



Table talk: How mothers and adolescents across socioeconomic status discuss food



Priya Fielding-Singh^{a,*}, Jennifer Wang^b

^a Department of Sociology, Stanford University, 450 Serra Mall, Room 133, Stanford, CA 94305, United States

^b Emmett Interdisciplinary Program in Environment and Resources, Stanford University, 473 Via Ortega, Suite 226, Stanford, CA 94035, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 February 2017

Received in revised form

13 June 2017

Accepted 14 June 2017

Available online 15 June 2017

Keywords:

United States

Food choice

Parents

Adolescents

Health disparities

Family

Socioeconomic status

Qualitative methods

ABSTRACT

This article reports findings from a qualitative study of food practices among families of differing socioeconomic circumstances. Using in-depth interviews from sixty-two families in the San Francisco Bay Area in 2015–2016, we find socioeconomic differences in how mothers and adolescents talk about food. Across SES, mothers and adolescents engage in discussions about healthy eating. However, these conversations are more commonplace and embedded within high-SES family life than among low-SES families. Beyond conversations about 1) healthy eating, the topics of 2) food quality and 3) price are discussed to varying degrees across SES. Within high-SES families, frequent discussions of healthy eating are paired with dialogue highlighting the importance of consuming higher quality food. Price is largely absent as a topic of conversation among high-SES families. On the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum, low-SES mothers and adolescents frequently engage in conversations about price when discussing food. Mentions of food quality are rare, but when they do occur, they underscore important trade-offs between food's healthiness, quality and price. Given prior research showing the impact of dialogue between parents and adolescents on adolescents' dietary behaviors, these findings help us understand how family discussions contribute to shaping adolescents' approaches to food. An important implication is that high-SES families' discussions of food quality may strengthen messages about healthy eating, while conversations about affordability within low-SES families may highlight financial barriers to healthy eating.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Socioeconomic inequities in diet-related health among adolescents in the United States continue to draw the attention of scholars and policymakers. Top concerns include high rates of type 2 diabetes and obesity among adolescents from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds (Hanson and Chen, 2007; Daniels, 2009; Ogden et al., 2010, 2012; Frederick et al., 2014). Adolescents' sociocultural and familial circumstances contribute to these socioeconomic disparities. Within families, parents play a particularly large role in shaping adolescents' food intake (Larson and Story, 2009). Parents model eating behaviors (Savage et al., 2007), structure mealtimes (Hammons and Fiese, 2011), and mold tastes and preferences (Birch et al., 2007). Parents also talk to adolescents

about food (Berge et al., 2015, 2013). These discussions have important consequences for adolescents' dietary behaviors and health (Haines et al., 2006; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010; Berge et al., 2013, 2015). To date, however, scholarship on parent-adolescent dialogue about food has focused primarily on whether families encourage dieting, or discuss topics of healthy eating or weight (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010; Berge et al., 2013, 2015).

In this paper, we report the findings from a qualitative descriptive study that explored how mothers and adolescents across SES talk about food. Two primary research questions guided this study: what is the nature of food-related dialogue across SES? And how might these conversations further contribute to disparities in adolescents' diet quality? We answer these research questions by showing, through interviews with mothers and adolescents, that there are socioeconomic differences in the kinds of conversations that take place around food. Across SES, mothers and adolescents engage in discussions about healthy eating. However, these conversations are more routine and embedded within high-SES family life than within low-SES families, for whom these

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: priyafs@stanford.edu (P. Fielding-Singh), jw56@stanford.edu (J. Wang).

conversations occur less frequently. Beyond conversations about 1) healthy eating, we find that the topics of 2) food quality and 3) price are discussed to varying degrees across SES.

2. Background

2.1. Socioeconomic diet disparities among adolescents

Adolescent health disparities are a national health concern in the United States. Just as these health issues follow a socioeconomic gradient, so too do the dietary practices that help drive them (Darmon and Drewnowski, 2008; Wang et al., 2014). Greater affluence is consistently associated with healthier diets for higher SES adolescents, who consume fewer energy-dense foods and drinks such as fast foods and sweetened beverages (Kant and Graubard, 2013). By contrast, children from lower SES families have the lowest fruit intake and the highest levels of sweetened beverage consumption (Frederick et al., 2014).

The sources of socioeconomic diet disparities among adolescents are myriad, ranging from structural and economic constraints (Caspi et al., 2012; Daniel, 2016) to biological (Björntorp, 2001) and sociocultural factors (Curtis et al., 2009). Given these diverse contributing factors, there is a call for more research that characterizes the socioeconomic and familial circumstances within which adolescents' food practices are embedded (Contento et al., 2006; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, 2007).

