



OXFORD

A SOCIOLOGY OF FOOD & NUTRITION

THE SOCIAL APPETITE



♥ 432 💬 #4th edition



EDITED BY
JOHN GERMOV &
LAUREN WILLIAMS



A SOCIOLOGY OF
FOOD & NUTRITION

Dedication

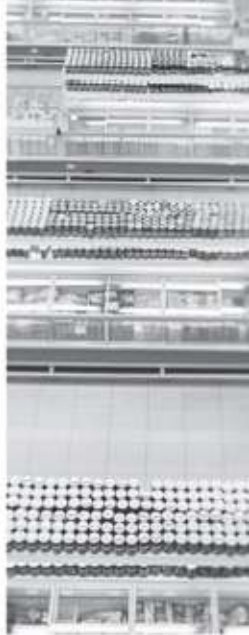
We dedicate this book to our respective late parents, Jan Williams (1940–2015) and Ivan Germov (1919–2006), who had been such strong influences on our intellectual and gastronomic development. Though they are both gone, their influence lives on.



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UNIVERSITY PRESS
AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

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Published in Australia by

Oxford University Press

253 Normanby Road, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205, Australia

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First published 1999
Second edition published 2004

Third edition published 2008

Reprinted 2009 (twice), 2010, 2011 (twice)

Fourth edition published 2017

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Title: A sociology of food and nutrition: the social appetite/edited by John Germov, Lauren Williams.
Edition: 4th edition.

ISBN: 9780190304676 (paperback)
Notes: Includes index.
Subjects: Food habits–Social aspects.
Food–Social aspects.
Nutrition–Social aspects.
Other Creators/Contributors:
Germov, John, editor.
Williams, Lauren, editor.
Dewey Number: 394.12

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Edited by Philip Bryan
Text design by Kim Ferguson
Typeset by Newgen KnowledgeWorks Pvt. Ltd., Chennai, India
Proofread by Laura Davies
Indexed by Karen Gillen
Printed in China by Leo Paper Products Ltd.

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PREFACE

A Sociology of Food and Nutrition: The Social Appetite introduces readers to the field of food sociology. It presents ‘sociologies of food’; that is, it is not dominated by one thesis or one theory or method, but rather presents a ‘potlatch’ of topics organised under key sociological themes. The book serves as a general reader, surveying the key topics and debates that dominate the literature, and brings together some of the leading authors in the field. This book can also be used as a teaching resource, whereby each chapter has:

- an overview section containing a series of questions and a short summary of the chapter, designed to encourage a questioning and reflective approach to the topic
- key terms (concepts and theories) listed at the start of the chapter, highlighted in bold in the text, and defined in a glossary at the end of the book
- a summary of the main points
- sociological reflection exercises that can be used as self-directed or class-based activities to assist readers to apply their learning
- questions for tutorial discussion
- further investigation, essay-style, questions
- suggested further reading
- recommended chapter-specific web links and, for some chapters, recommended films and documentaries.

What’s new in this edition?

This fourth edition has been completely revised with new chapters and substantially updated material throughout in response to user feedback and the latest research findings, to ensure that it is completely up to date with current developments in the field. The previous five-part structure of the book has been reorganised into three parts—the social appetite, the food system and food culture—in reflection of the broad trends currently evident in the field.

We are particularly excited to announce the new chapters on the following:

- Food Labelling—which has developed from being a source of factual information to a position of power that is highly contested.
- Food Insecurity in Australia—illustrating how even within affluent countries, some groups are not able to meet their basic human right to food.
- Australian Food History—the history of food in Australia from the Indigenous food traditions through the colonial period to the present day, and the influence of multiculturalism and convenience.
- A Historical Sociology of Wine—wine is a value-laden drink and often conveys a cultured and cultural identity; this chapter reviews how wine producers, distributors and consumers have shaped regional, national and global tastes for wine.
- The Social Appetite for Alcohol—explores the historical, cultural, structural and critical factors influencing alcohol consumption to address the question of why we drink the way we do.

The addition of these chapters both broadens and deepens the examination of the social appetite.

The interdisciplinary nature of studying food and nutrition

The central importance of food in social life means that its study is the province of diverse academic disciplines. Since we first published this book in 1999, we have seen the rise of interdisciplinary food studies as a distinct intellectual although diffuse genre, and the widespread publication of

food research that draws on social science and humanities disciplines. More recently, we have witnessed a growing interest in studies of the social dimensions of alcohol production and consumption; hence we see the first chapters dedicated to a discussion of alcohol in this edition of the book.

In such a field as the study of food and nutrition, there is much that we can learn through interdisciplinary exchange. This book aims to draw together perspectives from what might be seen as opposing disciplines: sociology and nutrition. Interdisciplinary collaboration is a lengthy and challenging process involving active debate over philosophical assumptions and methodologies, as well as overcoming jargon and territorial defences—not to mention the academic structures of universities.

As editors, we have worked through the challenges of interdisciplinary collaboration in compiling this book. John Germov is a sociologist and Lauren Williams is a dietitian, and we both work as university academics. Our interdisciplinary collaboration was originally unplanned and arose from having to share an office because of a lack of university space. Our shared office became a place of daily intellectual exchange as we probed the perspectives of sometimes opposing disciplines through discussion and debate. This debate informed the development of a new undergraduate sociology subject in 1996 at the University of Newcastle, Australia, called 'The Sociology of Food', which formed the basis for the first edition of this book. Originally designed for students of nutrition and dietetics, it was subsequently extended to humanities and social science students. In 2006, the course was redeveloped into a postgraduate subject called 'Food Sociology: Understanding the Social Appetite'.

The original and continuing aim of this book, two decades after the first edition was published, is to make the sociological study of food relevant to a multidisciplinary readership, particularly those across health, nutrition and social science disciplines. Our further aim is to reach a broad readership so that those interested in food, nutrition, and wider issues of food production, distribution and consumption can discover the relevance of studying the social context of food. It is our hope that this will foster ongoing interdisciplinary collaboration.

Despite our enthusiasm for food sociology and interdisciplinary collaboration, it would be folly to claim that this book contains all the answers for understanding food and eating. The study of food is rightly the province of many disciplines. We encourage readers interested in the social context of food and nutrition—both inside and outside the discipline of sociology—to break down disciplinary barriers and to facilitate the coalescence of a variety of perspectives through debate and discussion of the issues presented in this book.

We hope that *A Sociology of Food and Nutrition* inspires people from many disciplines to add a sociological perspective to their understanding of why we eat the way we do.

Bon appetit!

John Germov and Lauren Williams
January 2017

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the contributing authors for being so professional in their dealings with us and for their high-quality chapters. Our gratitude to the book's publishers, Jill Henry (1st edition), Lucy McLoughlin, Katie Ridsdale, Rachel Saffer and Tim Campbell (3rd edition), and Debra James (2nd and 4th edition), for their belief in the book. We warmly thank Jenny Noble for all the assistance she provided with the various facets of producing this fourth edition.

