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Food Acquisition in Poughkeepsie, NY
EXPLORING THE STRATIFICATION OF “HEALTHY FOOD” CONSCIOUSNESS IN A FOOD-INSECURE CITY
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Abstract
This article provides and examines empirical evidence in order to evaluate scholarly, professional and activist perspectives that view food insecurity as a function of the stratification of food consciousness. This concept highlights causal models of food insecurity that emphasize micro-level and idealist factors to explain why stratified groups hold distinct attitudes and preferences regarding food provisioning and consumption. An empirical model is developed for the household activity of food acquisition, and the hypothesized preferences of food-insecure and other at-risk urban households are investigated for foods and stores that promote unhealthy eating. The data come from a community food assessment survey in the city of Poughkeepsie, New York, administered to a probabilistic sample of 355 city households. Evidence is found that disproves the stratification of food consciousness model for food acquisition, and debates and research are directed toward more significant factors and contexts of food insecurity.

Keywords: food insecurity, food acquisition, provisioning, foodways, food consciousness, community food assessment

In this article, we provide and examine empirical evidence to evaluate scholarly, professional and activist perspectives that explain food insecurity as a function of what we call the \textit{stratification of food consciousness}. Specifically, we investigate the presumed preferences of food-insecure and other at-risk urban households for foods and stores that promote unhealthy eating. By finding initial evidence that disproves the stratification of food consciousness thesis,
and which suggests that socioeconomically stratified groups are no more or less likely to report “healthy” food acquisition preferences, we seek to direct debates and research toward more significant factors and contexts of food insecurity.

As urban and regional scholars whose work includes applied community research, we come to this project via a community food assessment (CFA) undertaken in Poughkeepsie, New York, a city characterized by substantial rates of poverty and economic underdevelopment. Working with local food justice advocates and public health professionals, the first author designed a city-wide household survey to gauge food insecurity, ascertain issues in household food access, and characterize prevailing attitudes and preferences toward the food that households purchase and the stores they patronize. Gathering descriptive measurements on these variables to situate and inform public policy related to food insecurity was the primary objective in the CFA survey.

We describe the Poughkeepsie CFA in greater detail later in this article, but we imagine our experiences were familiar to many scholars conducting research on food issues in economically challenged locales. Specifically, we heard and acknowledged many Poughkeepsie stakeholders articulate views on household food insecurity that drew explicit or implied chains of causality between the food and stores households chose and the problems of food insecurity that many experienced. Such claims provide our point of departure in this article. Since our survey data offer some preliminary evidence to test the validity of such views, which are shared by many food/health professionals and scholars, in this article we go beyond the mission of the original CFA to investigate whether local food insecurity is associated with particular attitudes and values. Mindful of the problem of co-production in which “assumptions about a scientific object’s causes and character [are] built into models of examining it” (Guthman 2011, 68; Jasanoff 2004), our analysis here provides an opportunity to exercise critical reflexivity on prevailing wisdoms underlying many food security studies and initiatives conducted in other locales with similar demographics and challenges.

Modeling food insecurity

Conventionally, food insecurity is understood to be a condition experienced by households and individuals. As defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (aka the USDA, whose operationalization and measurement scales were utilized in the CFA survey), food insecurity refers to “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways” (USDA 2010). While the risks of food insecurity manifest as problems with physical well-being and productivity for daily life, the USDA's survey questions (see Figure 1) specifically operationalize food insecurity as a function of socioeconomic resources—whether households have “enough money for food,” to cite a recurring phrase—and thereby presume that problems of dietary intake are set in motion by household ability to afford food and access the commercial
nexus of food retail. In the conceptualization we adopt in this paper, then, food insecurity is ultimately a result of economic insecurity and household poverty.

The concept of food provisioning elaborates the chain of household activities that embed food security outcomes. Provisioning entails at least five household activities: acquisition, preparation, production, consumption, and disposal of food. Leftovers and other circular exceptions aside, these activities are undertaken in a linear sequence of household social reproduction, “where technical skills (e.g. growing, shopping, meal planning, food preparation, cooking) and resources are tacitly coordinated by a primary food provider within the social context and demands of household members, as well as the broader environment in which they live” (McIntyre and Rondeau, 2011, 117–118; quoted in Veen, Derkzen, & Wiskerke, 2012, 367). We note that the way the USDA operationally defines food insecurity highlights food acquisition, the front end of the provisioning sequence, as the site where household food insecurity is structurally constituted. By contrast, strategies and techniques for mitigating food insecurity can intervene at any number of points along the provisioning sequence.

While most food scholars, health practitioners and food justice activists agree that food insecurity is a household-level phenomenon, they differ on the question of what causes it. Two conceptual schemas are relevant to thinking about the diversity of causal theories of food insecurity. The first is macro vs. micro levels of analysis, which pertain to the scale that causal factors correspond to: external vs. household/individual life forces.

Micro-level mechanisms, macro-level mechanisms, or some combination of the two provide a formal framework through which causal theories of food insecurity propose various substantive factors. The diversity of theorized factors can be understood through a second conceptual schema, material vs. ideal factors, and the arrows of causality drawn between them. On the one hand, materialist theses posit that the material circumstances in which people find themselves have a constitutive if not strictly causal effect on consciousness, i.e., the values, outlooks, and attitudes that people hold. On the other hand, idealist theses reverse this causal arrow, proposing that consciousness mobilizes people into action that shapes if not causes their material circumstances.

The two conceptual schemas call attention to four generic models of food insecurity causality, shown in the four quadrants of Table 1. These schemas allow us to abstract the causal accounts from different explanations of and proposed remedies for low-income urban households’ food insecurity.

