

FOOD CHOICE, HEALTH, AND INEQUALITY

Sociology 190.8, UC Berkeley, Spring 2021

Instructor: Dr. Caitlin Daniel
Mondays 10-12 PM

cdaniel@berkeley.edu
OH: Th 4-5 PM; Fri. 10-12

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 COMPONENTS AND REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Participation (30%)

As a capstone seminar, this course is a co-production between instructor and students. Unlike a lecture, it focuses much less on an instructor presenting knowledge and more on you digesting and grappling with knowledge together. Thus, how much you benefit from this experience depends on everyone contributing to our collective engagement with the course material. How do we do this? Come ready to dig into important ideas. This means that you must have read and thought about the assigned readings. Have your readings on hand. Class will focus on discussion, but we will also incorporate small-group activities and videos.

Zoom links will be posted in Announcements in bCourses. So that our online experience is as smooth as possible, I will post Zoom etiquette guidelines to Files in bCourses. Please read and follow!

Weekly Memos (20%)

Each week, you will write a memo (450-500 words) on the assigned readings. These memos will help you to systematize your thinking in preparation for class. They'll help me to see what you find interesting, confusing, or unconvincing. I will draw on your memos to facilitate classroom discussion, so be ready to discuss your memo (and to be called on if need be). If you are uncomfortable speaking up in class, let me know, and we can develop a strategy to support your participation. Logistics: A week in advance, I will post two writing prompts to Assignments in bCourses. 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 synthesis 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 1 PM. This will give me time to review them before class. Late memos receive NO credit. If you would like written feedback on your second memo, let me know. Thereafter, I will be available to give feedback in office hours.

Final Paper (50%)

A final paper (13-20 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. Two possible paper topics (DUE February 15)
- b. Paper proposal: *one* paper topic and the data sources you will use (DUE March 1)
- c. Annotated bibliography and description of data/sources (DUE March 29)
- d. Summary of emerging findings and paper outline (DUE April 22)
- e. Final paper due May 10 at 11:59PM

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Assignment	Percentage	Due Date
Participation	30%	All semester
Weekly Memos	20%	Sundays 1 PM
Two Possible Paper Topics	3%	February 15
Paper Proposal	3%	March 1
Annotated Bibliography, Data Description	7%	March 29
Emerging Findings and Outline	7%	April 22
Final Paper	30%	May 10

GRADING

This course has a total of **1000 points**:

Final paper: **500 points**

Attendance and participation: **300 points**

Weekly memos: **200 points**

A 94-100% **B+** 88%-89.99% **C+** 78%-79.99% **D+** 68%-69.99%

A-	90-93.99%	B	84-87.99%	C	74-77.99%	D	64-67.99%
		B-	80-83.99%	C-	70-73.99%	F	<63.99%

Incomplete Grades: Incompletes are the last resort for students experiencing true medical or other emergencies that make it impossible for them to complete their coursework on time. To be considered for an incomplete grade, students need to speak with me about it DURING the semester, and you must provide documentation of the reason for the request.

If you need **accommodations** for a disability or medical condition, or have a conflict due to university sports or the observance of religious holidays, please email or speak with me early in the semester.

MATERIALS

Materials include academic articles, book chapters, news articles, and videos on YouTube. These materials will be available online in three locations: E-Reserves, which provides access to digital copies of books and articles; PDFs in bCourses; and links, provided in the syllabus. The syllabus indicates in **bold** where each reading can be found. The e-Reserves list will be in the “Files” folder of bCourses. (Note: This list, kindly created by the library, is not in alphabetical or chronological order...) The PDFs are in bCourses in the “Files” folder.

Please note that some readings are TBD and that others that are currently assigned may change. I will apprise you of any changes.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS and POLICIES

Participation and Preparation

Participation requires preparation. When new material proves challenging, it helps to approach it systematically. The following questions may help you. They will also guide our discussion:

1. What is the research question? Why is that question important?
2. What is the main argument? (try to distill into three or four points)
3. How convincing is the argument? What are its strengths and weaknesses? If you're unconvinced, what would the author have to do to persuade you?
4. What about the argument is unclear or confusing? *Why* am I confused? What do I need to work through that confusion?