We are grateful to our students, whose interest in and enthusiasm for food sociology was the original stimulus for this book. And we thank the academics who have used earlier editions for providing feedback and encouraging us to produce subsequent editions.

On a personal note, thanks go to our support team: John thanks his wife Sue Jelovcan, daughter Isabella Germov, and sister Roz Germov—all active food sociologists in their own right; Lauren thanks her husband Greg Hill for all the dinners on the table.

* * * * *

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ATSI	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people
AUDIT	Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test
BMI	body mass index
CAS	Critical Animal Studies
CIWF	Compassion in World Farming
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (Australia)
DASH	Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension
DGAC	Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (USA)
DRI	dietary reference intake (USA)
EAR	Estimated Average Requirement
EFR	emergency food relief
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FDA	Food and Drug Administration (USA)
FSANZ	Food Standards Australia New Zealand
g	gram
GFC	Global Financial Crisis
GHG	greenhouse gases
GI	Geographic Indicators
GM	genetically modified
GRAS	Generally Regarded as Safe
HAES	Health at Every Size
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services (USA)
IARC	International Agency for Research on Cancer
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IOM	Institute of Medicine (USA)
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JDC	Jubilee Debt Campaign
kg	kilogram
MDG	Millennium Development Goal (UN)
mg	milligram
mL	millilitre
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NIDR	National Institute of Dental Research (USA)
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council (Australia)
NHS	National Health Survey
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAN	Pesticide Action Network
PIEDs	performance and image enhancing drugs
POU	prevalence of undernourishment
RNI	Recommended Nutrient Intake

RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
RTF	Right to Food coalition
SEP	socioeconomic position
SES	socioeconomic status
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
USDA	US Department of Agriculture
WHO	World Health Organization
WFP	World Food Programme
WTO	World Trade Organization

PART 1

AN APPETISER

We were compelled to live on food and water for several days.

W.C. Fields, My Little Chickadee (1940 film)

Beulah, peel me a grape.

Mae West, I'm No Angel (1933 film)

Good to eat, and wholesome to digest, as a worm to a toad, a toad to a snake, a snake to a pig, a pig to a man, and a man to a worm.

Ambrose Bierce, The Enlarged Devil's Dictionary (1967)

The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don't want, drink what you don't like, and do what you'd rather not.

Mark Twain, Following the Equator (1897)

The aim of this book is to introduce a multidisciplinary readership to sociological investigations into food and nutrition. The first chapter maps the field of food sociology and provides an overview of sociology for those with little or no background in the discipline. It highlights the distinctive features of the sociological perspective through the analytical framework of the sociological imagination template, giving numerous examples of the application of sociology to the study of food and nutrition. We trust that this introductory chapter will whet your social appetite for exploring the sociology of food and nutrition.

This chapter also provides an overview of the structure and content of the other parts of this book, which explore major themes in the sociological literature:

- **Part 2** The food system: Food politics, production and distribution
- **Part 3** Food culture: Consumption and identity

The authors do not propose that this classification scheme is an exhaustive depiction of the food sociology field and acknowledge that there are overlaps between the themes and other equally important themes we could have addressed. Nonetheless, we believe these to be the dominant themes in the social appetite.

CHAPTER

1

EXPLORING THE SOCIAL APPETITE:
A SOCIOLOGY OF FOOD AND
NUTRITION

John Germov and Lauren Williams

OVERVIEW

- › Why do we eat the way we do?
- › What is sociology and how can it be applied to the study of food and nutrition?
- › What are the major social trends in food production, distribution and consumption?

This chapter provides an overview of the sociological perspective as it applies to the study of food and nutrition by introducing the concept of the social appetite. We explain how food sociology can help to conceptualise the connections between individual food habits and wider social patterns to explore why we eat the way we do. The chapter concludes by reviewing the major themes discussed in this book, highlighting the social context in which food is produced, distributed, consumed and disposed.

KEY TERMS

agency
agribusiness
body image
civilising process
cosmopolitanism
dietary guidelines
food security
globalisation
identity
McDonaldisation
muscular ideal
public health nutrition
reflexive modernity
risk society
social appetite
social construction
social structure
sociological imagination
structure/agency debate
thin ideal

Introduction: The social construction of food and appetite

But food is like sex in its power to stimulate imagination and memory as well as those senses—taste, smell, sight ... The most powerful writing about food rarely addresses the qualities of a particular dish or meal alone; it almost always contains elements of nostalgia for other times, places and companions, and of anticipation of future pleasures.

Joan Smith, *Hungry for You* (1997, p. 334)

We all have our favourite foods and individual likes and dislikes. Consider the tantalising smell of freshly baked bread, the luscious texture of chocolate, the heavenly aroma of espresso coffee, the exquisite flavour of semi-dried tomatoes, and the simple delight of a crisp potato chip. In addition to these sensory aspects, food is the focal point around which many social occasions and leisure events are organised. While hunger is a biological drive and food is essential to survival, there is more to food and eating than the satisfaction of physiological needs. 'Social drives'—based on cultural, religious, economic and political factors—also affect the availability and consumption of food. The existence of national cuisines, such as Thai, Italian, Indian and Mexican (to name only a few), indicates that individual food preferences are not formed in a social vacuum. The link between the 'individual' and the 'social' in terms of food habits begins early: 'While we all begin life consuming the same milk diet, by early childhood, children of different cultural groups are consuming diets that are composed of completely different foods, [sometimes] sharing no foods in common. This observation points to the essential role of early experience and the social and cultural context of eating in shaping food habits' (Birch, Fisher & Grimm-Thomas 1996, p. 162).

Therefore, despite similar physiological needs in humans, food habits are not universal, natural or inevitable; they are **social constructions**, and significant variations exist, from the sacred cow in India, to kosher eating among the orthodox Jewish community, to the consumption in some countries of animals that are kept as pets in other countries, such as dogs and horses. In Australia, the kangaroo may be on the coat of arms, but it is also a highly prized meat that is increasingly available in supermarkets and restaurants. Many indigenous peoples continue to consume traditional food; Australian Aboriginals, for example, consume 'bush foods' not often eaten by white Australians, such as witchetty grubs, honey ants, galahs and turtles. Some cultures prohibit alcohol consumption, while others drink alcohol to excess, and many cultures have gendered patterns of food consumption (see Box 1.1). As Claude Fischler (1988) notes, food is a bridge between nature and culture, and food habits are learnt through culturally determined notions of what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate food, and through cultural methods of preparation and consumption, irrespective of the nutritional value of these foods and methods (Falk 1994).