Returning to the example from the Poughkeepsie CFA that motivates our analysis in this article, we heard organizers and members of the public alike endorse educational proposals to mitigate food security among the city’s low-income population. For instance, educational materials and cooking demonstrations were proposed to teach food-insecure households how to prepare healthy dishes using fresh produce or how to evaluate nutritional content on food item labels. Advocates of such proposals that focus on mindsets and personal skills,
Fig 1. Map of Poughkeepsie, New York.
which are frequently proposed by advocates and initiatives in public health and food justice elsewhere, stake out a micro-level idealist position (corresponding to quadrant 4). They presume that low-income households have incorrect information and unhealthy ideas about what foods to buy and where to grocery shop, and further that holding such ideas results in behavior (or lack thereof) that compounds if not contributes to household food insecurity, insofar as householders with such food consciousness fail to adopt strategies (e.g., for maximizing nutritional content) or practice techniques (like stretching out meals using simple healthy ingredients) that could mitigate the likelihood and risks of food insecurity. In this paper, we empirically test such idealist assumptions about the influence that “unhealthy” attitudes and preferences have on low-income urban households.

Stratified food consciousness and food insecurity

Such educational proposals reveal an important debate in food security work regarding food consciousness—of specific concern in this paper, consciousness in the form of attitudes and preferences about what food items to buy and where to shop. Two key issues in this debate are, first, whether low-income urban households have significantly different ideas about food acquisition compared with their higher-income counterparts—a pattern we call stratified food consciousness—and, second, what difference such ideas might make for food security outcomes; that is, how much impact attitudes have on behavior.

To put the causal model implied by educational proposals in broader perspective, in this section we review relevant literature from two overlapping research traditions, sociology (focusing specifically on stratification, gender and urban sociology) and food research. Our references to specific works from this literature are admittedly brief and strategic in this section. We seek not to inventory the vast body of scholarship pertaining to urban food insecurity (which readers can find cited throughout this special issue), but instead to highlight the broader causal models that these four fields support in regards to stratified food consciousness. Needless to say, scholars, practitioners and advocates generally recognize that food insecurity ultimately draws upon multiple causal factors originating at different scales, from macro influences such as global shifts in food supply and downturns in national economies to micro-level household strategies for stretching out food budgets and optimizing nutritional intake. In modeling causal accounts of food insecurity here, we simply call attention to the ways different accounts emphasize particular points of intervention where food insecurity occurs and remedies can be targeted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Conceptual schemas of urban food insecurity.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Macro level of analysis</td>
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<td>Micro level of analysis</td>
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Social and spatial stratification

Critical scholarship on social stratification generally situates causal factors at the macro-level—the broad contexts and mechanisms by which people are divided and categorized into a hierarchical class system whereby different classes experience varying and unequal opportunities and life chances (e.g., Weber 1978). While the extent of this maldistribution of power and resources has recently reached levels unseen for almost a century, and economic inequality has recently been exacerbated by the recent Great Recession (e.g., Piketty 2014), the socioeconomic barriers facing low-income workers have been taking shape over decades of restructuring in income-earning employment opportunities. In the United States, shifts in technological/workforce productivity have placed a labor-market premium on highly educated knowledge/information/creative skills—the so-called creative economy—while exporting traditional industrial jobs and simultaneously expanding precarious jobs in low-skill service sectors at home (Florida 2003). The macro-level material forces (quadrant 1 of Table 1) in turn shape people’s demand-side abilities to consume food and manage other daily activities in the sphere of labor reproduction and consumption (quadrant 3). In this macro-context of unequal opportunity, people are unevenly able to live in areas where fresh, healthy food can be bought; to afford private transportation to travel to such areas when they are not nearby (and public transit is insufficient); and to avoid stark financial trade-offs between forestalling immediate risks (eviction, medical emergencies) and affording quality, nutritious food.

The Marxian historical materialist paradigm inaugurated the thesis that consciousness follows the stratification of social relations (from Marx's *The German Ideology*: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas”), and indeed there is considerable evidence that neoliberal policies and academic philosophies (quadrant 2) legitimize the current ubiquity of risk and inequality (Hacker 2006). At the micro-level, historical materialism has inaugurated a number of theories regarding stratified consciousness that concede some autonomy to ideal forces in the experience of everyday life (quadrant 4). A venerable tradition in cultural studies, from E. P. Thompson’s (1966) history of working-class consciousness to recent accounts on the agency of cultural consumers, suggests that the consciousness of the marginalized reveals cultural resistance to the force and legitimizations of the ruling ideas.

A somewhat different interpretation of micro-level stratified consciousness comes from Bourdieu’s theory of class distinction, which examines the ideological “naturalization” of hierarchical class systems into separate social worlds known by their distinctive tastes, aesthetics and lifestyles. Bourdieu posits that normative prescriptions about the aesthetically “right” ways to live, as well as shared distinctions concerning the superiority and inferiority of different groups’ lifestyles and activities, represent conflicts over legitimacy and resources in which the economically privileged and (an overlapping group) the intellectual/cultural/media-producing strata hold the upper hand (Bourdieu 1984). This conflict of cultural capital involves a reflexive dimension. As elite tastes diffuse to other groups further down the social hierarchy, dominant
groups who find their monopoly on distinct tastes and habits eroding may mar-
shall new ideas and tastes into their distinction activities (Elias 2000). As this
suggests, the stratification of consciousness in the realms of everyday life is a
dynamic, purposive activity that reveals ideological domination “from above”
that perennially disadvantages less privileged groups.

