Fast food consumption in minority populations

Claire Schrantz

Abstract

I am interested in looking at the racial stratification prevalent in the current American dietary experience. Literature to date on nutritional inequality has confirmed that poorer communities have been deprived of equal access to healthy, local food (Alkon and Agyeman 5). I am interested in looking into what kind of food these minority-based communities eat, in terms of this diet’s long-term implications. With this study, I wish specifically to explore a trending disparity in nutritional choices, namely fast food consumption. As the eating of fast food is becoming compartmentalized along the lines of race, I hope to analyze the cultural associations drawn between fast food and African Americans. The question that I seek to answer by means of investigating fast food tradition is: to what extent does a dietary stratification of whites and blacks foster racial divide in the United States?

Purpose of the Study

This question of what separates the two races along the lines of food in this country is pertinent to the pursuit of progress and racial equity in the United States. Dietary habits are not just a signifier of cultural identity, but also an integral force either fueling or hindering workers and students. The fiscal disparity between white and black Americans leaves blacks more susceptible to reliance upon unhealthy food sources, and in tandem a decreased dietary emphasis on vital nutrients (Satio, Galanka, and Siega-Riz 1089). Accordingly, there are disproportionately more fast food restaurants per capita in predominantly African American neighborhoods than there are in Caucasian neighborhoods (Block, Scribner, and DeSalvo 211). Block, Scribner, and DeSalvo posit that the relationship between the low-income tendency of these areas and the resulting unhealthy dietary trends is likely a key actor in obesity epidemics within populations (211). With my research, I hope to take this observation one step further, accounting for the cyclical nature of poverty and poor health. I want to find out whether obesity is endemic, rather than epidemic, to these regions.

The issue folds over with each generation: children are raised in regions where their parents cannot afford healthy food, and are thus imbued with chronic fast food tendencies. One indicator that this lack of nutritional value in the diets of African American children may be a detriment to lifelong health is the place that the poorer children occupy in current U.S. culture as a target market for fast food advertisements (Henderson and Kelly 191). Prime time children’s TV shows which have a predominately African American audience feature sixty percent more food commercials for fast food—also, sweets and drinks heavy in high-fructose corn syrup—than prime time TV shows with a predominately Caucasian child audience (Outley and Tadesse 432). This assignment of African Americans to the drive-thru echelon of a dietary hierarchy so early in life can hardly be innocuous compartmentalization. In my research, I want to gauge how insidious early-onset dietary subjugation actually is, and to what extent it perpetuates racial divide. How does the targeting of African American children for fast food advertising play out in poor communities with regards to the stress low income already places on health?
Works Cited

  - Not only does this book assess the fast food problem, but it also questions the righteousness that sustainable agriculture pundits award the local food movement in its overlooking how out of reach it is for low-income Americans, a population disproportionately composed of minorities. It is a valuable source for my research because it confronts our country’s food infrastructure along the lines of race, and in doing so frames a launching pad for a food justice and equalizing movement.

  - This article takes a look at the prevalence of obesity and its related health complications in low-income neighborhoods in the context of the sociodemographics and fast food. This is a useful one for me, because its finding that fast food consumption does indeed correlate to obesity epidemics gives me the basis upon which to prop my question regarding the cyclical nature of poverty, obesity, and poor health.

  - Vani and Kelly take a look at the different types of foods being advertised during prime time television shows, ultimately concluding that more fast food advertisements air during African American programming. This will augment my research by corroborating my other sources on the subject and providing a focus on obesity and its complications. This source balances out the research I already have by looking at fast food advertising more acutely through the lens of poverty.

  - This web source looks specifically at the statistics regarding commercial advertising content during shows with a predominately white audience versus shows with a predominately African American audience. The study found that more fast food commercials aired during television shows aimed at black American children. This is relevant to exploring my theory for the authority it gives me to add the element of perpetuating chronic fast food intake and obesity in an already marginalized population of the United States.

  - This article zeroes in on frequency of fast food meals composed of fast food, noting particularly trends such as a higher frequency of meals eaten at fast food establishments as inversely associated with vegetable intake. This type of information is vital to my
proposition because it highlights a direct relationship between more fast food and less vital nutrients.