BOX 1.1 GENDERED FOOD HABITS

Gendered patterns of food habits can be observed in many cultures (DeVault 1991; Counihan 1999). It is not difficult to find examples of gender stereotypes in the advertising of certain food products. In Australia, over many years, the 'Meadowlea mum' commercials depicted a loving mum who prepared home-cooked meals with margarine to serve her happy family. Meat and Livestock Australia similarly aired highly gendered advertising campaigns, such as its 1990s 'Feed the man meat' campaign complete with sing-a-long

jingle, which depicted dutiful mothers preparing hearty meat-based meals for their growing sons and hard-working husbands. In 2013, the *Masterchef Australia* TV show pitted women against men and used highly gendered advertisements, including pink and blue colours, and graphics labelling some of the female contestants as '1950s housewife' and 'Daddy's little princess'. In preparing these advertisements, the advertising companies are cashing-in on, and reinforcing, existing gendered eating habits. Red meat tends to be perceived as a masculine food, while fruit and vegetables are perceived as being feminine (Charles & Kerr 1988).

The sociology of food and nutrition, or food sociology, concentrates on the myriad sociocultural, political, economic and philosophical factors that influence our food habits—what we eat, when we eat, how we eat and why we eat. Sociologists look for patterns in human interaction and seek to uncover the links between social organisation and individual behaviour. Food sociology focuses on the social patterning of food production, distribution and consumption—which can be conceptualised as the **social appetite**. The chapters in this book explore the various dimensions of the social appetite to show the ways in which foods, tastes and appetites are socially constructed. However, the sociological perspective does not tell the whole story, which is rounded out by many other disciplines, including anthropology, history, economics, geography, psychology and **public health nutrition**. Sociological approaches are a relatively recent addition to the study of food. Despite the delayed interest, since the 1990s there has been a significant surge in food sociology literature.

A sociological study of food habits examines the role played by the social environment in which food is produced and consumed. This does not mean that individual choice and personal taste play no role. Rather, because social patterns in food habits exist, a sociological explanation is helpful in understanding these patterns, which reveal the social determinants of why we eat the way we do. If food choice were totally based on individual or natural preferences for certain tastes, few people would persevere with foods such as coffee or beer, which are bitter on first tasting. These foods are said to be an 'acquired taste', and we 'acquire' them through a process of repetition that is socially driven, rather than biologically driven.

What is sociology? Introducing the sociological imagination template to study food

Before we discuss how sociology can contribute to the study of food and nutrition, we need to provide an overview of the sociological perspective (with which some readers will already be familiar). In brief, sociology examines how society is organised, how it influences our lives, and how social change occurs. It investigates social relationships at every level, from interpersonal and small-group interactions to public policy formation and global developments. Sociology provides critiques of explanations that reduce complex social phenomena to primarily biological, psychological or individualistic causes.

Charles Wright Mills (1959) coined the term **sociological imagination** to describe the way that sociological analysis is performed. Interpreting the world with a sociological imagination involves establishing a link between personal experiences and the social environment—that is, being able to imagine or see that the private lives of individuals can have a social basis. When

individuals share similar experiences, a social pattern emerges that implies that such experiences have a common, social foundation. For example, food and eating are imbued with social meanings and are closely associated with people's social interaction in both formal and informal settings. Box 1.2 provides some everyday examples of the social construction of food, especially food symbolism, to highlight the value of exploring the social appetite.

BOX 1.2 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FOOD AND TASTE

Food is central to social life and it is perhaps this centrality that has resulted in potent food symbolism and connections with key social events. That foods are imbued with social meaning is evident when we examine well-known books and films in popular culture. The film *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* (1994) explores the importance of food to family life and personal identity. *Babette's Feast* (1987) contrasts a pious lifestyle of moral austerity with the sensuality and carnality of food as a feast of sight, aroma, texture and taste—a spiritual experience of worldly pleasure. *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) conveys the social meaning of food in the context of marriage rituals. Other films have comically explored cannibalism, such as *Delicatessen* (1991) and *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* (1989); and who can forget the vomit scene in *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* (1983). The film *La Grande Bouffe* (1973) and Linda Jaivin's book *Eat Me* (1995) mixed erotica with the sensuality of food in what could be termed a genre of 'food porn' if it were not for the long tradition of food advertisements that conflate the pleasures of sex and food—just think of any number of adverts about chocolate or ice-cream. The passion of food has been explored in films like *Dinner Rush* (2000), *No Reservations* (2007) and *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2014), while the manipulative power of the food industry has been exposed in *Fast Food Nation* (2006), a fictionalised account of Eric Schlosser's (2001) journalistic exposé. Food is often used as a metaphor in daily speech, through expressions such as 'sweetheart', 'honey', 'bad seed', 'couch potato', 'breadwinner' and 'cheesed off', to name a few. Imagine some of the food rituals and food symbolism involved in the following social situations:

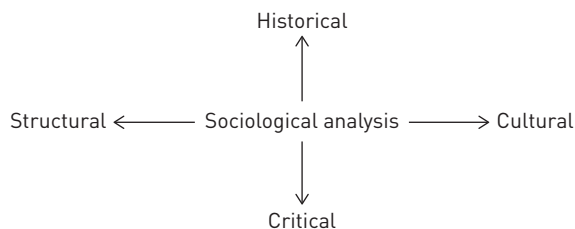
- a birthday celebration
- a wake
- a wedding banquet
- a religious feast or fast
- an occasion when you might exercise virtue and restraint in eating
- an occasion when you crave 'comfort food' or 'naughty but nice' food.

Drawing on the work of Mills (1959) and Giddens (1986), Evan Willis (2004) conceptualises the sociological imagination as consisting of four interlinked factors: historical, cultural, structural and critical. When these four interrelated features of the sociological imagination are applied to a topic under study, they form the basis of sociological analysis. We have visually presented this approach in Figure 1.1 as a useful template to keep in mind when you want to apply a sociological perspective to an issue—simply imagine superimposing the template over the topic you are investigating and consider the following sorts of questions:

- **Historical factors:** How have past events influenced the contemporary social appetite (i.e. current social patterns of food production, distribution and consumption)?
- **Cultural factors:** What influence do tradition, cultural values and belief systems have on food habits in the particular country, social group or social occasion you are studying?

- **Structural factors:** How do various forms of social organisation and social institutions affect the production, distribution and consumption of food?
- **Critical factors:** Why are things as they are? Could they be otherwise? Who benefits?

FIGURE 1.1 The sociological imagination template



Applying the sociological imagination template can challenge your views and assumptions about the world, since such ‘sociological vision’ involves constant critical reflection. By using the template, the social context of food can be examined in terms of an interplay between historical, cultural, structural and critical factors. However, it is important to note that the template necessarily simplifies the actual process of sociological analysis because, for example, there is a wide variety of research methods and social theories through which sociological analysis can be conducted. In practice, there can be considerable overlap between the four factors, so they are not as distinctly identifiable as is implied by Figure 1.1. For instance, it can be difficult to clearly differentiate between historical factors and cultural factors, or structural factors and cultural factors, as they can be interdependent. Cultural values are often intricately intertwined with historical events and may also be the product of, or at least be reinforced by, structural factors. Nevertheless, the sociological imagination template is a useful reminder that the four factors—historical, cultural, structural and critical—are essential elements of sociological analysis (see Box 1.3).

