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“It’s women’s obligation:” constitutive elements of gendered domestic cooking practices performed by women from western Brazilian Amazon

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ABSTRACT


This article examines constitutive elements of contemporary domestic cooking practices among women who live in the urban area of Cruzeiro do Sul, Acre, Brazil. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 self-identified women and mothers, who cook at home at least once a day. Here, we offer an in-depth analysis of our qualitative data, having coded our interviews with attention to the elements of cooking practices (i.e., understandings, procedures, engagements, materials, competencies, and meanings). Our findings reveal that cooking practices are not only gendered but also play a vital part in the construction and affirmation of these Brazilian women’s identity, as indicated by how they negotiate elements of their domestic culinary practices regarding financial availability (materials), time availability (procedures), sociocultural gender norms (competences), and aspirations and personal desires (understandings). Read from a feminist perspective, we conclude that tensions surrounding the performance of femininity occurred when buying food at the supermarket or participating in the practice of “comprar fiado” in small neighborhood markets; preparing menus to meet familial preferences; preparing meals quickly and with little effort; offering the best foods to her children and husband; and showing affection and appreciation to those they feed.


KEYWORDS

Cooking; women; gender roles; feminism; qualitative research; Brazil

Introduction

“Cooking practices” may be understood as activities to prepare food or meals from scratch with raw or traditional ingredients (McGowan et al. 2017). The term emerged in anthropological and sociological research on food in the late 1990s, concurrently with the advent of the theory of social practices (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012; Warde 2016). This theory emphasizes performativity, everyday life, and the people’s world (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012), highlighting different aspects of social practices based on patterned routines, dispositions, consciousness, embodiment, and materials (Warde 2016).

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 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed [here](#).

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In Brazil, women, more than men, are historically and socio-culturally responsible for domestic cooking practices and are commonly engaged in a broader range of family eating-related activities and commitments. Data from a 2017 National Household Survey indicate that 95.6% of women, including those who were employed full-time outside the home, were responsible for preparing or serving food, cleaning the table, or washing dishes daily, while only 59.8% of men performed these tasks (IBGE 2018). Additionally, previous Brazilian studies emphasized the persistence of gender dynamics related to women as responsible for culinary practices (Martins et al. 2019; Mazzonetto et al. 2020; Ferreira and Wayne 2018; Assunção 2008; Sato et al. 2020a), intergenerational transmission of cooking-related meanings and practices (Mazzonetto et al. 2020; Ferreira and Wayne 2018; Assunção 2008), and familial food care (Martins et al. 2020). Furthermore, the devaluation of domestic cooking as trivial food versus the social recognition of professional and paid culinary practice highlights incongruencies with regard to the kitchen space (Collaço 2008). Notably, none of these studies fully articulate constituent elements of domestic cooking-related practices, which we argue here may be tied to Brazilian women's constructions of femininity.

Outside of Brazil, sociological and anthropological studies emphasize that domestic cooking practices intertwine power relations, roles, beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes attributed to being men and being women in society (Cairns and Johnston 2015; Short 2006; Counihan and Kaplan 2005; DeVault 1991; Abarca 1967). We understand gendered divisions of domestic cooking practice as categorial elements that condition feminine and masculine modes of action from repeated and reiterated behaviors; these mechanisms of gender create the illusion that their origin derives from a “natural essence” that precedes and transcends social life (Butler 1990). Accordingly, Fürst (1997) suggested that cooking practices are vital in the construction, affirmation, deconstruction, and denial of gender perspectives.

It is from this starting point that we explore Brazilian women's domestic cooking practices, in terms of both their constitutive elements and gendered aspects. Particularly, we attend to how the aforementioned elements condition how women not only perform their domestic culinary practices but are also sometimes limited by them. Drawing on theoretical perspectives of social practices, our empirical data and subsequent analysis contribute to an understanding of how gender is related to the constituent elements of domestic cooking practices performed by women.

Theoretical perspective

We based our study on theoretical-analytical frameworks of social practices related to food and everyday life, as proposed by Warde (2016) and Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012). Warde's (2016) social practices approach highlights domestic cooking practices as routine behaviors and their representations (doings and sayings) that occur through embodied activities, “things” (e.g., food, appliances, fuel, and cookware) and their uses, and forms of understandings, meanings, state of emotion or motivations. Domestic cooking practices are thus performative activities organized by (a) understandings that are interpretations of what and how to do something; (b) procedures spelled out by rules, principles, precepts, and instructions on how to do something; and (c) and engagements, which are teleo-affective structures that embrace ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions, and moods (Warde 2016, 2005). Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012) further

integrated a material perspective into this model, with specific regard to the different materials required when cooking. They suggested an analytical triad composed of “material, competence, and meaning.” Materials refer to things such as objects, infrastructure, tools, hardware, and the body itself; competence encompasses one’s skill, know-how, and technique; and meanings consider social and symbolic meaning, ideas, and aspirations. Bringing the two perspectives together, similarly to Kesteren and Evans (2020), we suggest that the theory of practices provides an innovative and differentiated framework of social life that considers human agency and focuses attention on the complex networks of materials, competences, meanings, understanding, procedures, and engagements that constitute actions of cooking practices in everyday life.