Gender is a separate and significant dimension of social stratification.
Materially, it involves the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities
between men and women. The gendering of labor opportunities means that
jobs traditionally viewed as women’s are feminized and assigned low statuses
(e.g., unpaid caregiving, “maternal” service occupations like teaching and
nursing), face disproportionately limited opportunities (part-time, less reli-
able, and low-mobility occupations), and earn lower pay. The restructuring of
income-earning opportunities intersects with household formation and the
unequal vulnerabilities of mothers and fathers to economic risk: single moth-
ers are among the fastest rising demographic groups experiencing poverty and,
relatedly, food insecurity (USDA 2012; Povich, Roberts, and Mather 2013). As
this illustrates, women’s material stratification goes hand in hand with gen-
dered discourses that legitimize women’s confinement to duties and domains
of private everyday life. Patriarchal culture assigns family carework and home
maintenance as the primary domain and responsibility of women. Food-re-
lated activities like shopping or meal preparation are predominantly women’s
“duties” that draw upon gendered codes “imported from the wider culture into
the everyday life of the household” (DeVault 1991, 44).

Stratified consciousness is also structured through geography; as urban
studies reminds us, social space is a key mechanism for mediating the life
chances of urban groups. People pursue their daily rounds within spaces of
work, home, shopping, education, community, and leisure that reflects the
uneven geography of opportunity (corresponding to quadrant 1 of Table 1).
Good-paying jobs, quality schools and childcare, affordable healthcare con-
centrate in some places more than others, leaving low-income groups es-
specially vulnerable to the disadvantages of their “communities of fate” (Logan
and Molotch 1987). Gender too has its segregated geography: while men are
afforded freer range of the public sphere, women are assigned responsibilities
largely in the domestic home, market settings for shopping, social reproduc-
tion and institutions of caregiving (e.g., schools, pediatricians’ offices). Gender
inequality in responsibility for unpaid household work is well documented, that
is, women spend considerably more hours completing home-based tasks com-
pared with men (e.g. Aguiar and Hurst 2007; Krantz-Kent 2009; Hook 2010;
Bertrand, Kamenica, and Pan, 2015). And for the poor, women may also be
subject to governmental/professional spaces of social hygiene: public health,
social workers, etc.

While urban studies tends to emphasize the material forces of space, schol-
arship on urban poverty and urban enclaves offers some support for the idea of
stratified consciousness in theories of social isolation. The thesis here is that
economic restructuring (Wilson 1987, 1996) and racial segregation (Massey
and Denton 1993) have isolated an urban underclass, mostly Black and (in
growing numbers) Hispanic, in neighborhoods and cities devoid of mainstream economies and institutions: good-paying formal-sector jobs, quality schools, large grocery stores. In this economically underdeveloped environment, alternative economies and institutions emerge—informal and illegal work, liquor stores, convenience stores—and inhabitants internalize fatalistic attitudes and values suited to daily settings devoid of real opportunity. Youth drop out of school and become parents earlier; residents view representatives of government, police, and schools as agents of punitive systems and consequently avoid contact with them; familial and ethnic traditions replace the authority of professionals and social workers. And, as it relates to food and provisioning, people fail to keep abreast of the latest knowledge on dietary and nutritional well-being. As this suggests, the social isolation theory suggests that to some degree socioeconomic obstacles faced by the poor are localized and ideal in nature, corresponding to quadrant 4 of Table 1, if not creations of their own making. But it fits well with cultural capital theory which asserts that the poor and marginalized are isolated from “mainstream” ideologies through the distinction-making activities of dominant groups.

**Food research**

Food scholarship supports three perspectives on food insecurity that we think are especially relevant. To begin, food systems research highlights how macro-level economic structures, institutions, and policies related to the production and distribution of food influence people's access to, consumption of, and benefits from food. These “supply-side” material forces can be theoretically subdivided into two macro levels (Neff et al. 2009). The first is the broad food system, where global dynamics of food supply and industry restructuring as well as national policies on agriculture and social welfare influence the accessibility, affordability, and nutritional value of the food that households consume. The second level is the community food system, where dynamics of food distribution are especially crucial: most importantly, where households obtain food locally, and how their food access is mediated by conditions of geography, local transportation (private cars, mass transit; see Farber, Páez, Mercado, Roorda, and Morency 2013), neighborhood safety, and local economic development. While food can be institutionally distributed (e.g., public school lunches are the largest public US food program; Poppendieck 2010), particularly crucial in urban settings (i.e., where agricultural land and occupations are scarce) is the market nexus of food retail: supermarkets, smaller food stores, restaurants, farmers’ markets, etc. At the community level, the uneven conditions of food distribution stratify localities into areas rich vs. poor in the range of food items, price alternatives, and food quality, with so-called food deserts representing the lowest and starkest levels of stratification (Gustafson et al. 2013; Song et al. 2012; Munoz-Plaza, Filomena, and Morland 2007).

As this attention to economic restructuring and urban geography suggests, food system research tends to model causality as macro-level material forces (quadrant 1 of Table 1), with the broad vs. community food system distinction suggesting a further bipartition of this quadrant. Economies and geographies
of food systems contextualize the differential rates of food insecurity, although they do not explain why some households fall into food insecurity and others do not. Corresponding to quadrant 2, food systems researchers’ attention to ideal factors tends to focus on marketing activities such as the promotion of highly processed, energy-rich but nutritionally suspect pre-packaged meals, convenience foods and snacks through direct advertising to children as well as “quality time” themes pitched at harried householders. The influence of food marketing on household diet and food insecurity highlights outcomes in quadrant 4, but food systems researchers are generally clear in viewing such ideal factors as of a piece with the material restructuring of food production and retail.