BOX 1.3 ABORIGINAL FOOD AND NUTRITION: APPLYING THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION TEMPLATE

Until the colonisation of Australia by Europeans, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people lived a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Today, ATSI people form 2.5 per cent of the Australian population, and suffer from disproportionately high rates of many nutrition-related chronic health conditions, such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and overweight and obesity (AIHW 2011). Data published in 2015 showed a lack of **food security**, particularly for those in remote Australia, where 31 per cent of people reported being in a household that ran out of food and could not afford to buy more (ABS 2015). Applying the sociological imagination template highlights the relationship between the social situation of Indigenous people, and their food, nutrition and health.

Historical factors

Before white settlement of Australia, there is evidence that ATSI people were fit and healthy and lived on a relatively nutritious, low-energy diet (NHMRC 2000). When, Indigenous communities were dispossessed of their hunting and fishing areas and forced to live on missions and reserves, they were provided with rations of highly processed Western foods low in nutrient value, such as white flour and sugar. The historical legacy of these developments was a change from a traditional nutrient-dense diet (bush foods) to a Westernised diet high in saturated fat and sugar and low in fruit and vegetables.

Cultural factors

While bush foods such as galahs, turtles, goannas, honey ants and witchetty grubs represent only a small proportion of the food consumed by Aboriginal people today, they remain an important part of Indigenous culture, identity and food preferences, particularly in rural and remote regions. Maintaining this cultural heritage and incorporating bush foods into nutrition-promotion strategies could help ameliorate nutritional problems in Indigenous communities.

Structural factors

Unemployment, low education, overcrowding and poverty are experienced by a disproportionately high percentage of Indigenous people (AIHW 2011). The limited food supply in rural and remote areas (particularly in terms of access to fresh foods such as fruit and vegetables), management of food stores and transport all provide challenges for food security in Indigenous communities.

Critical factors

The 2001 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan 2000–2010* (NATSINSAP) documented Indigenous food and nutrition problems and proposed a range of food supply, food security and nutrition promotion initiatives (SIGNAL 2001). Yet nearly two decades after this plan was released, food security continues to be a problem for this population group (ABS 2015; NHMRC 2000). Beyond public health nutrition approaches, a number of employment-generation schemes for Indigenous communities have been attempted. For example, echoing the native food sovereignty movement in the United States, a 'bush tucker' industry has developed, using traditional foods (such as bush tomatoes and indigenous oils and spices) as resources to market to the general community. While still small, the industry has received some government funding support, though considerably more funds are needed for industry development, which could result in it becoming a significant source of employment for Indigenous people, as well as a source of cultural connection to their heritage.

Food sociology and the structure/agency debate

A key sociological question concerns the relative influence over human behaviour (in this case food choice) of personal preferences and social determinants. To what extent are our food choices the result of social shaping as opposed to individual likes and dislikes? This represents a central concern of any sociological study, and is often referred to as the **structure/agency debate**. The term **social structure** refers to recurring patterns of social interaction by which people are related to each other through social institutions and social groups. In this sense we are very much products of our society, as certain forms of social organisation, such as laws, education, religion, economic resources and cultural beliefs, influence our lives. However, as self-conscious beings, we have the ability to participate in and change the society in which we live. The term **agency** refers to the potential of individuals to independently exercise choice in, and influence over, their daily lives and wider society. Clearly, we are not simply automatons responding to preordained social outcomes. Human agency produces the scope for difference, diversity and social change.

It is important to note that structure and agency are inextricably linked—they should not be viewed as representing an either/or choice, or as being inherently positive or negative. The social structure may liberate individuals by ensuring access to inexpensive food or make less healthy options more expensive (see Box 1.4), while the exercise of agency by some individuals may be constraining on others—for example, someone may steal your food!

BOX 1.4 THE SUGAR TAX: STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN ACTION

One example of the interrelationship between structure and agency is provided by the sugar debate recently sparked by the structural changes made in the United Kingdom. The UK government voted to introduce a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages (soft drinks), which is a type of structural change (Triggle 2016). Similar initiatives introduced in low- and middle-income countries, such as Mexico, have shown that such measures have an impact on purchasing behaviour, with a 6 per cent decrease in the purchase of taxed beverages one year after the introduction of the excise (Colchero, Popkin, Rivera & Ng 2016).

The case is also an example of where people can exercise their agency—consumers still have the ability to choose whether or not to buy these beverages at the higher prices, or to buy non-taxed beverage alternatives instead. In the Mexican study, the purchase of non-taxed products such as bottled water increased over the same period.

The interrelationship of structure and agency is illustrated by the fact that while people maintain the ability to purchase soft drinks, some people may have economic constraints that limit their purchasing power. The evaluation of the initiative in Mexico showed that the households of the lowest socioeconomic status had the greatest decreases in purchase of taxed beverages—9 per cent versus 5.6 per cent in the households of highest socioeconomic status. The effects of the new tax in the UK, as a high-income country, remain to be seen.

A sociological perspective thus sheds light on the potential success or failure of major policy initiatives, and illustrates the complexity of the interaction between structure and agency.

What's on the menu?

A walk down the aisle of any supermarket reveals food products that were not widely available even two decades ago. French cheese, Russian caviar, Indian spices, Thai coconut cream, Belgian chocolate and Australian macadamia nuts are a small indication of the extent of social change in food habits. In restaurants and cafes in major urban areas of any country, people can now partake of global cuisines such as Chinese, Indian, Thai, Italian, Greek and French. In fact, **culinary tourism**, the promotion of gastronomic experiences and events as a key feature of tourism (such as regional food festivals and foodstuffs), has become increasingly popular (Rojek & Urry 1997), particularly amid calls for a return to authenticity and regionality in food and cooking (Symons 1993).

The processes of mass production and **globalisation** have resulted in such a pluralisation of food choices and hybridisation of cuisines that a form of food **cosmopolitanism** is emerging (Tomlinson 1999; Beck 2000). The popular description of modern Australian cuisine as 'Australasian' is just one example of this cosmopolitan trend. Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck both argue that contemporary social life is characterised by **reflexive modernity** (Beck et al. 1994). According to Giddens (1991), people's exposure to new information and different cultures undermines traditions. For Claude Fischler, this can result in the omnivore's paradox, whereby when faced with such food variety and novelty 'individuals lack reliable criteria to make ... decisions and therefore they experience a growing sense of anxiety' (1980, p. 948), or what he playfully refers to as 'gastro-anomie'. In the face of food-borne diseases, such as 'mad cow disease' and avian influenza (bird flu), resulting from modern agricultural processes, the wide variety of food choices coexist with increased risk and anxiety over what to eat (Lupton 2000), the constant management of which Beck (1992) describes as characteristic of a **risk society**.