Materials and methods

Study design

We developed a qualitative, feminist-driven research framework to address constitutive elements of women’s gendered domestic cooking practices (Hesse-Biber 2014). This study was part of a prospective cohort named “MINA-Brazil Study: Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition,” which aims to identify early determinants to promote proper growth and development in early childhood (Cardoso et al. 2020). Our research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Public Health of the University of São Paulo (number 010143/2018) and took place at the two-year follow-up visit of the MINA-Brazil Study, which had an overall 70% retention rate ($n = 868$).

Study location

Cruzeiro do Sul is the second-largest city in the Acre state (Western Brazilian Amazon), with an estimated population of 87,673 inhabitants (70% of them living in urban areas) (IBGE 2019) and located 636 kilometers (≈ 395 miles) away from state’s capital of Rio Branco. Women and girls comprise half the population (IBGE 2019). The HDI of this municipality is 0.664, characterizing average development (the regional and national averages are 0.683 and 0.759, respectively) (IBGE 2011).

In general, women living in Cruzeiro do Sul are in a socio-economically vulnerable situation. In 2010, 6,944 (41%) private households were led by women. The average nominal monthly income of women aged 10 years and over is US\$ 132.62, while men earned US\$ 217.15. Among women householders, 57.0% were not schooling or had only elementary education. 41.8% women aged 10 years and over were economically active, generating income primarily as retail associates (IBGE 2011).

Additionally, Pessoa (2004) and Woff (1999) have suggested that gender relations in Cruzeiro do Sul are quite unequal, because the formation of this municipality occurred alongside the migration of northeastern men who came to live and work as rubber tappers in extractive reserves during the second rubber cycle (1942–1945). According to Woff (1999), some men migrated alone or abandoned their family entirely and sought unions with daughters of other migrants, indigenous women, or women “commissioned” to their employer (as a “luxury item”). The women were responsible for agricultural work, as well as for taking care of the family. Consequently, Cruzeiro do Sul developed

a patriarchal and authoritarian culture regarding the treatment of the family, with intra-family gender dynamics remaining relatively the same despite women's increasing participation in the workforce (Pessoa 2004; Woff 1999).

Sampling population

Cardoso et al. (2020) highlight that the women who participated in the two-year follow-up of the MINA-Brazil Study had on average 27.5 years of age; 10.9 years of schooling (this means that the majority studied up to primary level); 46.7% received monthly an assistance from the Bolsa Familia conditional cash transfer programme (BFP); and 40.5% were paid workers. Considering these characteristics, we focused on a subsample of the MINA-Brazil Study of 16 self-identified women, aged between 18 and 41 years old, who cooked at home at least once a day and were mothers of at least one child aged 2+ years old.

To define our sample size, we followed Kuzel's (1992) recommendation that we could achieve heterogeneity and maximum variation of data with a sample of between twelve and twenty informants. Participant selection was carried out by stratifying eligible individuals by educational level: until completed elementary school; until completed high school; and until or above undergraduate education. Data from the Brazilian census show that less-educated individuals are more susceptible to low socioeconomic status (IBGE 2011). We classified our individuals by educational level because we sought to include low-income individuals and still have data variation.

Seven women from each level of education were randomly selected from the MINA-Brazil Study pool to be invited to participate in our study and subsequently contacted by telephone. The first five women from each stratum who agreed to participate made up our sample of interviewees, totaling fifteen participants. One participant in the main study, who was interviewed to pretest the interview script, was included in the subsample of this qualitative study, totaling a sample of 16 participants. Women's participation was voluntary and confidential after signing an Informed Consent Form.

Data production

The first author conducted in-depth interviews from April to May 2018. Each interview addressed women's socio-demographic data; family dynamics of domestic cooking practices; tasks associated with the purchase, preparation, and serving of meals; pressures and the women's relative autonomy in cooking practices; and participation or absence of others in cooking practices. On average, interviews lasted 90 minutes. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese, recorded, and later transcribed verbatim. All names were changed to pseudonyms for anonymity purposes.

Data analysis

We conducted an in-depth analysis of all 16 interviews. The first author employed the cutting and sorting technique to code the data. She selected relevant excerpts related to the cooking practices discussed in each interview and grouped them according to the similarity of the meanings they shared with other excerpts; this defined the codes (Bernard, Wutch, and Ryan 2016). She constructed different codes applying Hesse-Biber's (2014) approach,

constituting descriptive codes (label for participants' words and organize data into topics); categorical codes (descriptive codes grouped into a more general category); and analytical codes (comprising a wider range of meanings). Then, the same researcher coded the data of cooking practices by unraveling its constitutive elements, according to the categories proposed by Warde (2016) and Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012). Two other researchers reviewed and discussed the data analysis with the lead researcher until they reached consensus. Our results are presented below in detail, with specific regard to participants' understandings, procedures, engagements, materials, competencies, and meanings of their cooking practices.

Results

Of the 16 women interviewed, two were single and lived with their children in single homes or with her parents, and fourteen were married or residing with her partners and dependents, following a heterosexual nuclear family model (Tables 1 and S1).

Table 2 presents the elements of cooking practices performed by the participants according to their understandings, procedures, engagements, materials, competencies, and meanings.

Daily and routine cooking practices

All participants self-identified as being primarily responsible for performing culinary activities in their homes, performing related tasks alone ($n = 7$) or sharing them with their daughter ($n = 5$), housemaid ($n = 2$), sister ($n = 1$), or mother ($n = 1$). They routinely performed the following activities: buying food, deciding the menu, preparing and serving meals, and cleaning the kitchen and dining spaces.

