

Sociology 190.8

Food Choice, Health, and Inequality

UC Berkeley
Spring 2018, Monday 4-6PM
Wheeler 24

Instructor: Dr. Caitlin Daniel
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OH: Th 2-4 PM, Barrows 434

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Food and diet-related health have become a pressing topic in research, policy and public discourse. This concern stems in part from the fact that disadvantaged groups tend to have poorer diets than their more advantaged peers. In order to understand these dietary disparities, we will examine how people's food choice is related to their material resources, to their social circumstances, and to the meaning that they attach to—and derive from—food. Additionally, we will consider how the public imagines that disadvantaged people eat and how these ideas themselves relate to social inequalities. In addressing these issues, we will consider several core questions: 1) How do patterns of food consumption *reflect* existing inequalities?; 2) How do patterns of food consumption *contribute to* social inequalities?; and 3) How do cultural *constructions* of what other people eat also contribute to inequality? While these questions focus on food, they will help us to think about structure, culture, agency, consumption, and stigma more generally.

LEARNING GOALS

- To understand dominant explanations of socioeconomic differences in food choice
- To appreciate how sociology enhances explanations of food choice, with its focus on the social value of food and on the interaction between structure and culture
- To extend our understanding of food choice to contemporary policy issues and to our own lives
- To gain familiarity with key classical and contemporary writings on food, health, and consumption
- To develop the skills of analytic reading, writing, and thinking, throughout the course and through an extended final paper

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attend Class Meetings

Let's attend every class ready to dig into important ideas. This means that you must have read and thought about the assigned readings. Bring your readings to class. Class will focus on discussion, but we will also incorporate small-group activities and documentary films. You can miss one class without your attendance and participation grade dropping.

Participate in Class

How much you and your peers benefit from this experience depends on everyone contributing to our collective engagement with the course material. Again, this means that you must do the readings and come to class ready to discuss them. Weekly memos will help you to get ready for class

meetings, and they will help me to elicit your participation. If you feel uncomfortable speaking up in class, feel free to let me know so that we can strategize about how to support your participation.

Read

A reader for this course is available at Copy Central. I will send an email with background information and reading questions for the following week's readings. A few readings are not in the reader. They are marked with an asterisk. (You do not need to bring these ones to class.)

Write Weekly Memos

Each week, you will write a memo (450-500 words) on the reading. These memos will help you to systematize your thinking in preparation for class discussion—and they'll help me to see what you find interesting, confusing, or unconvincing. Additionally, I will draw on your memos to facilitate classroom discussion. Be ready to discuss your memo!

Each Monday by 8PM, I will send two writing prompts. Choose one. The first prompt will echo questions in the reading questions in "Participation and Preparation," below. It will focus on understanding and evaluating particular readings. The second prompt will echo discussion questions for each class meeting, below. It will focus on synthesizing the readings. Understanding, evaluating, and synthesizing the reading are all crucial for discussion, so either memo prompt will help you prepare for that aspect of our conversation.

Memos are due on Sunday by 10PM. You will get full credit for submitting a memo that shows me that you have grappled with the material and are ready to engage it in class. Even if you don't understand everything fully, I want to see that you have worked through the readings. Because these memos are supposed to prepare you—and me—for class, you will get credit for a memo *only* if you submit it by the due date. Late memos receive NO credit. If you submit memos but they do not show meaningful engagement with the material, I will discuss this with you personally; if this happens repeatedly, you may only get partial credit. You get one week off from memo writing without penalty. (You choose which week.) I will provide written feedback on your second memo. Thereafter, I will not give extensive written feedback.

Final Paper

A final paper (12-20 pgs) is your opportunity to examine in depth an aspect of food choice and inequality that interests you. You can address your topic in one of three ways: 1) a literature review; 2) an analysis of a current event or policy issue; or 3) an analysis of cultural representations of food choice and the people making those choices (e.g., in documentary films, newspaper articles, TV shows, magazines, social media platforms, etc.). Four assignments will build up to the final paper.

- a. Three possible paper topics (DUE February 12)
- b. Paper proposal: one paper topic and the data sources you will use (DUE March 5)
- c. Annotated bibliography and description of data/sources (DUE April 2)
- d. Summary of emerging findings, abstract and paper outline (DUE April 16)

You will also meet with me in reading week to discuss your paper. (The meeting is part of the participation grade.)

