

Relations of Domination on Bourdieu's Perspective between Food Handlers and Their Bosses: Implications for Food Safety

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ABSTRACT: *Restaurants, as social spaces, are scenarios of interaction between food handlers and bosses in the daily preparation of the meals offered to customers. Ensuring food safety, and therefore, the prevention of the occurrence of foodborne disease outbreaks, is the responsibility of both parties. However, some structural and social aspects are seen as elements that may act to depreciate food safety. A qualitative ethnographic study was carried out with the use of participant observation in commercial restaurants in two Brazilian cities. Thus, this article seeks to present several points of conflict between food handlers and their bosses and their implications for food safety.*

Keywords: *Bosses, Bourdieu, Food handlers, Food safety, Restaurants*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Role of Domination

The true meaning of social interactions is never fully visible at first sight, since the structures that prescribe it underlie the actions [1].

The implicit relations of domination are manifested in this context, because they are everywhere [2]. However, in order to oneself to adapt to a dominated position it is necessary, first, to be consistent with such form of domination. This fact, in its turn, occurs through the recognition between both parts, domineering and dominated, of the symbolic principles, such as the way of speaking, thinking or acting, stigma or emblems [3,4].

Symbolic systems act as mechanisms for legitimizing and imposing domination, because they reinforce the structures that support them, ensuring that the dominant maintain their position and overlap their worldview according to their interests [2].

Foodborne Illness

As regards to food safety, it is estimated that diarrheal diseases from contaminated water and food kill 2.2 million people each year, most of them children [5]. In the last decade, serious outbreaks of foodborne diseases (FBD) have been documented on all continents, showing the importance of these diseases to public health [6].

Food handlers with poor personal hygiene, with inadequate behavior, or that do not act in a way to prevent the occurrence of outbreaks, e.g., controlling the time and temperature of the cooking, cooling, processing and storage processes, as well as being inattentive to cross-contamination may contaminate food [7]. Studies [8,9] have observed that food mishandling is the main cause of FBD and a factor strongly associated with food outbreaks.

It should be stressed that incentives for adequate work are necessary. However, these incentives should be carried out to fulfill the psychological aspirations of food handlers, providing the esteem of superiors, a harmonious environment, healthy interpersonal relationships and recognition of work. When a positive culture is encouraged favorable results for the company are guaranteed, notwithstanding when the incentives are only salary the positive effect becomes merely temporary [10]. Leadership is the process of influencing people to create predictable results and accomplishing its goals [11]. Therefore, the food safety leader must ensure the food safety standard compliance combining his/her knowledge with the incentives aforementioned.

Aim of this Paper

To illustrate the points of conflict between bosses and food handlers regarding structural and social aspects and their implications for food safety.

II. METHODS

A qualitative study was conducted, in which the central strategy used was ethnography. This methodological approach allowed the immersion of the authors in the social reality shared by food handlers and their bosses. The sample was given for convenience, according to the criterion of access to six commercial restaurants, three *self-service* (i.e. consumers serve food oneself) and three *à la carte* (i.e. consumers ask the waiter for his/her request), from two Brazilian cities, in 2016.

The participant observation technique was used, which presupposes a constant interaction between researcher and agents [12]. The observation was carried out for 42 days, with seven days in each restaurant, in which notes were written in field diaries. The annotations included aspects related to site infrastructure, service characteristics, location, details about the agents in question, their speeches, nonverbal communications, interpersonal relationship, work routine and relation with food safety. These data were collected with the purpose of providing a holistic view of the correspondence between the structural aspects of the restaurants and the social interactions of the agents present in them.

Content analysis of the thematic type proposed by Bardin [13] was used to elucidate the writings contained in the field diaries. And, from that point the information was analyzed in the light of the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu.

III. POINTS OF CONFLICT

In total, 68 food handlers and 17 bosses were observed. The relationships of domination were identified in all restaurants, but in varying ways, from soft to direct forms. All the interactions and situations experienced by the agents were written in the field diaries.

Structural Issues

- Bosses often instigate and pressure food handlers on meeting the meal's finishing time, but they do not provide the right infrastructure for work, such as sufficient physical space, thermal comfort, utensils and equipment in good conditions. Frequently, this push is carried out through an approach that generates negative repercussions such as discussions and lack of interest in meeting sanitary norms. These aspects are known as mitigating factors of adequate practices and behavior of food handlers [14,15].
- Due to the lack of employees and the poor quality organization of the service, bosses request multiple tasks for food handlers at the same time, causing workers to stop their activities and start more urgent tasks. Coupled with the rush to deliver the dishes at the appointed time, this scenario becomes conducive for the steps to increase anxiety levels and thus inherent to prevention of FBD to be skipped. An increased anxiety level may reduce food safety practices especially in restaurants without adequate training strategies and with high workload [16].

Social Issues

- Bosses neglect rules, such as wearing a cap, proper shoes, absence of necklaces, earrings, and rings, however they require such practices from food handlers. Food handlers, therefore, believe that compliance with these standards is unnecessary because bosses, as dominant agents on the field, do not stand as the example to be followed. The lack of involvement of bosses with food handlers may act as barrier of the adequate practices.
- Symbolic power, that is, the power to do things with words [1] manifests itself through reprimand and harsh talks, jokes, contempt and impatience of the bosses in relation to food handlers in daily work. This situation usually triggers the disregard for compliance with sanitary norms.
- Direct verbal offenses of the bosses toward food handlers and, in reverse, but in a whispered way often occur. The dominated agents reported not being able to openly discuss their working conditions.
- Bosses fail to listen to food handlers regarding the efficiency of equipment used on a day-to-day basis, or what equipment or utensil should be purchased to improve practicality. The devaluation of food handlers' opinions about their own work may discourage their full realization and alignment with preventive practices of FBD.
- Bosses impose their wills and commonly require food handlers to do particular tasks for them, which are nothing to do with their work. Food handlers reported that they perform these tasks for fear of reprisal or losing their job, that is, because they are the agents dominated in this field.
- Food handlers are afraid to tell their bosses about food production problems because they do not know whether the reaction will be harsh or not.
- Domination is naturalized by food handlers, who consider it normal to swear, scream and argue with bosses. In a more intense way, some food handlers who have complacent bosses do not recognize the lead agent as leader because they do not have the dominating stereotype.
- Another characteristic feature of domination manifests itself in the sense of tightness and of "doing wrong" when bosses are around.

- Bosses make food handlers sign documents without first instructing them on how to prevent implications, accidents or situations from occurring.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Emphasis is given to the role of bosses as encouraging and motivating actors towards food safety compliance by food handlers. Poor management, which the boss does not provide an adequate infrastructure nor observes workers as their humanity, may result in workers disinterested in meeting sanitary norms. The points of conflict illustrated demonstrate the need to decrease the distance of communication between bosses and food handlers, since the voice of food handlers about their feelings and opinions about their own work needs to be heard. The social character of this research suggests that the issues that underlie social interactions in the restaurant environment, when they present distorted relations between bosses and food handlers, can negatively influence food safety.

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