Purchasing food practices

Ten participants shopped alone for food. Four performed this task with their husbands, while two did not perform this task at all (their husbands were responsible). These women identified three central procedures for food purchasing practices: storage control, decision of the day and place of purchase, and indication and selection of food to be purchased.

Storage control was based on the daily use of food in preparing meals, managing available supplies, and identifying the need to purchase more food. Women with higher incomes made purchases when food reached a minimum quantity, which helped them better plan how much (and when) to buy. However, participants with financial difficulties – mainly BFP beneficiaries – made purchases on an emergency basis, such as when the food supply depleted. This practice resulted from a decision to distribute income to meet the basic family's needs (food, clothing, housing, etc.). To meet the family's urgent demands, these women performed the practices of "*comprar fiado*" (buying on promise to pay later) food. In this trade practice, women must construct a trusting relationship with the seller from the neighborhood's small markets, earning debts in the process. In doing so, they gamble the confidence acquired, their ability to pay their debts, and their reputation (as a good payer).

Table 1. Socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of sixteen (16) women living in the urban area of Cruzeiro do Sul, Acre, Brazil.

Age (years), mean \pm SD	31.8 \pm 6.0
Number of children, mean \pm SD	2.4 \pm 1.2
Number of people living in the household, mean \pm SD	4.4 \pm 1.1
Education, n (%)	
No formal Schooling	3 (18.8%)
Completed elementary school	2 (12.5%)
Completed high school	4 (31.3%)
Completed or above undergraduate education	6 (37.5%)
Occupation, n(%)	
Paid extra domestic worker	7 (43.8%)
Exclusively unpaid domestic worker	5 (31.2%)
Unemployed	4 (25.0%)
Wealth index, n(%)	
Poorest	5 (31.2%)
Second	3 (18.8%)
Third	3 (18.8%)
Wealthiest	4 (25.0%)
Highest individual income, n(%)	
Partner	9 (53.3%)
Woman	7 (43.8%)
Beneficiary of the Bolsa Familia Program^a, n(%)	
Yes	7 (43.8%)
No	9 (56.3%)
Occupation of the male partner, n (%)	
Not married	2 (12.5%)
Formal worker	8 (50.0%)
Informal worker	3 (18.8%)
Unemployed/retired	3 (18.8%)

Legends

^aThe Bolsa Familia Program (BFP) is a social program, implemented since 2003, for poor or extremely poor families whose focus is on income transfer to provide immediate relief from poverty. The types and amounts of money that each family receives depend on the composition and the income of the beneficiary family. The “basic benefit” (the monthly amount per person of R\$ 89.00, \approx US\$15.78) is paid to families considered extremely. An “variable benefit” (the monthly amount per person of R\$ 41.00, (\approx US\$ 7.26) is paid to families considered poor and have: (a) children or adolescent between 0 and 15 years old; (b) pregnant women; or breastfeeding women (nursing mothers) in their composition. Note: Dollar values were calculated using the Central Bank of Brazil's exchange rate on August 20, 2020 (1 real/BRL was equivalent to 0.18 United States Dollars/USD).

Decisions regarding the day and place of purchases were made based on available finances (payday or receipt of BFP funds), the availability of the husband or children's caregiver, and the schedule of women working outside the home. Participants who were financially dependent on their husbands would make purchases only when money was available; in this sense, husbands were able to exert a degree of financial control over when to buy food. That said, the women were still responsible for buying food either alone or whenever her husband was available to accompany her. Despite receiving money from their partners, this was sometimes insufficient to buy food for all relatives. This resulted in needing to buy foods that they considered cheap, high yielding, and sufficient to satisfy their family's hunger, as Luiza (41 years old, no schooling, and snack producer) expressed:

In the past, [I] couldn't buy food because my husband didn't give [me] money. I didn't eat because I had [nothing to eat]; and when I had [something to eat], I prioritized my children. Today, I have difficulty managing the forty reais (US\$ 7.09) [I receive weekly for my informal work] and the Bolsa Familia money [which I receive monthly]. With the Bolsa

Table 2. Elements of cooking practice performed by study Amazonian women.

Cooking practice activities				
Elements of culinary practices	Food purchase	Menu planning	Meal preparation	Meal service
Procedures <i>routinized instructions, principles, rules and social forms</i>	Decide shopping days and locations Pay for food purchases Perform inventory control Select the foods to buy Go to food shopping places	Choose food preparation techniques and the foods that will compose the menu Plan the food variation during the week	Cooking food Cut herbs and vegetables Defrost frozen foods Meal preparation Prepare eve's food Season the food Vary foods during the week Wash and organize the dishes, furniture and the environment "Cooker" Cookware Foods Fuel Home appliances Own body Participation of other family members Time	Consume meals in socioculturally defined places Distribute the food to the family Feed the children Meet the socio-cultural mealtimes Serve the dinner dishes Chairs Cookware Cutlery Commensals Foods or culinary preparations Own body Table
Materials <i>objects, infrastructures, tools, hardware and body itself</i>	Food buying resources Food selling locations Own body Participation of other members Time Transportation vehicle	Cooking utensils Foods Home appliances Own body Participation of other family members Time		
Competencies <i>skills, know-how and techniques</i>	Know how to choose foods and manage food inventory Know the food tastes of family members and their health status Know the foods available at the retail food chain	Know food, its preparation and ways to reuse it Know the family members' food tastes and their own Know the socio-cultural norms of meal composition	Know the food and its possibilities for use and reuse in culinary preparations Know the family members' food tastes and their own Know the techniques of food preparation Manage time for meal preparation Do not prepare fried foods Prepare food in nutritious ways Think that each person has their own way of cooking Use easily cooked food or techniques to facilitate meal preparation Vary foods and culinary preparations	Know how to feed the child Know the family's ways of eating Know the family members' food tastes and their own Manage food portioning
Understandings <i>practical interpretations of what and how to do something</i>	Buy more nutritious foods for kids Buy more cost-effective foods Buy food according to financial conditions Prefer foods considered "normal"	Consider their food tastes as different from family Plan a more nutritious menu for people with special conditions Provide food consistent with family eating habits Put on the table what the family likes Think that family members have the same food taste		Avoid food waste Feel difficulties feeding the child Think that children need more nutritious foods