The food system: Food politics, production and distribution

If commercial interests make people's tastes more standardised than they conceivably could in the past, they impose far less strict limits than did the physical constraints to which most people's diet was subject... the main trend has been towards diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties in food habits and culinary taste.

Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food* (1996, pp. 321–2)

The increasing mass production and commodification of food over the last century has resulted in food being one of the largest industries across the globe, with world food exports estimated to be over US\$1303 billion in 2012, more than doubling in value since 2005 (Department of Agriculture 2014; see Table 1.1). In Australia, there are over 1.6 million people employed in the food sector, with the total value of food production estimated at \$42.8 billion in 2012–13. Australia is a major food exporter, ranked the 13th largest in the world, representing \$31.8 billion in trade (2012–13) (Department of Agriculture 2014).

Food is a major source of profit, export dollars and employment, and thus concerns a range of stakeholders, including corporations, unions, consumer groups, government agencies and health professionals. To conceptualise the size of the food industry or food system, various models have been proposed, such as food chains, food cycles and food webs (see Sobal et al. 1998 for an excellent review). Jeff Sobal and colleagues (1998) prefer to use the term 'food and nutrition system' to acknowledge the important role of public health nutrition in any food model, which they define as:

the set of operations and processes involved in transforming raw materials into foods and transforming nutrients into health outcomes, all of which functions as a system within biophysical and sociocultural contexts. (Sobal et al. 1998, p. 853, original italics)

Food system models invariably simplify the operations involved in the production, distribution and consumption of food, often failing to take account of the global, political, cultural and environmental concerns, or the related stakeholders and industries, such as the media, waste-management, advertising, transport and health sectors. The model devised by Sobal and colleagues (1998) addresses most of these sociological concerns, though the issue of globalisation is absent.

BOX 1.5 THE MCDONALDISATION OF FOOD

The **McDonaldisation** of food is a global phenomenon and represents the expansion of **agribusiness** through the standardisation of food production and the homogenisation of food consumption. Ritzer, in *The McDonaldization of Society*, first published in 1993, used the term 'McDonaldisation' as a modern metaphor for '*the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world*' (2000, p. 1, italics in original). McDonald's is a prototype organisation that has been able, through rigid methods of managerial and technical control, to achieve a highly rationalised form of food production: no matter where in the world you come across a McDonald's restaurant, you can be assured of encountering the same look, the same service, the same products and the same tastes. Not only are there now many other food chains based on the same formula, but there are also fewer and fewer places where you can avoid the McDonald's experience.

TABLE 1.1 Share of export food trade by country, in value terms (2012)

RANK	COUNTRY	SHARE (%)
1	USA	10.6
2	Netherlands	5.9
3	Brazil	5.7
4	Germany	5.5
5	France	5.4
6	China	4.3
7	Canada	3.6
8	Spain	3.4
9	Argentina	3.3
10	Belgium	3.1
11	Italy	3.0
12	Indonesia	2.5
13	Australia	2.4

Source: Adapted from Department of Agriculture (2014, p. 31)

The five chapters in Part 2 of this book explore some of the key sociological issues affecting the food system, particularly the impact of globalisation (see Box 1.5) and agribusiness (see Schlosser 2001), and the role of food regulations in relation to the corporate influences on dietary guidelines, labelling and public health nutrition. Specifically, Part 2 investigates the environmental impact of current agricultural practices (Chapter 2); the inequitable distribution of food as the basis of world hunger (Chapter 3); the increasing food insecurity experienced in developed countries like Australia (Chapter 4); and the dominating influence of politics and policies on how food is produced and consumed and labelled (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

Given that food is a major industry and source of profit, it should come as little surprise that it is also an area rife with politics and debates over public policy, particularly over food regulation relating to hygiene standards, the use of chemicals, pesticide residues, the legitimacy of advertising claims, and various public health nutrition policies and strategies (see Box 1.6).

Dietary guidance is an area where governments involve themselves in regulating food and nutrition. **Dietary guidelines** are statements of recommendations for the way in which populations are advised to alter their food habits (see NHMRC 2013 for the Australian version of these guidelines). The ability of this advice to be influenced by powerful corporate interests, often referred to as Big Food, is demonstrated in Chapter 5. An examination of the development and implementation of food policy exposes some of the individualistic assumptions and corporate interests that have swayed the good intentions of government authorities and health professionals attempting to address public health nutrition. A highly contested example of the influence of the food industry can be seen in the development of regulations governing food composition and labelling, which is discussed in Chapter 6.

BOX 1.6 THE AUSSIE MEAT PIE AND THE DEFINITION OF 'MEAT'

Food regulations are often the outcome of a compromise between the interests of the food industry and public health. Take, for example, the humble meat pie in Australia and how FSANZ adopted a definition of 'meat' that makes it possible for buffalo, camel and deer to find their way into a meat pie, as well as gristle, animal rind and connective tissue.

The quintessentially Australian meat pie—one of the earliest fast foods in Australia—was actually inherited from the British. Its popularity reflected the wide availability of meat in Australia, its simple flavours (meat and gravy encased in pastry), and its ability to be eaten with the hands, which made it a popular convenience food, especially at sporting occasions such as football matches. The industrialisation and mass production of the meat pie has caused much speculation about its actual ingredients, particularly about how much meat and what types of meat it contains. According to Standard 2.2.1 (Meat and Meat Products) of the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code, a meat pie need only include a minimum of 25 per cent actual meat. Of particular interest is the definition of 'meat', which includes 'buffalo, camel, cattle, deer, goat, hare, pig, poultry, rabbit or sheep', 'slaughtered other than in a wild state'. So not only can a meat pie include very little actual beef or red meat, but it can include animal rind, fat, gristle, connective tissue, nerve tissue, blood and blood vessels under the label of 'meat' (offal must be listed separately in the ingredients list). This means that muscle meat—which is what people normally consider to be meat—may not even be included in a meat pie. Furthermore, meat content is measured by the presence of protein and this can be 'beefed up' by adding soy products (ACA 2002).

Food culture: Consumption and identity

Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you what you are.

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste* (1825)

People in Western societies are presented with a large number of consumption choices, which can be used to construct their self-identity. As Deborah Lupton has described, food is often defined as 'good or bad, masculine or feminine, powerful or weak, alive or dead, healthy or non-healthy, a comfort or punishment, sophisticated or gauche, a sin or virtue, animal or vegetable' (1996, pp. 1–2). These opposing attributes illustrate the social meanings, classifications and emotions that people can attach to food and, by choosing certain foods above others, define who they are. Pierre Bourdieu (1979, 1984) maintains that traditional modes of social distinction based on class persist through consumption practices, particularly food habits. The theme of Part 3 of the book encapsulates food habits that are influenced by various forms of social group membership, whether based on traditional social cleavages or new social movements (see Box 1.7).