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Assignment	Percentage	Due Date
Participation	25%	All semester
Weekly Memos	20%	Sundays 10PM
Three Possible Paper Topics	3%	February 12
Paper Proposal	3%	March 5
Annotated Bibliography, Data Description	7%	April 2
Emerging Findings, Abstract, and Outline	7%	April 16
Final Paper	35%	May 8

COURSE EXPECTATIONS and POLICIES

Participation and Preparation

Meaningful participation requires preparation. When new material proves challenging, it helps to approach it systematically. The following questions may help you, and they will guide our discussion:

1. What question(s) is the author asking?
2. What are the author's main points? (aim to identify three or four points)
3. What evidence does the author muster for their argument?
4. How convincing is the argument? What makes it convincing or unconvincing? If you're unconvicted, what would the author have to do to persuade you?
5. What about the argument is unclear or confusing?
6. What about the argument is interesting, surprising, or illuminating?

Note: If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to catch up with a classmate.

Assignment Submission

Assignments are due on bCourses by 11PM the day they are due. Don't leave them until the last minute! Late assignments lose a letter grade for each day (or fraction thereof) that they are late.

Computers, Phones, and Other Devices

No computers, phones, tablets, and other devices in class. The mere presence of an electronic device splits our attention. If you use a device in class, your participation grade will drop a full letter **for the whole semester**. If you need a phone because of an emergency, just tell me before class.

Email

I will respond to emails once a day, excluding weekends. If your question is answered on the syllabus or a handout, don't be disappointed if I don't reply.

Office Hours:

Thurs 2-4PM in Barrows Hall 434. Sign up in advance: <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/eikcw>

Classroom Culture and Academic Citizenship

We have the opportunity to engage important scholarly debates that will deepen our understanding of current social issues and our own lives. Meaningful engagement depends on everyone feeling

comfortable with sharing their thoughts—and their confusion. It will help if we all approach this course with curiosity and humility. Curiosity involves wanting to learn what other people think and wanting to understand why they think that way. It also involves interrogating why *we* think what we think. Humility requires recognizing that we don't always have the answer, and being open to being wrong. Sometimes our beliefs are based on intuition rather than on a systematic examination of evidence. We must be open to examining our beliefs and asking what they're based on. In the end, our beliefs may shift—or we might think the same way as before. But with curiosity and humility, we can have a more sophisticated, respectful discussion in the process.

Academic Integrity and Honesty:

Do your own work and cite references properly. Read and make sure that you understand UC Berkeley's Code of Student Conduct regarding academic dishonesty at <http://sa.berkeley.edu/conduct/integrity/addressing-misconduct>. Plagiarism is a serious offence. You will get no credit for any plagiarized assignment, and I will report you to Student Judicial Affairs for investigation. If you have any questions about what plagiarism is or how to avoid it, do not hesitate to contact me.

INTRODUCTION

JANUARY 22

WEEK 1: FOOD INSECURITY AND DIETARY DISPARITIES

1. What is health disparity?
2. What is food insecurity?
3. What are upstream vs. downstream factors?

PART 1: STRUCTURAL, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND MATERIAL INFLUENCES

JANUARY 29

WEEK 2: ACCESS-BASED EXPLANATIONS (YOU EAT WHERE YOU ARE)

1. Do “food deserts” explain dietary disparities?
2. What assumptions about how people act are embedded in access-based explanations?
3. How do these assumptions compare with people's understandings of access?
4. If we want to reduce dietary disparities, should we focus on increasing physical access to healthy food?

Landry, Alyssa. 2015. “What Is a Food Desert? Do You Live In One?” *Indian Country Today*.
<https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/culture/health-wellness/what-is-a-food-desert-do-you-live-in-one-235-million-in-this-country-do/>

Walker, Renee E., Christopher R. Keane, and Jessica G. Burke. 2010. “Disparities and Access to Healthy Food in the United States: A Review of Food Deserts Literature.” *Health & Place* 16(5): 876-884.

Ghosh-Dastidar, Madhumita, Gerald Hunter, Rebecca L. Collins, Shannon N. Zenk, et al. 2017. Does Opening a Supermarket in a Food Desert Change the Food Environment? *Health &*

Place 46: 249-256.

Cannuscio, Carolyn C., Weiss, E. E., & Asch, David A. 2010. The Contribution of Urban Foodways to Health Disparities. *Journal of Urban Health*, 87(3): 381-393.

FEBRUARY 5

WEEK 3: ECONOMIC EXPLANATIONS (YOU EAT WHAT YOU CAN AFFORD)

1. Does healthy food cost too much for people on a tight budget? Or is it affordable?
2. Does food cost explain socioeconomic disparities in diet quality?
3. Researchers and food-justice advocates disagree if a healthy diet is expensive or affordable. Why do they disagree?
4. If we want to reduce dietary disparities, should we focus on making healthy food more affordable?