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Elements of culinary practices	Cooking practice activities			
	Food purchase	Menu planning	Meal preparation	Meal service
Engagements <i>emotional and normative guidelines related to what and how to do</i>	Enjoy shopping for food alone Buy food for being the housewife and mother or for not working outside the home Want the husband to do the food shopping	Feel like cooking Find it boring to eat what you don't like Think that children will like what she puts on the table	Always be at home Enjoy cooking for the family Have more developed cooking skills Have difficulty cooking with the child Husband can't cook Dislike to cook everyday Feel no pleasure in eating their own food	Feel satisfied feeding the child Please family
	Being able to choose food for the family don't mind buying food alone Feel helpful contributing to their husband	Believe to have greater culinary creativity Eat what they like Give affection to husband and children Meet family hierarchy preferences Please the children Promote the family health	Think that cooking is a woman's duty Enjoy cooking Meet the division of labor within the family Please the family Think that society blames women for home cooking	Care for family members Don't waste food Meet family food distribution hierarchy
Meanings <i>social and symbolic meanings</i>				

Familia, which provides more than forty reais, I buy (once a month) a half kilo of [manioc] flour or ten of regional rice (both food considered expensive). [I use] the forty reais [from my work] to buy food weekly to replenish those that have run out.

Regarding food indication and selection, participants prepared a grocery list based on commonly consumed foods. This list was used by the women themselves or their husbands (when they were responsible for purchases). Therefore, even when physically absent from the place of purchase, women still exercised mental work around food decisions. When they went shopping, women were responsible for the selection of food, especially fruits and vegetables. As they selected foods, these women prioritized their expenses, adjusting to include foods they considered more expensive yet most nutritious (whole grains, fruits, vegetables) in the family's diet. Mietta (35 years old, full undergraduate, and nurse) described the tension between her expectations for her children's health and the family's financial situation:

We've been trying to include some whole foods, like brown rice. When the price is good [lower than usual], we buy it. At least the whole pasta we are buying for Cassio (autistic son). [In the past] when we earned better, we only bought brown rice. Today, we were looking for the same quality in our food, but only what we can afford.

The participants took the following aspects into account when making food purchases: materials expressed as ingredients, places of purchase, and financial resources; competencies required to choose healthy-, financially-, culturally-, and symbolically- appropriate foods for the family; understandings related to food, diet, family financial condition, and sociocultural conventions regarding women's roles regarding family care; and meanings attributed to the ways of buying food, and the body or the mental work of the woman engaged in this process.

The most prominent practice was "*comprar fiado*," which expresses the uneven dynamics of class and gender, materialized in a strategy to take care of her family when money was scarce. Thus, we understand that the material dimension is critical for women when accounting for gender norms. Considering that limited financial and material resources constrain these women's care and feeding practices, they need to remodel their procedures to be able to meet the responsibility of continuously feeding their families with nutritious and culturally appropriate foods.

Menu decision and meal preparation practices

Women were primarily responsible for deciding and preparing meals ($n = 13$), with few partners participating ($n = 3$) in these processes. Decisions regarding food preparation were influenced by the participants' perceptions of their family's food preferences, health status, food stocks, and time available. These women followed a basic rule when developing the menus: the main preparation – an animal protein source – should vary throughout the week in relation to its raw material (meat, fish, chicken, or eggs) and preparation (baked, boiled, fried, etc.). Accompaniments were slightly changed, being generally composed of staple foods, such as beans, rice, pasta, *farofa* (roasted manioc flour), and salad.

Menus tended to create a sense of tension or disagreement, as the women urged to accommodate different preferences among relatives. As a result, participants consumed

foods they disliked or planned other culinary preparations for themselves. As Patricia (34 years old, full undergraduate, and teacher) exemplified:

I make [two dishes]. For example, I make chicken, but I don't like it. So, I fry smoked sausage for me [to eat]. This is not a problem for me, because I think it is very annoying to eat what I don't like.

In addition to family preferences, the participants' understanding of the health of family members – especially children or husbands with chronic illness – was related to the decision of which foods or culinary preparations to use (e.g., vegetables, fruits, viscera; boiled or roasted foods) or avoid (e.g., red meat, free-range chicken; fried foods). These women sought to take care of their relatives by offering a diet with a certain nutritional quality and with respect to specific physiological processes, such as growing. Participants chose to prepare both “ordinary” and “healthier” meals with ingredients available in their homes. Furthermore, each meal varied depending on available ingredient combinations, the culinary techniques used, and whether they reused leftovers.