A more micro-level, idealistic perspective on food security comes from food choice research into the ways that household and individual resources translate into dietary and health outcomes. The significant incidence of obesity, Type II diabetes, and other non-hunger health risks among food-insecure individuals (Finney Rutten, Yaroch, Colón-Ramos, Johnson-Askew, and Story, 2010), for instance, is theorized to reflect rational preferences of low-income eaters and meal preparers for the lowest-price food options, which are typically energy-dense yet nutritionally poor (Drewnowski and Darmon, 2005), and for time-saving convenience, which is typically epitomized by food prepared outside the home (Tashiro and Lo 2012). This microeconomic framework is not necessarily incompatible with the macro-level contextual accounts of food insecurity, but food choice research foregrounds the demand-side mechanisms by which individual households and shoppers allocate scarce resources along ranked preferences for food acquisition. In this way, it is compatible with educational proposals that attempt to “overwrite” low-income households’ food and shopping preferences through, e.g., lessons on how to stretch inexpensive basic ingredients over many meals.

In a third approach, foodways research views households and other eaters as members of diverse communities, each of which attaches meanings to food choices in ways that are “emblematic of the complex cultural worlds these communities inhabit” (Alkon et al. 2013, 128). Typically, foodways research uses ethnographic methods to examine the food/dietary frameworks and latent values manifested in the ways communities eat and understand eating, toward the goal of tracing the normative chains of social organization, exchange, and culture activated in communities’ food systems, especially as shaped by concrete economic and historical contexts. A particularly vibrant strain of foodways research has addressed the phenomenon of “foodies,” those omnivorous gourmands whose activities rely increasingly upon expanding channels of food and dining information; the growth in specialty food retail and direct farm-to-consumer outlets; and social networks of affinity generally embedded in urban(e), educated circles (Naccarato and Lebesco 2012; Alkon 2012; Johnston and Baumann 2010). In important ways, foodie culture overlaps with the activism against the agricultural-industrial complex responsible for the unhealthy and unsustainable diets of so many Americans, as epitomized by the polemics of celebrity food writers like Alice Waters and Michael Pollan as well as the international interest in “slow food.” At the same time, foodies’ culinary
practices and normative prescriptions comprise a source of cultural capital with which foodies make cultural and identity distinctions about other groups—for instance, the “industrial eater” of Pollan’s polemic (Pollan 2006, 2009). Consistent with the Bourdieuan thesis of class domination via cultural capital, food activists are often privileged within profound hierarchies of income, education, and status (see McCullum, Pelletier, Barr, Wilkins, and Habicht 2004). Compared with low-income urban households, food activists hail from middle-class circles that are more likely to have the time and resources to prepare fresh foods (Leone et al. 2012; Drewnowski 2004); to heed health professionals’ latest thinking about healthy eating over the wisdom of family tradition or neighborly advice (cf. Lareau 2003); and to feel a sense of belonging when patronizing farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture, and other initiatives promoting the (loosely coupled) ethics of sustainable agriculture, food justice, and healthy eating (Alkon 2012; Colasanti, Conner, and Smalley 2010).

As scholars and social justice advocates critique the elitism embodied in foodies’ cultural consumption practices (see Guthman 2007; Slocum 2007), research increasingly addresses the foodways of other groups further down the social/cultural hierarchy, most notably the urban poor most exposed to unhealthy food commerce, food deserts, and food insecurity. In several respects, this scholarship seems to upend foodies’ expectations that populations at risk of food insecurity lack education about nutrition or food sources and prioritize retail convenience—in other words, that they are uncritical “takers” of whatever their local food system can offer them. Studies report that low-income urban shoppers are acutely aware of the uneven availabilities and dubious qualities of foods available to them (McClintock 2011); they are often savvy consumers who research and access food stores in and out of their localities (Alkon et al. 2013); they identify and implement fresh produce alternatives to minimize reliance on conventional systems, e.g. community gardens (Myers and Caruso 2014); and their apparent aversion to trying new, sometimes inexpensive foods often reveals a rational economizing of scarce resources in pursuit of provisioning objectives like optimizing food intake among picky eaters (Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 2014). In some ways, this research suggests that the urban poor do not exhibit food consciousness significantly different from many higher-income groups in regards to why they choose the foods they buy and stores they patronizing.

Hypotheses
This review suggests educational proposals that seek to “improve” low-income households’ food acquisition knowledge are congruent with two rather different theses about the stratified food consciousness of the poor: Bourdieu’s theory of class distinction (which emphasizes the cultural domination of privileged classes) and the social isolation thesis in urban sociology (which emphasizes the subcultural worldview and practices of the urban poor). All three perspectives support micro-level idealist models of food insecurity (corresponding to quadrant 4 of Table 1) in which low-income urban households hold qualitatively
different ideas about food acquisition compared with their higher-income counterparts that, in turn, increase the likelihood of food insecurity.

We now introduce five hypotheses that allow us to test the empirical validity of such models. Like educational proposals, these hypotheses assign a causal role to stratified food consciousness—here, specifically to household attitudes and preferences regarding foods and stores. They draw on idealist assumptions that changing attitudes and preferences among low-income urban households (i.e., de-stratifying their food consciousness by aligning it with higher-income households’ attitudes and preferences) can effectively mitigate the consequences of food insecurity. Like “healthy shopping” educational proposals in particular, these hypotheses presume that food insecurity can be specifically mitigated through the micro-level mechanism of household food acquisition. These hypotheses do not allow us to evaluate competing causal theories of food insecurity among low-income urban households, but they do permit us to test the validity of the idea that household food consciousness has a significant relationship to food insecurity.