In 2005, the 'Save Toby' website was launched on which it was claimed that Toby, a cute little rabbit, was being held for ransom. Unless visitors donated a certain sum of money, Toby would die. According to the site author: 'I am going to take Toby to a butcher to have him slaughter this cute bunny. I will then prepare Toby for a midsummer feast.' The website included pictures of Toby on a chopping board and in a saucepan, along with an updated diary of Toby's activities. What started as a bad taste joke gained global media attention and soon people sent money to save Toby or buy mugs, T-shirts and a book sold through Amazon.com. Eventually Toby was 'saved', and it spurred a number of copycat money-raising schemes/jokes that served to highlight public hypocrisy about eating meat. Meanwhile, rabbits remain widely available from butchers and restaurants in many countries. The Save Toby campaign exposed the contradictions inherent in meat consumption, particularly when some animals are socially constructed as pets, often with

human-like attributes. The line between 'normality' and taboo foods is often fragile—never more so than when it concerns eating animals; this issue is explored further in Chapter 9.

BOX 1.7 THE 'SLOW FOOD' AND 'TRUE FOOD' SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The Slow Food Movement began in Italy in 1986 and was formally established in 1989 as a response to the mass production and globalisation of food. It claims to have over 100,000 members worldwide, and aims to protect, catalogue and promote traditional, regional and national cuisines, including endangered animal breeds, vegetable species and cooking techniques. Using the emblem of the snail and referring to members as 'eco-gastronomes', Slow Food opposes the fast-food industry and works to protect food traditions, historic sites (cafes and bistros) and agricultural heritage (biodiversity, artisan techniques and sustainable agriculture). The Slow Food Movement promotes its aims by funding research, conferences and festivals, by publishing material, and by lobbying governments and corporations. Along similar lines but for vastly different reasons, the 'True Food Network', coordinated by Greenpeace, campaigns specifically against genetically engineered food and, in addition to its lobbying efforts, produces consumer guides on obtaining food free of genetic modification. For more information about these social movements and their food ideologies, see the following websites:

- Slow Food: www.slowfood.com/
- True Food Network: www.greenpeace.org.au/truefood/

Ordering a vegetarian meal, eating a meat pie, dining at a trendy cafe, drinking an exclusive wine or eating an exotic cuisine can be used and interpreted as social 'markers' of an individual's social status, group membership or philosophical beliefs. Part 3 of this book addresses the relationship between social groups, food consumption and identity formation, including an examination of how these aspects change in the life stage of ageing (Chapter 10) or are affected by social class (Chapter 11). Chapters 7, 8 and 12 examine Australian and European food cultures by drawing on the intellectual tradition of historical sociology, which blends the approaches of the two disciplines to explore how complex social processes shape the development of societies across time and place (Tilly 2001) or, as Mills famously stated, 'enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society' (1959, p. 6). No more so is this illustrated than in unpacking the complex relationship humans have with alcohol, explored in Chapters 12 and 13. The adage 'you are what you eat' (and in some cases drink) was originally intended as a nutritional slogan to encourage healthy eating, but today the meaning has changed as the focus has moved away from the internal health of the body to the external 'look' of the body. Part 3 of this book examines the impact of health, nutrition and beauty discourses on food consumption and body management. The name of the well-known company Weight Watchers symbolises the body discipline and surveillance that is now commonly practised in Western societies in efforts to conform to a socially acceptable notion of beauty and **body image**—a process that can be referred to as 'social embodiment', whereby the body is both an object and a reflective agent (Connell 2002). As we shall see in Chapter 14, attempts to regulate the body are gendered through the social construction of the **thin ideal** for women, and the **muscular ideal** for men. While external pressures from the media and corporate interests play a key role in the construction and maintenance of such discourses, they are also internalised and reproduced by individuals—an example of what Norbert Elias (1978) termed **civilising processes**, whereby social regulation of individual behaviour is no longer achieved through external coercion but through moral self-regulation. Chapter 15 discusses how society treats those who fail to conform to the thin ideal and face the stigma of obesity.

BOX 1.8 'LITE' FOODS, BALANCE AND INCREASING OBESITY RATES

Despite the increasing consumption of low-fat foods, rates of overweight and obesity continue to rise in many Western countries—a fact that should caution against any simplistic beliefs that low-fat foods can be used to control weight (Allred 1995). The 2014 figures showed that over 1.9 billion people (39 per cent of the world adult population) are overweight, with 600 million (13 per cent) obese (WHO 2015).

While so-called 'light foods' are marketed for weight control purposes, Claude Fischler (1995) argues that people seek increased pleasure through the inclusion of light foods in addition to, rather than as a replacement for, other foods in the diet (possibly allowing them to eat more). For example, it is not uncommon for people to use artificial sweetener in their coffee so that they can have a slice of chocolate mud cake, or to purchase diet cola with a hamburger, giving a sense of dietary 'balance'. The commonsense notion of a 'balanced' diet is highly variable, but may be defined as a balance between 'good' and 'bad' choices, hedonism and discipline, healthy and unhealthy food (Fischler 1988).

Attempts to rationally manage and regulate the human body mean that for many people the pleasures of eating now coexist with feelings of guilt. While food companies encourage us to succumb to hedonistic temptations, health authorities proclaim nutritional recommendations as if eating were merely an instrumental act of health maintenance. The social-control overtones of such an approach are clearly evident in the 'lipophobic' (fear of fat) health advice given by some health professionals. Changes in the advice of health authorities over the decades and the simplification of scientific findings into media slogans, mixed with the contra-marketing efforts of food companies, have served to create confusion over whether certain foods, particularly those marketed as 'low fat' or 'lite', are in fact health-promoting (see Box 1.8). While some people have become disciplined adherents to this marketing propaganda, others have become increasingly sceptical of moralistic nutrition messages, especially when linked to the thin ideal, and instead support size acceptance in the context of a healthy lifestyle, in an alternative doctrine of Health at Every Size.

A preliminary conclusion

There is no sincerer love than the love of food.

George Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah* (1930)

While this book represents an academic enquiry into food, we would like to acknowledge the passion, delight and pure hedonism with which food is intimately associated. In that light, and in the spirit of cosmopolitanism, we end this chapter with the following excerpt from Marcel Proust, which encapsulates the central role of food as part of *la dolce vita*:

She sent for one of those squat, plump little cakes called 'petites madeleines', which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted valve of a scallop shell. And soon, mechanically, dispirited after a dreary day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shiver ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory—this new sensation having had the effect, which love has, of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was me. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal. Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I sensed that it was connected with the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature. Where did it come from? What did it mean? How could I seize and apprehend it?

Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way* (1913, 1957)

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- The sociology of food and nutrition challenges individualistic accounts of people's eating habits that assume that personal likes and dislikes primarily govern food choice.
- The 'social appetite' refers to the social context in which food is produced, distributed, consumed and disposed—the social context that shapes our food choices.
- Sociology examines how society works, how it influences our lives and how social change occurs. It adopts a critical stance by asking questions such as these: Why are things as they are? Who benefits? What are the alternatives to the status quo?
- As Evan Willis suggests, the sociological imagination—or thinking sociologically—is best put into practice by addressing four interrelated facets of any social phenomena: historical, cultural, structural and critical factors.
- The way we eat reflects an interplay between social structure and human agency.
- Food cosmopolitanism, globalisation, reflexivity and risk are central features of contemporary social life in developed societies.