The time participants spent preparing meals varied according to their occupation. Women who worked full time outside the home prepared their family meals at lunchtime, after working hours, or on weekends. Those who were exclusively domestic workers or unemployed prepared their meals an hour or two before mealtime. The time available for meal preparation was also a good predictor of the characteristics of lunch menus. With less time available, participants might make a dish called “*carne e pirão*,” a low-cost culinary preparation consisting of cooked meat (fish or chicken) and a “*pirão*,” a garnish prepared with poached manioc flour. Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) (as canned meat, chicken steak, and sausage) were present in menus considered easy, fast, and low-cost, and which could be prepared at lunch time (as opposed to in advance). Many of the women mentioned that they also consumed UPFs as a main course when they did not want to cook or felt lazy or tired, as suggested by Nisia (26 years old, full undergraduate, and unemployed):

Yesterday I had no desire to cook, so I preferred to make canned meat, rice, and pasta. I choose [what to make] considering the day and ease [of preparation]. When I feel like cooking something different, more elaborate, I do so.

All participants prepared food alongside other household tasks, using time spent soaking, defrosting, or cooking food to do other domestic activities (e.g., cleaning the house or childcare). They deemed such multitasking as important because they were the only ones responsible for taking care of the house, food, and children. As articulated by Dandara (37 years old, no formal schooling, and unemployed):

I don't have time [to only prepare the meal]. I'm cleaning the house, cooking the rice, doing one thing and another. If I stop to do only one thing [like cooking], I will delay other activities. I must do other things, right? I'm taking care of the house, making lunch, taking care of Humberto (youngest son), doing everything at the same time.

To reduce their efforts and amount of time spent cooking, participants froze pre-cooked food portions (beans or rice), cooked in a pressure cooker, reused leftovers, and used UPFs. They also preferred to keep children out of the kitchen, so that they were not distracted as they cooked. Children constantly interrupted their mothers asking for attention, wanting to be picked up or cradled, or handling food and utensils (knife,

stove). Because participants were afraid of home accidents involving children and themselves (e.g., burns or cuts), they used strategies such as cooking when children are in school; placing the child in another room and entertaining them with activities; or using a physical barrier (doors and fences) to prevent children from accessing the kitchen.

On weekends, participants' lunches tended to be time-consuming and involved much more elaborate culinary techniques, including barbecue, roasted fish, and *caipira* chicken (dish made with free-range versus industrial poultry). On these days, participants had more free time to prepare food, because they were not working outside the home. Additionally, the husband was at home and could "watch over the child," while other family members could also be involved in food preparation or childcare.

Mealtime decisions involved many important elements: procedures related to the cognitive work of planning and deciding what the family should eat; food-related materials and time available for preparing dishes; competencies related to preparation techniques and reuse of food; understandings of relatives' eating habits, preferences, and health conditions; and meanings related to the hierarchy of food preferences.

Conversely, food preparation included the following constitutive elements: procedures related to developing recipes that require specific culinary techniques; culinary competencies; appropriate material (as utensils), understanding of relatives' food preferences and regional food culture; and meanings related to ways of food preparation, use of time, and responsibilities of women for domestic cooking and caring for their family members. Ultimately, meal preparation signals: (1) women's skills and knowledge to provide tasty and nutritious food for meals, and (2) women's perspectives and desires regarding their preferences and ways of taking care of their family's eating. Thus, the nexus such practices resides in disputes over power, control, and autonomy of the participants, all of which influence what to make for a given meal.

Families' food serving practices

Participants considered lunch as the most important meal, as it has a more structured menu and is eaten with everyone (husband and children) gathered at the table. Mealtimes were defined by family members' routines, especially children's class periods and working adults' lunchtime. Serving food practices express the structure of the family's social organization: the women shared that they were responsible for serving children and occasionally their husbands, since adults serve themselves (directly from the stove or from pans brought to the table).

Participants served children intending to reduce food waste and control their consumption. They reported difficulty in offering the meal to the children because they "messed up": refused to eat, took food from other people's plates, and played while eating. Thus, women divided their attention between eating their own food and checking whether the children were eating. Consequently, most participants eat their lunch alone, after all family members. Because other family members served themselves first, while the women served and fed the children, only after the child ate (or in a concomitant attempt) did the woman consume her meal. As Josefina (39 years old, completed high school, and unemployed) recounted:

After everyone (adults) serves themselves, [at least] I go and serve myself. While I am serving both (two sons) food, my husband has finished eating. I'm feeding the children; he gets up from the table and starts washing the dishes. After feeding the children, I'm going to eat alone.

Participants reported that there was no specific rule for distributing food. However, they offered the best foods for their children, especially proteins sources such as chicken breast and thigh. The rest was shared according to the adult individuals' food preferences or from a "who-takes-it-first" perspective (i.e., when diners served themselves). Many women reported eating the "less noble" foods (i.e., chicken neck, liver, or feet) that remained after serving family members, but reported enjoying them. As it seems, women's preferences were shaped by food resources, as well as their perceived responsibilities to their family members.

