socio-cultural, economic, bio-physiological, and even religious. In the same agreement, it would be up to the professionals involved in the attention to food health, which would include, therefore, the nutrition professional, being attentive to the links and existing interdisciplinary influences on eating behavior, as they present themselves, as basic assumptions before an intervention and efficient and integrated food therapy.

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## INTRODUCTION

For healthy eating, mental health is a real and necessary assumption. There is an evident correlation between cognitive, social and emotional aspects, together with a balanced and successful diet, so it is possible to observe the importance of health-promoting and disease-preventing habits, and, with a special impact, eating habits. According to Viana (2002), it is common knowledge that habits already acquired can only be transformed if, together with them, the adoption of new behaviors concerning the adult and, especially, the child. Therefore, the success or failure regarding a certain behavior change concerns the psychological and social parameters that revolve around the individual in search of that same change (VENDRAMINE & BENVENUTI, 2013). Thus, it is necessary, therefore, a careful look in order to understand the phenomenon of food, from a holistic point of view, which also includes, in that same equation, the psychic and socio-cultural aspects of its human. It is of great importance that we first know personal beliefs, as well as the social barriers involved concerning the individual's eating process, and in this sense, understand the eating process from a psychological and socio-cultural point of view and know the attitudes, beliefs and other

psychosocial factors that influence this decision-making process seem to be a good start for any nutritional therapy (VIANA, 2002). The individual's eating attitude becomes even more interesting when it is observed that the personal selection of foods becomes more dependent on psychic and social aspects than on the physiological needs themselves. The fact is that eating behavior results from the interaction of environmental factors with psychological and biological variables, therefore, cognition models have a profound influence on the individual's dietary aspects (ASSIS & NAHAS, 1999). From this perspective, it would be possible to obtain the understanding that the motivational variables about the process of food change would go through the following assumptions; occurrence of an unexpected bodily disease or symptom, in itself, or in a family member or friend; information obtained through a nutritionist, or even friends, family or the media; attitudes towards the fed, and last but not least; social reinforcement provided by the new behavior (MIOTTO, 2006; VIANA, 2002). It is possible to observe given the above, the influence of psychosocial aspects is so high, together with the possibility of decision-making that involves changing eating habits, it is a motivated attitude through complex motivational agents, which in turn, act continuously and in crossed ways. In this sense, it is still

impossible to stop correlating food motivation and its respective changes to aspects related to the pleasure and taste of food (JOMORI, PROENÇA & CALVO, 2008). As for the concept of taste, it has a complex meaning, and it becomes a figure of major importance and is based, above all, within the subject, it is considered by this subject, always in the highest regard concerning his individual preferences and values (GADAMER, 1997).

The purpose of this article is to drop light on the aspects that influence and modulate the process of human food change. It is known that this is a complex system of motivations and desires, and that, for science and nutrition professionals, knowledge from the human sciences has a lot to contribute with a view to a broad and comprehensive understanding of these aspects. Psychology as a science is deeply rooted in caring for the human being's mental health, and refers, above all, to the concepts of health and mental illness, which are associated with the individual in the most diverse scenarios of his life. In this context of health and disease, eating habits and customs emerge as a precondition for health promotion and disease prevention. The fact is that, in a two-way street, the knowledge coming from the science of Nutrition has a lot to add to a technical and grounded understanding about human health, which in this context also includes mental health. Corroborating the above, Vianna (2002), exposes that eating behavior is one of the aspects of the lifestyle that, undeniably, has a greater direct influence on health and disease. In this context of eating habits and customs, as well as concerning their respective consequences for the promotion of good health, both the Human Sciences, among them Psychology, as well as the Science of Nutrition, have a lot to complement with the construction of a new way of envisioning the human being, inserted here in his food context, and that one can thus move towards an intervention method whose gaze contemplates the individual in all its complexity and integrality. In a national reality of profound social inequality, and, consequently, a food reality that is less than ideal, a combination of knowledge for the benefit of the human person is eminent and necessary, and cannot therefore be postponed to a merely theoretical and character discussion secondary. Only by reflecting on ethical care, can a change be achieved, both in the private and in the social, in the sense of causing a rethink in the face of the importance of eating behavior, always with a view to physical and mental health of the individual. It is from an attention to food health with a welcoming and integrated look, and from a discussion about a new way of envisioning human complexity, that a pragmatic change can emerge in order to make good and acceptable, what also does well.