Sociological reflection

Think of the influences that have shaped your own food habits and likes and dislikes by imagining a social occasion at which food is consumed, such as a birthday party or Christmas celebration. Apply the sociological imagination template to explore the significance of the occasion, noting for each factor the influences on your food consumption:

- Historical: When did you first eat that way? What past events have influenced the social occasion?
- Cultural: What customs or values are involved? Who prepares and serves the food, and with whom is it consumed? Why?
- Structural: In what setting does the food event occur? What role do wider social institutions or organisations play?
- Critical: Has the particular event changed over time or not? Why?

Discussion questions

- 1 How can food and taste be socially constructed? Give examples.
- 2 What is meant by the term 'social appetite'?
- 3 Consider the social meanings and symbolism in the examples of the social appetite in Box 1.2. What other examples can you think of?

Further investigation

- 1 'Food choice is not simply a matter of personal taste, but reflects regional, national and global influences.' Discuss.
- 2 Given that social patterns of food production, distribution and consumption exist, to what extent are individuals responsible for their food choices?

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

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- Anthropology of Food: <http://aof.revues.org/>
- Association for the Study of Food and Society (ASFS): www.food-culture.org/
- Australian Food, Society and Culture Network: <http://sydney.edu.au/business/food-society-culture>
- Canadian Association for Food Studies: <http://cafs.landfood.ubc.ca/en/>
- Critical Studies in Food and Culture: www.facebook.com/Critical-Studies-in-Food-and-Culture-105508892823849/
- Food Culture Studies Caucus (American Studies Association): www.facebook.com/FoodCaucus/

- Food Systems Academy: www.foodsystemsacademy.org.uk/
- Gastronomica: www.gastronomica.org/
- Health at Every Size: <http://haescommunity.com/>
- International Food Policy Research Institute: www.ifpri.org/
- International Rural Sociology Association (IRSA): www.irsas-world.org/
- The Secret Ingredient: <http://thesecretingredient.org/>

Films and documentaries

- Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret*, 2014, documentary by Kip Andersen and Keegan Kuhn, 85 minutes.
- Food, Inc.* 2009, documentary by Robert Kenner, 94 minutes.
- The End of the Line*, 2009, documentary by Rupert Murray, 85 minutes.
- Fast Food Nation*, 2006, film directed by Richard Linklater, inspired by Eric Schlosser's book, 114 minutes.
- Fed Up*, 2014, documentary by Stephanie Soechtig, 92 minutes.
- Ingredients*, 2011, documentary by Robert Bates, 67 minutes.
- Super Size Me*, 2004, documentary by Morgan Spurlock, 100 minutes.
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PART 2

THE FOOD SYSTEM: FOOD POLITICS, PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

We are who we are because we are all things to all people all the time everywhere.

Ike Herbert, head of Coca-Cola USA, 1990, quoted in Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola* (1993, p. 398; Phoenix, London)

People often feed the hungry so that nothing may disturb their own enjoyment of a good meal.

Somerset Maugham, *A Writer's Notebook* (1949)

Food is an important part of a balanced diet.

Fran Lebowitz, *Metropolitan Life* (1978)

In Part 2 of this book we examine why something as innocuous as choosing certain foods can be a politicised act with global consequences. Food is an area that brings the best and worst of politics into play; the formation of public policy and attempts to influence it by vested interest groups take place at national and international levels. Food is a highly profitable commodity and the pursuit of profit has significant implications for the way food is produced and distributed. Yet food is also an essential commodity—people must literally eat to live—and it therefore has fundamental humanitarian value. The world produces enough food to feed its entire population, yet for a large proportion of the world's population, hunger is a way of life, with acute periods of starvation occurring in times of famine or political unrest. The unequal distribution of food is played out on a global scale, but even within developed countries, hunger is a regular part of life for some sectors of society.

The chapters in Part 2 cover the major influences on the food system, in terms of globalisation and agribusiness, by focusing on the environment and sustainability issues around food production, world hunger and food security in the developed world. It also considers the influence of the food industry on how governments and other authorities develop policy, and how they present food and nutrition information to consumers through dietary guidance and food labels.

Specifically, Part 2 consists of five chapters:

- **Chapter 2** explains how the dominant mode of agricultural production in developed countries, driven by the profit imperative, causes environmental degradation; it also examines a number of environmentally sustainable alternatives.
- **Chapter 3** outlines a range of perspectives that attempt to explain the persistence of world hunger, and discusses the viability of proposed strategies for ensuring that every human has enough food.

- **Chapter 4** extends the consideration of food security with the example of a developed country, Australia. The chapter illustrates that, even in an affluent nation, there are groups within society who are not able to meet their basic human right to food.
- **Chapter 5** examines the role of food policy in the form of dietary guidelines, exposing some of the individualistic assumptions and corporate interests that have impacted on the good intentions of government authorities and health professionals in attempting to address public health nutrition.
- **Chapter 6** provides an exploration of the development of the food label from the provision of ingredient information to its current status as a powerful communication device and highly contested space, subject to food industry lobbying.

CHAPTER 2

UNSUSTAINABLE FOOD PRODUCTION: ITS SOCIAL ORIGINS AND ALTERNATIVES

Terry Leahy

OVERVIEW

- › What are the environmental problems of agriculture today?
- › What agricultural technologies are available to deal with these problems?
- › What are the social causes of these problems, and what are the social alternatives?

As we go about producing and consuming our food, we set in train a long list of environmental problems. The process is unsustainable, because the environmental damage we are causing will make it difficult for us to grow food in the future. We are also drastically reducing the opportunities for other forms of life. These problems arise from specific social structures. It is not 'us', as a mass of individuals (or even 'us', as a society) that creates environmental problems. These problems come from our relationships with each other, relationships of class, economy, work and power. Current practices of food production damage the environment. Alternatives are available. However, agricultural strategies designed to achieve commercial success are inevitably constrained by the market.

Often, a sustainable solution is impossible in the marketplace. This chapter will also look at the kinds of social structures that might deal with this crisis. While capitalism may be considered to be part of the problem, alternative social structures seem unlikely to gain popular support soon. Which is all the more reason to be talking about initiatives that are succeeding now.

KEY TERMS

agroforestry
alienated labour
capitalism
cash crops
food forest
gift economy
global warming
monoculture
oil peak
organics
permaculture
polyculture
real utopias
ruralisation
salinity
social structure
sustainable agriculture
transnational corporations

Environmental problems and food production

As we go about producing and consuming food, we set in train a long series of environmental problems. Current agricultural methods, while highly efficient, are unsustainable because the environmental damage they cause reduces the productivity of the land. Major environmental problems are caused by **monoculture**, fertilisers, pesticides, overgrazing, overfishing, tree clearing, irrigation and the use of fossil fuels. What sociology can offer is the insight that these problems develop as a consequence of specific **social structures**.