Food service practices among these women were thus centered on understanding the proper way to distribute food among relatives; and meanings that express ways of serving, sharing, and eating food. We understand that these activities' nexus lies in gender norms related to symbolic meanings of female activity (e.g., feeding children and serving husband), as well as women's desires. The women negotiated these two elements constantly to implement models deemed appropriate by society, neglecting, and remodeling their tastes to meet family's demands. As Mietta (35 years old, full undergraduate, and nurse) shared:

My husband is from the countryside, he likes vegetables a lot. It was not part of my family's culture [. . .]. I used to eat cassava, pumpkin, cabbage, and I didn't even like them. With our relationship, many things have been inserted into my diet. For example, Jiló (scarlet eggplant), I thought that was horrible, the worst thing in the world. Nowadays, I eat and like it. Today, I'm going to prepare Jiló for lunch. Also, I have introduced this to my children's diet.

This is the result of a family hierarchy based on understanding appropriate attitudes and behaviors for men and women, individual competencies associated with gender, time availability, and economic resources relative to each family member. The family hierarchy places these women at the service of their family, neglecting their food tastes and desires, and being the last one to eat. Additionally, they include foods that are not part of their culture or eating habits in their diet with the intention of pleasing the husband or making the family's food more nutritious. Here, we understand that the main elements are family cohesion (marriage maintenance) and the promotion of children's growth and development, both of which can be understood as signs of the woman's ability to take care of the family. Consequently, the women's cooking competencies and the ability to decode serving practices is a critical factor for meeting their husband's and children's gendered expectations about femininity or motherhood.

Meanings assigned to cooking practices

In this section, we present what performing specific domestic culinary tasks means to the women interviewed, with regarding to their daily kitchen work.

Reasons to perform domestic cooking practices daily and routinely

The exclusively domestic workers or unemployed women considered themselves responsible for domestic culinary activities because they did not necessarily contribute financially to their families. These women performed cooking activities to contribute to the home, care for family, and avoid complaints or criticism from their husbands or other relatives. However, they sometimes underestimated the activities they performed, considering them as minor work that should be done for the sake of “awareness” of their feminine and non-provider status. Nisia (26 years old, full undergraduate, and unemployed) explained:

It's really a matter of conscience because if I'm home and I'm available to do it, I'll do it. He (husband) comes home at lunch time. He wants to have lunch and get some rest before he goes back to work. I won't take this rest from him by asking him to [wash the dishes]. So, I need to do it because I don't have a job. For me it's not awful to do it. Also, because he works outside home, he is the only provider, so the least I can do is the housework.

Regardless of the participants' occupational status, all women held responsibility for domestic cooking practice. For many of them, cooking activities were the social responsibilities of mother, wife, and housewife, and they should perform it. This perspective was also shared by husbands and children, who demanded that the women developed stereotypical gender behaviors and attitudes related to domestic cooking practices, as reported by Dandara (37 years old, no formal schooling, and unemployed):

It's the women's obligation. I'm the mother, I'm housewife, I must do it. When I argue with them (children), they say to me “oh, but you have an obligation to do all this, you are our mother.” Then I find myself obligated; I believe it really is my obligation.

We also identified another financial reason that was mentioned mainly by participants who were single or financially supported by their husbands. They considered that their domestic cooking practices were the only way to provide food for themselves and their children, as economic conditions prevented them from eating away from home, buying ready-to-eat food, or hiring a housemaid to do the cooking.

A third reason concerned the participants' desire to dedicate time to caring and showing love and affection toward their husband and children. These women followed principles and rules that they thought were appropriate to their situation in life and their identity as women, mothers, or wives, and despite their own cooking and eating preferences.

Feelings associated with domestic cooking practices

The participants associated dubious feelings with domestic cooking practices. Positive feelings were associated with cooking spontaneously, i.e., without the pressures of time, family tastes, or nutritional adequacy, and only for family. Negative feelings were related to being the only person who prepares meals at home, cooking concurrently with other household activities, and eating their own food daily. Participants wanted other people to engage in cooking practice so that they could eat meals prepared by others. This was considered more prestigious, and participants reported consuming such food with greater contentment and gratitude. Finally, the participants expressed a desire to occupy other places in the work, family, and community, and not just “live in the kitchen,” recognizing that women's roles in society are not just limited to the home environment. Luiza (41 years old, no formal schooling, and snack producer) admitted:

I'm not gonna lie, I do the cooking, but I don't like it. I don't enjoy being in the kitchen all time. I enjoy cooking, but I don't like cooking for a lot of people. I don't like to cook for more than my children. I just enjoy cooking for my kids. For me, it's more about cooking for them, that's all.

Discussion

In general, the women interviewed do not appear to have low-education or low-income status. However, socioeconomic vulnerability is expressed in reference to the Bolsa Familia Program, since a significant number of participants receive BFP assistance ($n = 7$) on the basis of qualifying, “extremely poor” income criteria (monthly income of no more than US\$ 15.78 per person) or “poor” (a monthly income between US\$ 15.78 and US\$ 31.54 per person) (Martins and Monteiro 2016). Notably, three women who self-reported as earning the most money in the family received the BFP benefit, while their husbands were informal workers or unemployed.