Absences are excused only for true emergencies. Excused absences require documentation of the reason for the absence. Note: If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to catch up with a classmate. There are no automatically excused absences. Because class falls on a Monday, we already have two days off 😊

Assignment Submission

Assignments are due on bCourses by 11:59 PM the day they are due, unless indicated otherwise. Late assignments lose a letter grade for each day (or fraction thereof) that they are late.

Other Devices

No (non-assistive) devices other than your computer (e.g., phone, tablet) are allowed in class. The

mere presence of an electronic device splits our attention. If I notice you using such a device, your participation grade will drop a full letter **for the whole semester**.

Email

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

Office Hours Sign-Up Info:

Sign-up sheet: <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/eikcw>

Zoom Log In:

<https://berkeley.zoom.us/j/5308475197?pwd=NFBFT21yVWRialBKRFRjbUNNOIRBQT09>

Meeting ID: 530 847 5197

Passcode: 537704

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 understand what other people think and why. It also involves interrogating why *we* think what we think. Humility requires recognizing that we don't always have the answer and that we might be wrong. After all, many of our beliefs are based on intuition rather than careful analysis. Learning involves examining our beliefs and asking what they're based on. At the end of this inspection, our beliefs may shift—or maybe not. But with curiosity and humility, we can have a more sophisticated, respectful discussion in the process.

Academic Integrity and Honesty:

There is zero tolerance of any form of academic dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, copying, and falsification. Make sure that you understand UC Berkeley's Code of Student Conduct regarding academic dishonesty:

<http://sa.berkeley.edu/conduct/integrity/addressing-misconduct>. Instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs for investigation. Additionally, you may lose points for the entire course component that any dishonest is associated with (e.g., zero points on paper, zero attendance and participation points). Please note that it's possible to plagiarize without intending to. If you have any questions about what plagiarism is or how to avoid it, do not hesitate to contact me.

INTRODUCTION

JANUARY 25

WEEK 1: FOOD INSECURITY AND DIETARY DISPARITIES

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

NO READING

PART 1: STRUCTURAL, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND MATERIAL INFLUENCES

FEBRUARY 1

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

1. How well does access 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 own understandings of access?
4. If we want to reduce dietary disparities, should we focus on increasing physical access?

Video: "Eliminating Food Deserts In America:" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8My-iWjTBQ8>

Walker, R. et al. 2020. "Disparities and Access to Healthy Food in the United States: A Review of Food Deserts Literature." *Health & Place* 16(5): 876-884. **bCourses**

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

Cummins, S., Flint, E., & Matthews, S. A. (2014). New neighborhood grocery store increased awareness of food access but did not alter dietary habits or obesity. *Health Affairs*: 283-291. **bCourses**

Allcott, Hunt, Jean-Pierre Dubé, Molly Schnell. 2019. "Why Food Deserts Aren't the Key Cause of Nutritional Inequalities." *USA News and World Report*. Dec. 27.
<https://www.usnews.com/news/cities/articles/2019-12-27/why-food-deserts-arent-the-key-cause-of-nutritional-inequality>

FEBRUARY 8

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. There's a lot of disagreement about whether a healthy diet is affordable. Why? What is this disagreement about?
4. 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. **bCourses**

DeVault, Marjorie. 1991. "Affluence and Poverty," Chapter 7 in *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*. **bCourses**

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/>]

FEBRUARY 15: NO CLASS (PRESIDENT'S DAY)

→DUE: TWO POSSIBLE PAPER TOPICS

FEBRUARY 22

WEEK 4: THE GRIND OF POVERTY AND RACISM (YOU EAT WHAT YOU CAN MANAGE—AND TO MANAGE)

1. How does the experience of poverty and racism hardship shape what people eat, now and in the future?
2. The authors present several different views of how the grind of poverty affects what people eat and how they *experience* eating on a budget. Compare and contrast these views. Which one(s) do you find most compelling? Why?
3. From the perspective of this week's readings, how do we reduce dietary disparities?

Warin, M. et al. 2015. "Short Horizons and Obesity Futures: Disjunctures Between Public Health Interventions and Everyday Temporalities." *Social Science & Medicine* 128: 309-315.