Utilizing a micro-level idealist perspective, these hypotheses are designed to determine whether there is stratification in food preferences as they relate to healthy versus unhealthy food, and, if that is the case, whether or not groups located higher in the social hierarchy are more likely to have attitudes about food that are more in line with what is considered more favorable, appropriate, and superior, that is, “healthy.” If food consciousness is stratified, we hypothesize that food-insecure and other at-risk households (low-income, black, Hispanic, with children, using food stamps, meal preparer under 35) will be less likely to prefer stores that sell what is considered healthy food, more likely to prefer items that stay fresh longer and are easier to prepare, be less likely to desire food that is organic (our proxy for elite food ideals), and to be less likely to read nutritional labels.

**H1:** At-risk households are less likely than others to prefer to patronize food stores because they sell healthy food. Particularly in commercially underdeveloped areas, urban households may face a dilemma between expending scarce time and resources traveling to supermarkets with healthier food choices and patronizing closer convenience stores that are more likely to offer less healthy choices. As such, we hypothesize that food-insecure and other at-risk households will prefer the latter.

**H2:** At-risk households are more likely than others to prefer food items that stay fresh longer. In an industrialized food system, food manufacturers offer consumers the utility of longer shelf life through packaging (e.g., canned and frozen items) and additives (including sodium and other preservatives that may simultaneously offer cheap calories and enhance taste). Importantly, urban convenience stores tend to specialize in such food items. Consequently, we hypothesize that food-insecure and other at-risk households will prefer such items.
H3: **At-risk households are more likely than others to prefer food items that are easy to prepare.** Another innovation of industrialized food systems is the development of snacks and entrees that come ready-made, require simple heat-up, or are pre-processed for easy addition of basic ingredients. As with foods that stay fresh longer, these items may include substantial additives and be especially prevalent in urban convenience stores. Consequently, we hypothesize that food-insecure and other at-risk households will prefer such items.

H4: **At-risk households are less likely than others to prefer food items that are organic.** A relatively new genre in mainstream food retail, organic foods tend to be scarcer and higher priced than non-organic counterparts. Their value may also reflect cultural “messages” reinforced by health professionals, food activists, and countercultural food movements, all of which middle and upper classes are more likely to adhere to. Consequently, we hypothesize that food-insecure and other at-risk households will not place a special premium on organic foods.

H5: **At-risk households are less likely than others to look at food labels when shopping to find out if the item is nutritious or healthy.** Research shows robust correlations of low-income status with obesity, diabetes, and other diet-based health problems. Additionally, following the changing scientific wisdom on “healthy eating” may require substantial time, effort, and a general credence toward expert opinion. We hypothesize that these structural factors will come to bear on the shopping experience, such that food-insecure and other at-risk households will report they are less likely to read item labels.

To reiterate, these five hypotheses proffer the validity of micro-level idealist models of food insecurity; they do not allow us to test competing models or theories. Accordingly, if our analysis leads us to reject these hypotheses, we cannot determine what really does explain food security in our study, which could include any number of causal factors outside the micro-level idealist domain of causality (i.e., quadrants 1–3 in Table 1) or areas of stratified food consciousness that our survey did not address.

**The study**

**The setting**

Our data for this article come from the Poughkeepsie Plenty community food assessment, a food-security initiative undertaken between 2010 and 2012 in the city of Poughkeepsie, New York.

Poughkeepsie is a small city (2010 pop. 32,736) in a region often celebrated for its agriculture and rural landscapes. Located in New York State along the Hudson River and roughly equidistant from New York City to the south and the state capital, Albany, to the north, the city has historically occupied a regional role as a distribution point for agriculture, commerce and manufacturing. During World War II, the International Business Machines (IBM) corporation built a massive munitions factory in a neighboring suburb (the confusingly named but municipally distinct Town of Poughkeepsie) and turned it into one of several higher-end computer manufacturing facilities in the region after the war. IBM's
impact on the city would be substantial, starting with population growth. Among other migrants, Poughkeepsie attracted a stream of West Indian migrants that introduced ethnic and cultural diversity to the city’s longstanding Black population (Mamiya and Kaurouma 1978). As well, IBM triggered new housing and commercial development in the suburbs that siphoned away the city’s economic vitality (Flad and Griffen 2009).

By 1950, Poughkeepsie reached a population peak of approximately 41,000 residents. Thereafter, like many other “Rustbelt” cities in the United States, Poughkeepsie experienced white flight, population declines and capital disinvestment. Most significantly for this article, the city lost its last large grocery store in 1991, and for the next 20 years residents had to travel over a mile out into the adjacent suburb to find large, full-service grocery stores. By the 1990s, a new stream of Latin American migration (chiefly from two villages in the Mexican state of Oaxaca) began to change the composition of the city’s population and food retail. A medium-sized Latin grocery store opened in 1998, providing the city’s biggest selection of fresh foods for some 13 years; however, its location at the city’s eastern end meant it still lay a mile away from the central business district and even farther from many residential neighborhoods. In 2011 a large, full-service corporate supermarket opened in the city—directly across the street from the Latin grocery store.

Presently, Poughkeepsie features substantial racial and ethnic diversity and is marked by considerable economic distress, as shown in Table 2. These characteristics make potential food insecurity a problem for many, as indicated by participation in the public school free/reduced price lunch program. In 2011–12, 80 percent of students in the city’s school district were entitled to receive free lunches, with another 11 percent eligible for reduced-price lunches (NYS SED 2012).