Despite the economic situation of the participants, all women reported carrying out gendered domestic culinary practices, whereby they were primarily responsible for the family's food activities. *Materials* were closely related to the financial availability for cooking practices, especially supermarket food purchase. Our participants did not use home gardens, animal breeding, and/or receiving food donated as a means food acquisition, although Sato et al. (2020a) had identified this strategy as important for other mothers from the MINA-Brazil Study deal to deal with food insecurity. Rather, they bought their food in supermarkets due to the possibility to use cash, credit, or debit cards. Indeed, market buying is the main form of access to food in all Brazilian regions, which makes income a prerequisite for participation (Machado et al. 2018; IBGE 2020). Therefore, receiving assistance from the BFP expands the possibility of monthly market purchases because it guarantees a continuous income source for poorer families. Despite buyers' economic conditions, supermarkets have emerged as a main establishment to buy food because it offers the conveniences of food variety (fresh, processed, UPFs) located in the same place, and with ample stock, quality, and more competitive prices (Duran et al. 2013).

Moreover, we identified two food purchasing patterns according to women's income. The first pattern is buying food when minimum stocks were reached. The second one is “*comprar fiado*” in poor and emergency situations. In both cases, *understandings* and *engagements* are reflected in expectations and tensions afforded by available money to buy nutritious, tasty, and high-yield foods (i.e., foods that can feed all relatives with the fewest possible ingredients). Faced with that tension, women make financial adjustments to insert foods they value in their family's diet, because a diet based on lean meats, whole grains, vegetables, and fruits can be more expensive compared to a diet consisting of refined cereals, root vegetables, and fatty meats or meat products (Machado et al. 2017). Whereas the Amazonian women that Sato et al. (2020a, 2020b) studied considered healthy and regional foods financially unaffordable. Despite this, our participants struggled to maintain a monthly purchase of these foods, when they had more money available.

Also, Sato et al. (2020b) showed that Amazonian women considered UPFs and fast foods expensive and unimportant to nutrition or satiety but were important for leisure. Here, we add the understanding that cooking with UPFs is a matter of convenience, rather than a strategy to manage the difficulty of buying healthy or regional food. Our

interpretation comes from women's efforts to buy foods that they considered essential to their family's diet (e.g., whole grains, regional rice, and manioc flour), even in lower income situations. Thus, UPFs appear not only as an alternative to the lack of fresh food but as a choice for women to reduce culinary efforts.

The "*comprar fiado*" pattern was common among the most low-income status women who could not regularly shop in the supermarket, as they experience a specific mode of socioeconomic exclusion. These women are less likely to move between home and supermarket; have less purchasing power (for food, fuel, appliances, and utensils); and less access to other goods and services needed for cooking (e.g., water supply). Thus, they find it difficult to follow social conventions, inclusive of using traditional food, household utensils (e.g., gas stove), and cooking indoors, all of which are central to typified Brazilian culinary practice in urban settings. Consequently, these women were required to change their practices to suit new situations: in the absence of money, food was purchased in small neighborhood markets, which allowed women to "*comprar fiado*." Although small neighborhood markets tend to charge more for food products (Cavalcante Filho et al. 2018; Machado et al. 2017), low-income consumers could prefer these establishments because of established relationships, seller empathy, and the trust maintained with the owner and staff (Davies and Brito 1996). Additionally, "*comprar fiado*" generates a "good neighborhood policy" established *vis-à-vis* a more intimate relationship between the seller and consumer, which may have even been supported for generations (Davies and Brito 1996).

Thus, women are constrained to cook the food that they can access financially, rather than what they want for either her family or herself. That said, traditionally, women were socially charged to prepare nutritious and culturally contextualized foods for their families. Consequently, the participants see cooking as a woman's obligation, and they are made for it. Likewise, Sato et al. (2020a) also found this perception of domestic cooking, in addition to a strategy to deal with food and nutritional insecurity. Furthermore, our data show that poverty could limit gendered practices related to family food care, which women may want to account for by performing even more traditional gendered domestic cooking practices.

Procedures were intricately linked to time availability related to menu decision-making and meal preparation practices. During the week, participants performed cooking practices to minimize or reduce the time and energy (physical or mental) spent on planning or preparing meals. This is more evident among women who are extra- and intra-household workers, as they are required to reconcile work demands and family life. These women used off-work hours to engage in cooking practice activities and often abdicated personal leisure activities. This conception of reconciliation is grounded in a gender value system that presents a list of discourses, practices, and behaviors that are considered "good," "normal," and "natural" to women within heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-sexual relationships (Butler 1990).

In addition, time availability is also related to the participants' culinary skills (*competencies*), which include techniques and knowledge that can facilitate the implementation of faster and appropriate menus to the peculiarities of the relative (McGowan et al. 2017; Bernardo et al. 2018). This aspect was evidenced by food preparation techniques, whose main purpose was to reduce the time and effort to produce family meals.

On the weekends, though, participants spent the largest amount of time performing various meal-related activities. The *meanings* attributed to weekend meals (especially on Sundays) were directed at accruing greater social prestige, which more expensive than those used in everyday cooking. Weekend dishes are more elaborate (e.g., lasagna and barbecue); involve other family members; and leisurely (cooking and eating with the family). We suggest this temporal emphasis may be related to attempts to provide expressions of care through the production of culinary preparations considered tastier and of greater meaning, while also trying to meet the hedonistic demands of family members.

