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Pleasures and stress of eating alone and eating together among French and German young adults

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Abstract: The presence and the absence of people during meals create pleasures and stress to the eaters. Therefore these positive or negative feelings have an impact on their perception and their appreciation of meals.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the pleasures and the stress of eating alone and eating together among French and German young adults. We focused on this specific age group and on the cultural differences observed between France and Germany.

Negative feelings of eating alone are predominantly known in current literature. Nonetheless, solo eating events also allow positive feelings. Eating with others encourages several activities and situations, which are commonly recognized as sources of pleasure, building the conditions for sociability. However, sharing meals is also stressful for the eaters. These negative feelings may encourage young adults to choose to eat alone from time to time or an adjustment of commensal eating events. Additionally, differences between the French and German young adults have been observed, which could be explained by the attitudes towards food and the eating patterns in these two countries.

These aspects are discussed in the paper thanks to empirical data collected through in-depth interviews with forty-five French and German young adults and participant observations of eating events in Lyon, Paris and Berlin.

Keywords: Eating together, eating alone, pleasure, stress, ethnography, cross-cultural

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