Table 2. Demographic and economic characteristics in Poughkeepsie and the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poughkeepsie</th>
<th>United States</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median income</td>
<td>$39,061</td>
<td>$52,762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty rate:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All residents</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with children</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-headed single parent</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors (age 65 or older)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compounding household risks of food insecurity is Poughkeepsie’s geography of food access and food retail. The 2008–10 American Community Survey reported that 27 percent of the city’s households have no vehicle of their own. Although not owning a car does not necessarily impede urban residents’ food access when full-service grocery stores are within walking distance for many, this is not the case in Poughkeepsie. The location of the two grocery stores at the city’s eastern end means that for most residents small convenience stores, delis and bodegas are the primary food retail stores in walking distance. Consequently, two contiguous downtown Census tracts comprise an urban food desert by USDA standards (Figure 1). Furthermore, the municipal bus system receives low user ratings for scheduling frequency and convenient travel to suburban grocery stores; it also imposes a 4-bag limit on riders that make large shopping trips difficult. Finally, in recent years, the city has struggled to maintain a viable farmers market in the downtown area where residential population is densest. These features of the local food system make acute the dilemmas described earlier that households face between expending time and resources to access supermarkets with healthier food items, and patronizing closer convenience stores with less healthy food items.

This is the setting for the “Poughkeepsie Plenty” community food assessment (CFA), the research component of an initiative launched in 2010 to mobilize residents around evaluating and reforming their urban food system. This two-year community food assessment employed multiple research methods to measure and understand the experiences of food insecurity in Poughkeepsie: a household survey, focus-group interviews with residents, fieldwork at local food retailers, and archival research on food-assistance programs (Nevarez 2013). Our sample size and methodology are among the more rigorous deployed for an in-depth study of food security in a small US city.

For this article, we utilize data from the CFA’s household survey, administered between October 2010 and April 2012. The survey was administered via face-to-face structured interviews at Poughkeepsie residences to households’ primary meal preparers. Social researchers recognize that sending people out to “pound the pavement” often yields very low response rates, particularly in highly mobile urban environments, where concerns about answering the door to strangers can run high (Fitzgerald and Fuller 1982). However, the CFA employed this design and took significant efforts to generate a respectable response rate because it best corresponded to its target population—all Poughkeepsie households, not simply those with phones or people conveniently located at targeted events—and made possible representative and generalizable baseline measures of food security and other characteristics for the entire city.

Households were selected using probability sampling methods. The sampling frame consisted of all City of Poughkeepsie households, as recorded by the Dutchess County Division of Planning and Development. A subset of 1500 households was randomly selected from this total sampling frame universe. A total of 355 surveys were completed, generating a final response rate of 24 percent. The final dataset was weighted to reflect the race, Hispanic ethnicity,
and income distribution of Poughkeepsie's population according to US Census 2010. Since probability sampling was utilized to select households, these results represent the characteristics and views of all Poughkeepsie households within a ±5.5 percent margin of error.

**Variables and measures**

The Poughkeepsie Plenty CFA’s organizing concept is *food security*, which following USDA convention we conceptualize as a tripartite ordinal variable: households can be (a) food secure, (b) food insecure without hunger, or (c) food insecure with hunger. To gauge food security, the survey incorporated the six-item Household Food Security scale adopted by the USDA for shorter surveys (Blumberg, Bialostosky, Hamilton, and Briefel, 1999); see Figure 2.

*Food stamp usage*, an indicator for participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program designed to help households cope with food insecurity, was measured with one dichotomous item, “In the past twelve months, did you or others in your household get food stamp benefits—that is, either food stamps or a food stamp benefit card?”

We conceptualized food acquisition preferences as having two dimensions: factors that influence store choice, and factors that influence food item choice. *Patronizing stores for healthy foods* was measured with a single item, analyzed by recoding a four-item Likert scale to a dichotomous variable, very important/not very important: “In choosing a store for most of the food you eat, how would you rate, ‘Store has healthy foods’.”

*Choosing healthy food items* included three items, each analyzed by recoding four-item Likert scales into dichotomies, very important/not very important:
When you choose types of food to buy, how would you rate: (1) ‘Food that stays fresh longer’; (2) ‘Food that’s easy to prepare’; (3) ‘Organic food’.” Note that the first two items indicate healthy food item preferences negatively, evoking food items that are canned, frozen, have preservatives added (especially for [1]), and/or are pre-processed for simple cooking, baking, or re-heating by microwave (especially for [2]).

Attention to food labels was measured: “Do you look at the food labels to decide if the food is nutritious or healthy?” This was recoded as dichotomous: always vs. sometimes/never.

Finally, socio-demographic questions were asked covering race, ethnicity, household size, presence of children, income, and age and gender of the primary meal preparer.

Analysis and results
Our methodology allows us to assess the extent of food insecurity in Poughkeepsie, identify subgroups that are more likely to experience it, and evaluate the relationships between it and food acquisition preferences. Here we report topline descriptive statistics, as well as comparisons between the samples and subgroups. Chi-square tests were run to identify statistically significant differences. Lastly, Poisson regression models were developed to measure the independent effect of measured socioeconomic variables on food preference outcomes.

The prevalence of food insecurity
We found considerable levels of food insecurity in Poughkeepsie. As Table 3 indicates, about one in four (26 percent) of the city’s households are food insecure—significantly higher compared with the United States, the Northeast, and metropolitan areas in general (USDA, 2012).