2.2. Sociocultural and familial influences on adolescents' diets

With adolescence comes changes in eating behaviors: adolescents' greater freedom, preference for less healthy foods, and increased independent eating occasions all contribute to a decline in diet quality (Sargent et al., 2002). Adolescents' dietary choices are embedded in and reflect their everyday family life and their broader sociocultural environments (Curtis et al., 2009; Backett-Milburn et al., 2010a). Research shows that values around diet and consumption vary across SES: for instance, healthy eating can serve as a form of social, symbolic and cultural capital within high-, but not low-SES groups (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012). As adolescents absorb the implicit food-related values and norms circulating in their respective groups, they come to unconsciously understand and enact the unspoken boundaries and rules of acceptable consumption. In this way, adolescents' food choices are gradually constructed from the accumulated habits and preferences built up in their familial and socioeconomic groups (Bourdieu, 1984).

2.3. Parents' influences on adolescents' diets

Within the family context, parents play an important role in shaping adolescents' ideas and choices around food (Rasmussen et al., 2006). Our study advances two strands of social scientific scholarship examining parents' influences on adolescents' diets. First, and most broadly, we build on research showing important socioeconomic differences in how parents approach adolescents' consumption. Socioeconomic status underpins how parents navigate the dietary changes associated with adolescence (Eldridge and Murcott, 2000; Backett-Milburn et al., 2006). Studies show that parents vary in how much control they feel they can or should exercise over their adolescents' food consumption (Backett-Milburn et al., 2006). While low-SES mothers largely view adolescents' food preferences as beyond parental control and as progressively adolescents' own responsibility, middle-SES parents perceive it as their responsibility to mold adolescents' food practices "in the right direction". While much of this research assumes and occasionally alludes to the fact that parents and adolescents

talk about these food-related topics (Backett-Milburn et al., 2010b), little light is shed on the conversations themselves. We therefore lack an understanding of the similarities and differences between food-related discussions in families across SES backgrounds.

Second, our work advances an important and more focused research stream exploring food-related discussions within families (Berge et al., 2013, 2015). Berge's examinations of parents' conversations with adolescents about healthy eating and weight present two main findings. First, higher-SES mothers engage in more parent-adolescent conversations about healthy eating compared to lower-SES mothers, who report more conversations about adolescent weight (Berge et al., 2015). Second, how parents talk to adolescents about food impacts adolescent eating behaviors: while conversations focused on weight or size are associated with increased risk for adolescent disordered eating behaviors (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010), conversations about healthy eating are protective against disordered eating behaviors (Berge et al., 2013).

These findings reveal that how parents talk to their adolescents about food matters. Yet we lack a more holistic understanding of how food is discussed within families and the degree to which these conversations are central or peripheral to family life and adolescents' daily eating experiences. For example, while research shows that parents across SES consider different factors related to their adolescents' diets (Backett-Milburn et al., 2010a), it is less clear if and how parents communicate these factors to adolescents. Given these conversations' documented impact on adolescents' diets (Berge et al., 2013, 2015), understanding how food is discussed within families is essential for advancing our understanding of parental influences.

3. The study

3.1. Data collection

We draw on qualitative data collected between January 2015 and June 2016 in the San Francisco Bay Area, California. Data consist of interviews with one mother and one adolescent from 62 families across socioeconomic status. In total, 124 interviews were conducted from 20 high-SES, 21 middle-SES, and 21 low-SES families. Given study aims, families were purposefully selected on the basis of socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Inclusion criteria for the study included having a child between the ages of 12 and 19 who lived at home. All mothers identified as primary caregivers. The interview sample varied in ethnographic background, marital status, number of children, and employment status.

We categorized families by socioeconomic status primarily using parents' level of education and household income (Cooper, 2014). Consistent with other studies in the United States families were designated high-SES if at least one parent had a college education and family income was above 350% of the poverty line. In middle-SES families, both parents had at least a high school education and household income was between 180% and 350% of the poverty line. In low-SES families, neither parent had above a high school degree and household income was below 180% of the poverty line. Table 1 shows the sociodemographic composition of the interview sample.

Following ethics approval from relevant educational institutions, families were primarily recruited using purposive and theoretical sampling (Small, 2009). All names of interview respondents and institutions used in this paper are pseudonyms. We recruited approximately forty percent of families through a public high school, Hillview Central High School, where teachers, coaches, school administrators, and a parent newsletter facilitated contact with families. Hillview Central was chosen as a recruitment site

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5046460>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5046460>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)