Drewnowski, Adam. 2004. "Obesity and the Food Environment: Dietary Energy Density and Diet Costs." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 27(3): 154-162.

DeVault, Marjorie. 1991. "Affluence and Poverty," Chapter 7 in *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 167-202.

Bittman, Mark. 2011. "Is Junk Food Really Cheaper?" *The New York Times*, 24, SR1.
[<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/25/opinion/sunday/is-junk-food-really-cheaper.html>]

Stic. 2013. "[How To Eat Good on a Hood Budget.](http://plantbasedonabudget.com/7-ways-to-eat-good-while-on-a-hood-budget-by-stic-of-dead-prez/)"
[<http://plantbasedonabudget.com/7-ways-to-eat-good-while-on-a-hood-budget-by-stic-of-dead-prez/>]

Brown, Leanne. 2014. *Good and Cheap: Eat Well on \$4 a Day*. Pp. 3-13 [***browse recipes at:
<https://cookbooks.leannebrown.com/good-and-cheap.pdf>]

FEBRUARY 12

WEEK 4: THE GRIND OF POVERTY (YOU EAT WHAT YOU CAN MANAGE)

1. How does the experience of material hardship shape what people eat?
2. How might the experience of material hardship affect people's relationship to food many years down the line?
3. The authors present several different views of how the grind of poverty affects food choice—and the experience of eating only what's within budget. Compare and contrast these views. Which one(s) do you find most compelling? Why?

Warin, Megan, Tanya Zivcovic, Vivienne Moore, Paul R Warde, and Michelle Jones. 2015. "Short Horizons and Obesity Futures: Disjunctures Between Public Health Interventions and Everyday Temporalities." *Social Science & Medicine* 128: 309-315.

Olson, Christine M., Caron F. Bove, and Emily O. Miller. 2007. "Growing up Poor: Long-Term Implications for Eating Patterns and Body Weight." *Appetite* 49(1): 198-207.

Mullainathan, Sendhil and Eldar Shafir. 2013. "Focusing and Tunneling," "Borrowing and Myopia," and "Poverty," Chapters 1, 5, and 7 in *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means so Much*. New York: Times Books.

Elkins, Kathleen. 2015. I spent only \$4 a day on food for a week — and it was grueling *Business Insider*.

→DUE: Three Possible Paper Topics

****2/19/2017: NO CLASS**

FEBRUARY 26

WEEK 5: TASTE SOCIALIZATION (YOU EAT WHAT YOU LIKE)

1. Is it possible that people, even economically disadvantaged people, actually eat the food they do because they like its taste?
2. Where do our tastes come from in the first place? Biology? Personality? Socialization?
3. How do our tastes *reflect* social and economic inequalities?
4. How might taste *contribute to* dietary disparities?

Mennella, Julie and Gary Beauchamp. 1998. "Early Flavor Experiences: Research Update." *Nutrition Reviews* 56(7): 5-11.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1983. "The Choice of the Necessary," Chapter 7 in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Harvard University Press. Pp. 372-381 only.

Daniel, Caitlin. 2016. "Economic Constraints on Taste Formation and the True Cost of Healthy Eating." *Social Science & Medicine* 148: 34-41.

**Wollan, Malia. 2014. "What Kids Eat All Over the World." New York Times Magazine. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/10/08/magazine/eaters-all-over.html>

RESEARCH INTERLUDE

MARCH 5

WEEK 6: LIBRARY VISIT

1. What resources exist for social scientific research on food? How do I find them?

→DUE: Paper Proposal

PART 2: SOCIAL AND SYMBOLIC INFLUENCES ON FOOD CHOICE

MARCH 12

WEEK 7: THE SOCIAL MEANING OF FOOD: CREATING SOCIAL EXPERIENCE AND COLLECTIVE LIFE

1. How do people use food to create social experience and sustain social ties, even when they don't have much money?
2. Is using food to create social experience and social ties related to dietary disparities? If so, how?
3. Can we harness the social force of food to address dietary disparities? If so, how? If not, why?

DeVault, Marjorie. 1991. "Constructing the Family," Chapter 3 in *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 77-91.

Kaufman, Leslie and Adam Karpati. 2007. Understanding the Sociocultural Roots of Childhood Obesity: Food Practices among Latino Families of Bushwick, Brooklyn. *Social Science & Medicine* 64(11): 2177-2188.