Regarding sociocultural gender norms, we observed that women's cooking practices were oriented toward meeting a social hierarchy based on stereotyped femininities and masculinities. Thus, we emphasize gender norms in relation to the *engagements*, *understandings*, and *meanings* attributed to cooking practices. As highlighted above, participants disputed food preferences and tastes with relatives. This dynamic is expressed by the negotiation of relative powers, privileges, controls, and autonomy, which affect what family members eat for a given meal (Poulain 2017; Warde 2016). Our participants expressed a symbolic perspective of femininity associated with restrictions or self-control, as they felt they had to make compromises when it came to their own eating tastes and pleasures. They oriented their practices to attend to the tastes and preferences of family members, providing food they considered appropriate, while considering their doing so as a form of care, demonstration of appreciation, and socialization for the proper feeding of children. This seems similar to Fürst's (1997) understanding of the expression of stereotyped femininity through self-control or restraint as related to the idea that women cook to please men, decide what they buy in light of their husbands' preferences, and carry the burden of buying and cooking food, all the while performing these tasks within a set of social relationships that deny them power.

This was further expressed by some women's claims of responsibility for domestic cooking if they did not have other jobs that contribute to the family's finances. Thus, they illustrated a division of domestic work practices based on the engagement of family members in the working world, delimiting public and private domains in which, respectively, one works to earn money and "support" the family and to take care of the family (Cairns and Johnston 2015; DeVault 1991). For many of the participants, cooking was an obligation or household task that they alone – not other family members must do it. We argue that such a perspective subsequently shapes social rules that serve to form, maintain, and at times modify gendered familial dynamics, in order to maintain the social identities of people directly involved and indirectly affected by participants' daily and routine cooking practices (Fürst 1997; Cairns and Johnston 2015).

Additionally, our participants expressed that their cooking practices were also related to the lack of pleasure in eating their own food; the reluctance, resistance, or rejection to cook; the fatigue of performing all domestic activities; and the desire to perform the identity of woman/mother/wife in terms that are considered an "appropriate" manner and as a way of caring for her husband and children. Denoting the importance of their subjectivities, especially those related to their personal desires, the pleasures and dislikes these women mentioned may be understood as central parts of the *engagements* and *understandings* attributed to cooking practices (Fürst 1997; Cairns and Johnston 2015; Beagan et al. 2008). In sum, they have mixed feelings about cooking, finding it more enjoyable to cook when they had no social demands.

Finally, we interpret the cooking practices developed by our participants as resulting from conflicting negotiations among the different individuals that make up the family. This sometimes results in greater accountability of participants in relation to domestic activities that are performed alone and without others' participation. Consequently, these women consider that family members – especially men in the figure of the husband – need to take up or share domestic activities. In this sense, we could understand the culinary practices of the women we interviewed as: a routine way in which women are required to navigate through private (home) and public (food-selling) spaces; navigating objects (money, food, cooking utensils, among others) and intrafamilial relationship; developing and utilizing their culinary competence (knowledge and skills); and understanding and re-signifying themselves as persons of practice, taking into account their trajectories, relationships with objects and people, and the actions they develop and perform in order to produce meals for their family.

Limitations

Despite the relatively low number of participants in our study, our approach allowed us to identify six constituent elements of cooking practices, helping our interpretations of these women's performances of domestic culinary work. Given this experience, we suggest that future studies employ interview and observation techniques (participatory or otherwise), recognizing that the latter may record situational and embodied culinary aspects that may be otherwise difficult for participants to remember or verbalize (Martens and Scott 2017).

Conclusion

In our exploratory study, we illustrated the constituent elements of cooking practices performed by Amazonian women, mothers, and wives, drawing attention to gender dynamics in the family. Participants recognized the existence of sociocultural norms related to typified Brazilian culinary practice in urban settings: buying food with money, preparing menus to meet family members' preferences (health, taste, etc.), preparing meals quickly and with little effort, offering noblest foods to her children and husband, and showing affection and appreciation to them. We also noted a general pattern common among Amazonian Brazilians that reify stereotyped gender roles grounded in a sexual division of housework, which lead to gender inequities that impact one's relative freedom or agency, as well as access to goods and services of distinct gender identities.

The practices performed by these women did not always follow socioeconomic patterns, as participants were often at odds with various constituent elements, such as financial and time availability, conceptions of femininity and motherhood, and their wishes related to themselves and their family. At times, they followed alternative patterns of cooking practices that are socio-culturally disseminated in poverty contexts, such as "*comprar fiado*" and using UPFs to cook. Also, standards of cooking practice have blurred the boundaries of common practice, calling into question stereotypical norms that are socially reproduced, such as using UPFs to shorten the time spent preparing a given meal. As cooking practices occur through social, economic, cultural, and

symbolic relations, they remain central features worthy of ongoing research in the context of embedded tensions in contemporary foodways and identity formation among women and others within and outside of the Brazilian Amazon.

Finally, we observed that the participants' culinary practices had their nexus: (a) in the availability of income to access materials and perform the necessary procedures and develop their competences; (b) the socio-cultural gender norms that were related to the competences, understandings, engagements and meanings attributed to culinary practices devoted to the family; (c) in the projects, purposes, emotions and moods of women that relate to the culinary procedures, understandings and meanings. From these, women developed (or not) a typified Brazilian culinary practice. It is concluded that women actively dispute powers, privileges, controls and autonomy to implement models of culinary practices that can perform within their current circumstances of life.

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