Two factors are significantly associated with household food security in Poughkeepsie: income and race/ethnicity. As Table 4 shows, a majority of households (60 percent) with incomes less than $15,000 annually were food insecure, including 32 percent insecure with hunger. Over one-third of Hispanic households (37 percent) and black households (36 percent) were food insecure.
insecure, as were about one-fifth (19 percent) of white households. As was expected, given the gendering of food provisioning and the feminization of poverty, a majority (66 percent) of meal preparers were female, and women were more susceptible to food insecurity, 30 percent versus 17 percent, respectively. Interestingly, group characteristics that approached but were not significantly

Table 4. Food insecurity and impacted socio-economic subgroups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Insecure with hunger</th>
<th>Insecure w/o hunger</th>
<th>Food secure</th>
<th>Insecure/secure p (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Row %</td>
<td>Row %</td>
<td>Row %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income: less than $15K</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household ethnicity: Hispanic</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>0.023*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household race: Black</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>0.008**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal preparer: Age 35 to 44</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>0.032*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income: $15K to $50K</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in household</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>0.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal preparer: under age 35</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>0.032*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal preparer: age 45 to 60</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>0.032*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal preparer: female</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>0.009**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household size: 3 or more people</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>0.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General population</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No children in household</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>0.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household size: 1 or 2 people</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>0.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household race: white</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>0.014*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal preparer: male</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>0.009**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal preparer: age 60 or older</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>0.032*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income: $50K to $100K</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income: over $100K</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:

*p < 0.05.

**p < 0.01.

***p < 0.001.
associated with food security include household size, the presence of children, food-stamp usage, and a meal preparer under 35. These findings underscore how food insecurity is experienced among a range of Poughkeepsie households, from large families with many mouths to feed to those with individuals living alone.

**Determinants of healthy store/food preferences: regression analysis**

In order to detect which independent variables significantly determine food/store preferences, we ran five regressions with the following socioeconomic inputs: income, food security, presence of kids in household, age, food stamp usage, Hispanic (or not), and black (or not). From our hypotheses, outcome variables included: (1) Very important store has healthy foods; (2) Very important food that stays fresh longer; (3) Easy to prepare: food that’s easy to prepare; (4) Organic: organic food; (5) Read labels: always/sometimes/never. The results are presented in Table 5.

### Table 5. Survey results for regression variables by general population and food security (p-values presented).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthy: store has healthy foods</th>
<th>Food security</th>
<th>General population</th>
<th>Secure</th>
<th>Insecure</th>
<th>Insecure/secure p (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Col %</td>
<td>Col %</td>
<td>Col %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh: food that stays fresh</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>0.007**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>longer</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to prepare: food that’s</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>0.153</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easy to prepare</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic: organic food</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0.625</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read labels</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>0.272</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes/never</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
* *p < 0.05.
** p < 0.01.
*** p < 0.001.

Determinants of healthy store/food preferences: regression analysis

In order to detect which independent variables significantly determine food/store preferences, we ran five regressions with the following socioeconomic inputs: income, food security, presence of kids in household, age, food stamp usage, Hispanic (or not), and black (or not). From our hypotheses, outcome variables included: (1) Very important store has healthy foods; (2) Very important food that stays fresh longer; (3) Easy to prepare: food that’s easy to prepare; (4) Organic: organic food; (5) Read labels: always/sometimes/never. The results are presented in Table 5.
Table 5 gives the aggregate results for our dependent variables, as well as by food security. Overall, 64 percent said a store with healthy foods was very important, 58 percent stated food that stayed fresh was very important, 40 percent answered that it is very important to have food that is easy to prepare, 17 percent felt organic food was very important, and 42 percent reported they always read nutritional labels. There were no significant differences between food secure and insecure households for food that is easy to prepare, organic food, and the reading of labels. Shopping at stores with healthy foods approached significance (0.079), with food insecure households having a stronger preference. Results for food that stays fresh longer were significant (0.007), with food insecure households more likely to say it is important.

Table 6 shows the significance level for regression models predicting five food preference/behavior outcomes. Overall, the data disprove four, and narrowly circumscribe the remaining, of the hypothesized relationships between at-risk household characteristics and unhealthy food store/item preferences.

Table 6 indicates no significant input variables for preferring stores that sell healthy food. In fact, the Poughkeepsie study offers some evidence for a relationship opposite to what we hypothesized; specifically, food stamp usage may have an impact on whether or not consumers prefer stores that sell healthy food. These data give us reason to reject H1.

Table 6 indicates no significant input variables for preferring food that stays fresh longer. In Poughkeepsie, at-risk households are no less or more likely than other households to prefer foods that provide longer shelf life often at the expense of nutritional quality. This suggests we might reject H2.

### Table 6. Regression analysis: predictive models for food preferences and behavior (p-values presented).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Healthy</th>
<th>Fresh</th>
<th>Easy to prepare</th>
<th>Organic</th>
<th>Read labels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food insecure household</td>
<td>0.869</td>
<td>0.959</td>
<td>0.877</td>
<td>0.811</td>
<td>0.587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income &lt; $35K</td>
<td>0.845</td>
<td>0.220</td>
<td>0.024*</td>
<td>0.459</td>
<td>0.982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in household</td>
<td>0.389</td>
<td>0.661</td>
<td>0.752</td>
<td>0.831</td>
<td>0.408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 35 or older</td>
<td>0.265</td>
<td>0.831</td>
<td>0.819</td>
<td>0.458</td>
<td>0.826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food stamps</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.256</td>
<td>0.756</td>
<td>0.873</td>
<td>0.557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.266</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>0.704</td>
<td>0.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.989</td>
<td>0.152</td>
<td>0.015*</td>
<td>0.918</td>
<td>0.225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p ≤ 0.05
In Table 6, the only evidence in support of any of our hypotheses regards the relationship of socioeconomic status and preferring food that is easy to prepare. Specifically, income and race prove to be significant predictors: households with incomes less than $35,000 per year and black households are more likely to say it is very important that food be easy to prepare. These data prevent us from rejecting H3, except for perhaps Hispanic households (which approaches significance at 0.115).

Returning to the general pattern, Table 6 indicates no significant input variables for preferring food items that are organic or for reading food-item labels. These data suggest we might reject H4 and H5, respectively.