Arnade, Chris. 2016. McDonald's: You Can Sneer, but It's the Glue that Holds Communities Together. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/jun/08/mcdonalds-community-centers-us-physical-social-networks>

MARCH 19

WEEK 8: THE SOCIAL MEANING OF FOOD: STATUS AND DIGNITY

1. How does food relate to our identity—who we are, who we want to be, and who we are *not*?
2. How do concerns about status and economic constraints work together in shaping food choices?
3. What are the health consequences of eating in ways that accord with our identity?
4. What are the social consequences of failing to eat in ways that are socially respectable?

Veblen, Thorstein. 1994[1899]. *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. Pp. 15-16, 24-38, 84-85, 87-90, 102-104, 115-116.

Charles, Nickie and Marion Kerr. 1986. "Eating Properly, the Family and State Benefit." *Sociology* 20(3): 412-429.

****3/26/17: NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)**

APRIL 2

WEEK 9: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF "GOOD FOOD"

1. What characteristics of food do people in different social classes appreciate?
2. Why do people in different social classes appreciate different characteristics of food?
3. How do these definitions of good and satisfying food relate to economic circumstances? How do they relate to social/symbolic concerns (e.g., status, identity, etc.)?

4. Do different social constructions of “good food” shape dietary inequalities? If so, how?

Johnston, Josée, and Shyon Baumann. 2007. "Democracy versus Distinction: A Study of Omnivorousness in Gourmet Food Writing." *American Journal of Sociology* 113(1): 165-204.

DeVault, Marjorie. 1991. “The Significance of Style,” Chapter 8 in *Feeding the Family*. pp. 203-226.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Harvard University Press. pp. 177-187.

→ DUE: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

APRIL 9

WEEK: 10 THEORIZING FOOD CHOICE AND FOOD WELL-BEING

In-class film: *Soul Food Junkies* by Byron Hurt

1. How do *structure*—access, material resources, and policy—and *culture*—people’s shared ideas about and feelings about food—work together to shape food choices?
2. To what extent is there a cohesive African-American way of eating?
3. That food provides social wellbeing—not just health—is a key theme in *Soul Food Junkies*. If we were to develop the concept of *food wellbeing*, what would it include?
4. Should nutrition policies and programs consider food wellbeing above and beyond nutrition, narrowly defined? Why or why not? What would these policies and programs look like in practice?

Block, Lauren G., Sonya A. Grier, Terry L. Childers, et al. 2011. “From Nutrients to Nurturance: A Conceptual Introduction to Food Well-Being.” *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 30(1): 5-13

PART 3: MORALITY, STIGMA, AND INEQUALITY

APRIL 16

WEEK 11: CONSTRUCTIONS OF “GOOD” AND “BAD” EATERS

1. In the popular imagination, what defines the “good” eater and the “bad” eater?
2. How do definitions of “good” and “bad” eaters relate to “good” and “bad” kinds of people?
3. What are the consequences (social, psychological, health) of constructing some people as “good” eaters and others as “bad” eaters?
4. Is healthy eating just elitism dressed up as science? If so, what are the concrete implications? What would that matter?

Crawford, Robert. 2006. “Health as a Meaningful Social Practice.” *Health* 10(4): 401-420.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction*. pp. reread 178-179.

Puhl, Rebecca M., and Chelsea A. Heuer. 2010. "Obesity Stigma: Important Considerations for Public Health." *American Journal of Public Health* 100(6): 1019-1028.

**The Onion. 2014. "Woman A Leading Authority On What Shouldn't Be In Poor People's Grocery Carts."

<https://local.theonion.com/woman-a-leading-authority-on-what-shouldn-t-be-in-poor-1819576454>

In class film: clip from *People Like Us*

→ DUE: Emerging Findings, Abstract, and Paper Outline

APRIL 23

WEEK 12: SEMESTER OVERVIEW AND THEORETICAL INTEGRATION

Link, Bruce and Jo Phelan. 1995. Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Disease. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 35, 80-94.

Note: come prepared to synthesize what we've learned throughout the semester and to discuss the emerging findings of your capstone paper.

→ "DUE" Reading Week: Meeting about Final Paper

→ DUE MAY 8: Final Paper

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Writing: When we write, we see more clearly what we do and do not know. And when we write clearly, we show that we know something well. Strong, clear writing requires substantial rewriting and revision. Please take advantage of "drop in" or "by appointment" writing tutoring at the Student Learning Center (<http://slc.berkeley.edu/writing>), and consider seeking feedback from your peers. Of course, while peer review can provide essential guidance, your final product must reflect your own thinking and work.