**Development:** Faced with the phenomenality of everyday life, psychological factors emerge as a fundamental assumption for changing the individual's lifestyle. It should be noted that factors such as lack of time, overwork, as well as high expectations for professional success have a relevant influence on the individual's psychic subjectivity. It should also be noted, as a factor contrary to the adoption of new habits, the difficult access to more satisfactory behavior and consumption patterns from the health point of view. It is important to note that this variable has a socio-cultural aspect, and therefore, it varies from community to community (ALESSI, 2006). It is possible to perceive, when it comes to eating habits within our social context, that the information about the benefits and harms of a certain group of foods is tangible and existing, which proves the difficulty inherent in this type of change. A

study carried out in the Brazilian Federal District between the years 2008 and 2015 indicates, based on data provided by nutritionists, the prevalence of cultural habits of the patients at the expense of a habitual change towards a more adequate diet in terms of nutrition. Then, as a preponderant factor preventing healthy eating, we mention the precarious living conditions of patients and, equally important, the "lack of interest in change" from these same patients, as well as resistance to change in the same observable context (SILVA *et al.* 2016). From the above, it is possible to obtain the understanding that the factors that influence the act of choice in the face of the "eating" of the individual, are of a cultural, social, economic and psychic order, being that, these same factors cannot, under any circumstances, be seen separately. Sociocultural influences collaborate in the construction of the subject's psyche, and, in a two-way street, they cross and influence each other.

The economic aspects, exert full influence when making decisions about which food to consume and when, not being in any way, isolated figure and immune to sociocultural and psychic crossings, as it is included as a problem of order which, by logical consequence, causes psychological impact. In this sense, income appears as a preponderant factor regarding the human consumption process (DEFANTE, NASCIMENTO & LIMA-FILHO, 2014). It is known that the Brazilian food habit has its origins largely based on influences arising from the wide miscegenation process that occurred in the country, however, the access of Brazilian populations to the desired foods, depends on a much more pragmatic factor, the financial one. A relevant fact is that, due to several factors, among them the lack of money, not all people have access to healthy food and in sufficient quantities regularly, this causes an evident reduction in the quality of life of these individuals. Another point of great relevance is the fact that the low-income population acts along with a tendency to save their money instead of exercising their complete purchasing power concerning food (DEFANTE, NASCIMENTO & LIMA-FILHO, 2014). Such attitudes affect, from a feeling of economic insecurity, the consumption of financially cheaper food, and consequently, of poorer quality. In this context, it is possible to obtain the understanding that the eating habits of a given population, depend, and at the same time, originate, under a food culture that has been developed and apprehended by that same population over the centuries. It is still a process of human formation, where the focus would be to glimpse the process of making choices about food from different socio-cultural groups.

Once considered a product of a cultural result, the food process has anthropological factors to be measured and thought about its respective reality. This means that there is in constant operation, a whole framework of past cultural inheritances, which emerge from food customs originating from these ancient populations. Add that to the fact that our country, Brazil, was built, culturally speaking, under an immense and complex tangle of different cultures, then we can glimpse, a result of eating behavior that is not very simple to analyze and endowed of complex crossings. Thinking about food, in a healthy way, acquires greater relevance when dealing with low-income populations, it is therefore a problem of national scale, and even worldwide, where consumption models are represented by inequalities ranging from insufficiency to waste, the which causes nutritional imbalances (DEFANTE, NASCIMENTO & LIMA-FILHO, 2014). Studying the food motivation of these people means understanding how they are

willing to spend their resources, since they do not have sufficient economic capacity to choose food. It is mainly a question of choices, where psychological and subjective aspects emerge giving voice and time to those same choices. From an analysis that highlights the psychological bias about eating behavior, we can mention several factors that have a major influence on the eating problem, such as depression, anxiety, stress, and unspecified feelings of tension (FRANCA *et al.*, 2012). Such factors of an emotional nature severely damage the interpersonal relationships of the individuals who own them, they are, therefore, psychological matrices of human eating behavior. As an important point of conversion between psychology and eating behavior, there is the issue of overweight and obesity, such a problem, since it is a worldwide concern inherent in the sciences, both in Psychology and Nutrition, you will receive brief attention here. As is known, the excessive and abnormal accumulation of fat is currently considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be a public health problem, it is also a risk factor for several other diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, among others (FRANCE *et al.*, 2012). The eating behavior behind obesity may be related to the excessive consumption of highly energetic foods, such as sugars, salt, fat, and other micronutrients (CARVALHO & MARTINS, 2004).

Nutritionally speaking, the action in the face of obesity must pass, according to the food guide in the Ministry of Health published in 2008, by limiting energy intake from fats, replacing saturated fats with unsaturated fats, eliminating the consumption of trans fat, increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables, whole grains and legumes, as well as limiting the consumption of sugar and sodium. The fact is that, although the effects and losses of obesity are widespread, their rates continue to rise both internally and internationally (FRANCA *et al.* 2012). What has been found is that the individual's adherence to the necessary dietary changes does not depend, at times, on contact with adequate information, but goes beyond that, being largely dependent on volition and desire processes. Behold, Psychology emerges as a fundamental piece to the understanding of such processes. The desired dietary change is only achieved if that same change is at the heart of the individual's will, so that the low success in combating obesity may be related to inadequate intervention strategies and little adept at treating the individual supported in the most just manner. The result can only be less than expected. Research carried out on the topic in the city of Brasília, found that the presence of feelings such as sadness, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, motivation and joy interfere positively or negatively in the change in eating behavior (FRANCA *et al.*, 2012). Such factors have a close connection to emotional factors, so they require adequate and competent attention. The performance of support groups, which are composed of professionals from both the area of Nutrition and Psychology, are important for overcoming such food problems.