Olson, C. et al 2007. "Growing up Poor: Long-Term Implications for Eating Patterns and Body Weight." *Appetite* 49(1): 198-207, Intro and pages 204-207 (starting at "Qualitative Findings")

Kazmierski, K. et al. 2020. "Stress-Induced Eating Among Racial/Ethnic Groups in the United States: a Systematic Review." *Journal of racial and ethnic health disparities*: 1-15

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*.

MARCH 1

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

→ TWO PAPER TOPICS DUE TO BCOURSES BY 11:59PM

1. Thus far, our readings have focused on *barriers* to eating more healthily (structure). Is it possible that low-income people actually eat the food they do because they *like* it (agency)?
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?

Birch, L. L. 1999. "Development of food preferences." *Annual Review of Nutrition*: 41-62.
https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=DEVELOPMENT+OF+FOOD+PREFERENCES+birch&btnG=

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>

PART 2: SOCIAL AND SYMBOLIC INFLUENCES ON FOOD CHOICE

MARCH 8

WEEK 6: THE SOCIAL MEANING OF FOOD: CREATING SOCIAL EXPERIENCE AND GROUP LIFE

1. How do people use food to create social ties and social life, even when money is tight?
2. What kinds of ties do we produce through food? How do these ties differ by class?
3. Does using food to create social experience and social ties relate to inequality? How?
4. How can we harness the social force of food to address dietary disparities? If we can't, why?

DeVault, Marjorie. 1991. "Constructing the Family," Chapter 3 in *Feeding the Family*: 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>

In-class video: *Home Flavored*, <http://realfoodfilms.org/video/home-flavored/>

MARCH 15

WEEK 7: In-class documentary: *A Place at the Table*

Reading: TBD

Come ready to analyze and synthesize the perspectives we've covered so far

**** NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK MARCH 22-26**

MARCH 29

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

→ Annotated Bibliography Due

1. How do concerns about status and dignity shape food choices even when money's tight?
2. How do these concerns about status and dignity relate to identity—who we are, who we want to be, and who we are *not*?
3. Charles and Kerr focus on England in the 1980s. What would be the contemporary US version of their argument?

4. What are the social consequences of failing to eat in “respectable” ways?
5. What are the possible health consequences of eating in ways that protect our dignity?
6. How do we think about the balance between preserving dignity and promoting health? Do they conflict? Are they complementary?

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.

In-class activity: Analyze low-income parents’ narratives of how they feed their families OR Analyze “You’re the Mom” program

APRIL 5

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.

PART 3: STATUS, STIGMA, AND MORALITY

APRIL 12

WEEK 10: CONSTRUCTIONS OF “GOOD” AND “BAD” EATERS (“GOOD” FOOD = “GOOD” PEOPLE?)

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>

APRIL 19

WEEK 11: FOOD AND HEALTH AS RESISTANCE

1. Is healthy eating just elitism dressed up as science? If so, with what consequences?
2. Can healthy eating and health itself be forms of resistance instead?
3. When and why is healthy eating a tool of oppression versus a tool of liberation?

Potorti, Mary. 2017. “Feeding the Revolution”: The Black Panther Party, Hunger, and Community Survival.” *Journal of African American Studies* 2(1): 85-110.

Nelson, Alondra. 2011. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*. Chapters 2 and 3. Pp. 49-114.

“The Movement to Define Native American Cuisine.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/17/dining/new-native-american-cuisine.html>

<https://www.fastcompany.com/3067716/the-creator-of-resistance-kitchen-on-why-food-is-resonating-in-the-age-of>

Whose Resistance?

Wey, Tunde. 2020. “White Food Media and the Commodification of Resistance.” *Scalawag Magazine*.

<https://scalawagmagazine.org/2020/07/food-magazines-identity-politics/>

APRIL 19

WEEK 11: SOLUTIONS

1. How do we address dietary disparities and food insecurity?

READINGS TBD

→ April 22: EMERGING FINDINGS DUE (This is not a day we meet, so don’t forget!)

APRIL 26

WEEK 12: THEORIZING FOOD CHOICE AND FOOD WELL-BEING

Hurt, Byron *Soul Food Junkies* (documentary)

Readings TBD

1. 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?
2. Should policies and programs consider food wellbeing in addition to hunger and

nutrition? What would these policies and programs look like in practice?

→ DUE MAY 10, 11:59PM: 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.