Conclusion
The general picture from the Poughkeepsie study is one of insignificance: that is, we found almost no significant correlations between food security status or any other at-risk socioeconomic variables, on the one hand, and household food consciousness on the other. In rejecting hypotheses regarding stratified attitudes and preferences about foods to buy and stores to patronize, our study sheds light on whether low-income urban households and other socioeconomically stratified groups differ significantly along food-acquisition attitudes and preferences for healthy eating. Generally, they do not. No systematic factors explain which meal preparers report item and store preferences associated with “healthy eating”—this, in a city where roughly one in four households are food insecure, and where roughly the same number have no private transportation with which to access suburban supermarkets with wider varieties of food choice, quality, and price. Based on their survey responses, food-insecure households are no less or more likely to voice that they want to “do the right thing” where healthy food shopping is concerned.

As such, these results provide evidence to reject micro-level idealist models of stratified food consciousness that presume superior attitudes about what is healthy eating reside only among the top tiers of the hierarchy. In Poughkeepsie, the poor, marginalized, and at risk are no less likely than their wealthy and more secure neighbors to articulate partiality for making “smart” food choices. Whether or not these households can act on these preferences—i.e., whether food acquisition consciousness results in behavior consistent with preferences—is an entirely different question.

Accordingly, this study directs researchers to the role of factors other than stratified food consciousness at the point of acquisition. The socioeconomic conditions of food insecurity may impact activities further down the food provisioning chain from the initial point of acquisition, although we note some studies have reached similar findings of insignificance, for instance, regarding how the experience of poverty affects food preparation (McLaughlin, Tarasuk, and Kreiger 2003) and consumption (Todd and Ploeg 2014). Indeed, operative factors may be external to the food provisioning chain altogether. The factors may be micro-level as suggested for instance by the “allostatic load” theory in which the experience of poverty entails a constant physiological stress that induces or exacerbates many of the health problems associated with food insecurity (Schulz...
et al. 2012). Alternately, they may be macro-level, for instance, as built into
the broad and community levels of food systems; thus, one recent study found
cost and access to be more significant factors than food acquisition patterns for
low-income households in Pittsburgh’s food deserts (Walker et al. 2010).

Of course, it could be argued that words are not reliable indicators of deeds,
i.e. stratified knowledge about how to shop well might still be an operative
mechanism, but survey responses are poor indicators of it. We interpret this
possible critique to suggest that our overall failure to discern group differences
in healthy food acquisition attitudes and preferences is simply the result of the
socially desirable response bias (see Pager and Quillian, 2005; Schultz and Six
If so, we think it noteworthy that respondents across all food security, socio-
economic and demographic categories that we surveyed exhibit this ostensible
bias. If the critique has merit, it still cannot explain our finding that no socio-
economic category of primary shopper is more or less versed in the “correct”
answer to give survey administrators—another kind of defeat for the stratified
food consciousness thesis.

Taking our findings at greater face value, our study suggests that knowledge
about how to shop and choose foods well is not as stratified as many com-
mentators and activists think it is. Food nutrition and dietary well-being may
be topics of greater general awareness than is often assumed. Perhaps these
discourses circulate on media, in doctors’ offices and school literatures, and
across other hierarchical structures more effectively than previously thought.
This casts doubt upon the value of further educational interventions into food
insecure households and urban food systems. Not that food education is not
important, but it is possible that a general baseline of food knowledge has
diffused sufficiently across social and institutional strata. This Poughkeepsie
study suggests that allocating further resources into reaching and teaching
food-insecure households and other groups at the bottom of social and cultural
hierarchies might yield only diminishing returns.

If it is not for the lack of “knowing better” about healthy food acquisition that
food insecure households struggle with diet- and nutrition-based health risks,
then perhaps the prevailing assumptions concerning healthy eating conscious-
ness speak more to the symbolic interests of foodies and other groups vying
for cultural capital in the socioeconomic hierarchy. The agricultural industrial
complex may very well have normalized the profile of the industrial eater, but
the causal blame placed upon the provisioning practices of food-insecure and
other at-risk households not only undermines a structural critique of the food
system (Guthman 2011); it also projects distinctions down the cultural hierar-
chy that do not necessarily correspond to how food-insecure households think
about eating and food shopping. The history of cultural manners and propriety
shows repeatedly a dialectic of hierarchical differentiation and broader diffu-
sion (Elias 2000). Perhaps this explains how food-insecure households have
absorbed more of the “healthy eating” food-acquisition consciousness than
privileged groups think they have.

Turning to directions for future scholarship, there is evidence that it is not
just at-risk and socially and economically disadvantaged groups who experi-
ence a disconnect between attitudes and behavior. While there is a relationship between poverty and obesity, with respect to rates for being overweight, upper income quartiles and lower income quartiles are similar. Vanotar and Reeves (2015) found that in the United States, the top family income quartile was 42 percent overweight, quartiles 2–4 ranged from 35 to 38 percent, and the bottom family income quartile was at 37 percent. Research into how socioeconomically diverse groups negotiate the difference between the ideals of “healthy” food they report and the eating behavior and health outcomes that result, and whether these navigations reveal common or stratified mechanisms, would be a fruitful line of study.

Analogously, in addition to identifying the gendering of food provisioning, the body of literature on the feminization of care work has illuminated that this type of work, allocated to women, is propelled by intrinsic, non-monetary rewards (Englund 2005). As part of “caring,” women’s motivation is not limited simply to providing enough food, but to provide good, nurturing food. The disadvantaged women we surveyed gave reports that suggest they know healthy food is “good” food. Thus, the ways that disadvantaged women navigate the dissonance that socioeconomic constraint imposes upon their perceived need to deliver nutritionally proper food need to be further explored to better construct public policy interventions.

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Disclosure statement

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