The same research also pointed out that important intervention strategies, such as the practice of physical activities, helped to reduce physical and psychological symptoms. The importance of the interdisciplinary team was also emphasized as responsible for stimulating the participation in the proposed treatment, obtaining more effective therapeutic responses. Such results corroborate the idea defended here about the multiplicity of factors behind eating behavior. The presence of the psychic components arises, once again, as a relevant part of

the food problem, and this problem, when seen in general, leads us to the premise that a deep theoretical reflection is necessary. The results obtained from a rethinking about the human's food motivations, would also serve as a basis for an adequate therapy in the field of attention and care of food health (MOREIRA, 2007). This complementation would therefore run through the constant and in-depth academic debate on the topic, which unfortunately does not yet translate into our institutional reality, dictated here in general. Such discussions should not lose sight of the pragmatic ideal for which they are intended, as they must be based on a sense of deep ethical and social concern, the ultimate end of which would always be the promotion of good health to the figure of the human being. The figure of man is attributed sine qua non relevance to the science of Nutrition, which means that such science is above all a branch of knowledge that is intended to serve the human being himself, as well as to support and guide him along with their food weaknesses. It would be correct to say that Nutrition as a science finds its existential justification based on care with the figure of man, as this gives him a sense of existence, and only from the situational concreteness inherent to this man, is that Nutrition it will come to obtain its respective pragmatic and social meaning, that is to say to be useful in the face of a given food situation in a specific case.

The proper intervention in Nutrition is largely dependent on knowledge about the socio-cultural reality in which the patient or client is inserted. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the biological understanding of human eating behavior can and must be complemented by the socio-cultural, economic and psychic dimensions about the human being. Such an articulation of human knowledge would give, to the figure of the nutritionist, effective conditions for the elaboration of an efficient intervention method and aimed at the integrality of the individual. It would be a question of giving full conditions to the nutrition professional, based on the learning of technical-theoretical knowledge, in order to glimpse the phenomenon of changing eating behavior based on its real factual complexity. Taking as a basis, the assumption that man is relegated to the position of major object of the science of Nutrition, we will easily understand the high level of difficulty that exists concerning its understanding. Although it is considered one of the many biological sciences, its social character is undeniable, and therefore, it is delegated to the good professional nutritionist to act responsibly before his maximum object of attention, man. For that, it is necessary to look for looks that transcend the instruments and their limits, and thus start to operate away from the mere biological reductionism (CANESQUI & GARCIA, 2005). For the nutritionist, the task of understanding human eating behavior is a basic objective. It is a complex task that involves borrowing knowledge from other related areas, such as sociology, anthropology and psychology. It is known that it involves a process of freeing self-imposed bonds concerning their scientific knowledge, which is a visible characteristic that refers to many of the sciences that study man, however, the idea of expanding the limits of one's own science with clear objectives to better understand the individual, does not seem a bad path.

## Conclusion

Based on what has been discussed throughout this article, it is possible to highlight the complexity of the human being's food motivation factors. They present themselves as carriers of the

most specific outlines, when we glimpse the psychic, economic and socio-cultural characters involved in the process. Therefore, its understanding is not a simple question, but a dense analytical and interpretative task. At the heart of this same task is the human being, this, in turn, presents itself, as a being that was constituted from a complex scheme of crossings and alterities that made it what it is today, individually speaking. He is thus endowed with a unique personality, so he responds to stimuli in a very personal way, which means that his behavior also has deeply personal characteristics, being far from an exact determinism about that same behavior. These same premises would also apply to the issue of eating behavior. This, because it is an attribution, above all human, would be at the mercy of the relative and the inaccurate, characteristics that are typical of a being moved by subjective desires, which in turn are constituted from a multiplicity of cultural, psychic factors, social, among many others. The fact is that, when dealing with the individual, even in a professional sphere, we are exposed to behavioral variables, which we cannot predict or expect. Such an understanding is important for the nutritionist, mainly because his efforts will, in most cases, be directed towards a change in eating behavior, and the failure to reach his expectations can be frustrating and counterproductive (CARVALHO & MARTINS, 2004).

As a result, the professional training process for Nutrition professionals must be based on technical-theoretical knowledge that is yes, efficient, but which is also based on a social-human framework that is above all ethical and moderate. Such an understanding would therefore serve, so that the nutritionist is in the condition to perceive each small advance in each of his patients, this calls for the presence of a sensitivity linked to the sense of human morality, whose function would be to perceive in the figure of the other the potentialities first, and the weaknesses later. Science may well be based on biophysiological knowledge, but care must be, above all, human, so that it is necessary to realize that, when dealing with man, the causes of a food problem are hardly the same, very least the most appropriate and efficient therapy. It is evident that the Nutrition professional, even supported by a solid technical-scientific knowledge, is still located in a terrain of uncertainties, typical of the multifactoriality that gives rise, and that constitutes its object of study, the human being. Nutritional intervention gains, due to a multiplicity of factors, very specific contours, in the sense that what is efficient for one patient / client may not be as effective for another, this is called the principle of individuality, something that every nutritionist should know in depth.

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