
Menu 1 - Paper 1

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Variables Affecting Children's Experience of Eating at School

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Abstract: Over the past decades in Spain, eating in school cafeterias has become increasingly more common among school children. Some studies attest that the meals served in school cafeterias are very often nutritionally unbalanced. However, according to our hypothesis, this diagnosis seems inadequate. Even if the planned school meals are nutritionally balanced, the food actually eaten by a student may not be. This paper argues that the real consumption of food is a result of many factors and circumstances that influence the experience of eating lunch at school and, particularly, the experience of the hedonic pleasure of eating. These factors include, among others, the normative, organizational and dynamic context of the cafeteria; the effect of environmental characteristics on food intake; the relationship between students and the foodservice staff, and their role in reducing the fear of unfamiliar food and encouraging its consumption; students' perceptions and attitudes toward health, body and ultimately their way of thinking and rationalizing food. A more precise evaluation of the actual practices of food consumption in schools and their reasons can eventually lead to the improvement of food services offered in school cafeterias.

Keywords: school cafeteria, school meal, actual intake, food acceptance, food rejection

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