Monocultures and alternative agricultures

In rich countries, technologies that save labour cause environmental problems. With the farming industry based on large pieces of land serviced by machinery and cheap fuel, monocultural (single crop) production is cheaper than growing a variety of crops. In a monoculture, pests spread easily and can destroy the whole crop (Lawrence & Vanclay 1992, p. 53; Watson 1992). Toxic pesticides are used to reduce pest attacks; these pesticides endanger health and kill off microbes, earthworms, insects and wild animals (Leu 2006; Kishi 2005). After time, pests develop resistance to pesticides—the crop may be unable to be grown at all, or even more toxic pesticides are called in (Pretty & Hine 2005).

An alarming problem is 'colony collapse disorder' in beehives (UNEP 2010). Whole hives empty as the worker bees leave. Bees pollinate 71 of the 100 crop species that provide almost all our food—for example, almonds, avocados, cranberries, apples and soybeans. In the United States, the number of beehives used to pollinate crops dropped by half between 1950 and 2007. In the winter of 2007–2008, North American beekeepers lost 36 per cent of their hives. Declines in beehives have also taken place in Europe, China, Japan and North Africa. Pesticides such as neonicotinoids seem to be responsible. Even at low doses, these pesticides impair the direction sense of bees. They also weaken immune systems, making bees more vulnerable to parasites and diseases (PAN 2015). Herbicides kill weeds that bees depend on for pollen, starving them and weakening their immunity. Less diversity in pollens means an insufficient variety of nutrients for bees. Frequently moving the hives is associated with hive deaths from parasites and infections (UNEP 2010).

Conventional farming uses synthetic fertilisers. These acidify soils and kill microorganisms that create soil fertility. Up to 60 million hectares of Australian agricultural land will become too acidic for plant growth (Cullen et al. 2003, p. 3). Fertiliser is washed into waterways, stimulating algal growth. The algae use up oxygen, so waterweeds, fish and insects die. The algae can be poisonous, like the blue-green algae of the Darling River (Lawrence & Vanclay 1992; Thomas & Kevan 1993; Vanclay & Lawrence 1995). We can look at two kinds of solutions to these problems: **food forest** solutions and **organics**.

Food forest solutions

As an alternative to monoculture, some **permaculture** writers recommend 'forest gardening' or polyculture (Mollison & Holmgren 1978; Whitefield 1998). A **polyculture** is where a variety of foods are grown together. Carbohydrates do not come from cereals but from a food forest of mixed species. If pest species do cause a problem, it is confined to some crops, while the rest

flourish. Small livestock provide fertiliser and eat pests (Mollison 1988). Polycultures could work very well if people grew food locally and had plenty of time to plant, maintain and harvest by hand. A mixture of species that had to be cared for individually would take time but could sustain the soil and be fun to grow. In the context of the capitalist market place, these solutions are difficult to implement. Farmers save on labour costs by using harvesting machinery, and the polyculture solution is less profitable (Lawrence & Vanclay 1992, pp. 52–3).

Organic solutions

Another solution is 'organic' agriculture. In organics, inputs come from organic plant or animal resources, such as animal manure. No artificial fertilisers or synthetic pesticides are used (Kristiansen & Merfield 2006; Leu 2006). This kind of agriculture is promoted for its health benefits. It also protects the environment. Methods such as rotating crops, growing living mulch, using animal manures, planting legumes and digging water-retaining structures assist soil fertility. There are no artificial fertilisers to destroy soil organisms, acidify soils and wreck aquatic environments, and no pesticides or weed-killing chemicals to harm wild species and soil microorganisms (Kasperczyk & Knickel 2006). While crop yields per hectare are generally lower in organic agriculture, costs of inputs are less and farmers can end up better off if they get higher prices for organic produce. Yields in organics are about 80 per cent of conventional yields. However, they improve over the first five years and can end up as high as in conventional agriculture (Leu 2006; Seufert et al. 2012).

The market for organic produce has been growing rapidly. Between 1999 and 2013, the amount of agricultural land devoted globally to organics grew from 11 million hectares to 43 million hectares (Organic World 2016). Yet organic food is still considerably more expensive. In Australia, a basket of organic groceries was found to cost 32 per cent more than the same basket of groceries farmed conventionally (Barry 2008). In the United States, a similar study found organic food to be 56 per cent more expensive (Roberts 2011). The basic reason is the extra labour that goes into producing composts, spreading manure, weeding by hand, companion planting and resting fields to grow cover crops (Lawrence & Vanclay 1992; Thomas & Kevan 1993). Farmers attempting to transfer to organic farming face many challenges. The drift of chemical sprays from neighbouring farms can prevent a farmer from gaining organic certification. It takes approximately five years to reach full organic production—the time needed for soils and beneficial organisms to build up after toxic chemicals have been removed (Wynen 2006). This five-year wait can be financially crippling. Grain growers have to install their own mill in order to market their flour as organic. The required investment in skills and knowledge is also expensive (Vanclay & Lawrence 1995). Organics have a long way to go to dominate the market. In 2013 the total value of the global organics market was US\$72 billion (Lernoud & Willer 2015, p. 39), 2 per cent of the total world value for agriculture—US\$3261 billion (FAOSTAT 2015).

Ploughing, cultivation and weed control

Ploughing with tractors saves on labour costs and works well with cereal monocultures. When soil is ploughed, the top layer is turned over completely. Exposure to sunlight destroys beneficial microorganisms. The use of heavy machinery packs the soil down (Thomas & Kevan 1993). Ploughed fields are also very susceptible to erosion. Rains wash away the topsoil, which is a non-renewable resource. The eroded topsoil pollutes waterways with excessive nutrients (Land & Water Australia 2002). So this method of production is unsustainable. For example, in Australia, a 30-year study has revealed that eight tonnes of soil per hectare are lost in summer cropping

of annual cereals, compared with 0.01 tonnes lost from undisturbed native forests (Turner et al. 2004). A food forest strategy is an ideal solution—tree crops produce carbohydrates without the soil being constantly disturbed. Within organic farming, cereal production is achieved by rotating different crops in different seasons, using hand weeding and some ploughing to reduce weeds. Living mulch, legume crops and fallow fields are used to keep organic matter in the soil and retain moisture (Morse 2006).

Within typical commercial farming, one approach that has been used is 'minimum tillage', or 'no-till' or 'conservation farming'. After the grain is harvested, the stubble and crop residue is left on the field to add organic matter. The fields are sprayed with herbicides to kill weeds. By 1996, up to 80 per cent of Australia's cropping farms were using some aspects of this technique (Cullen et al. 2003, p. 11). Minimum tillage technology improves soil quality. There is less ploughing to control weeds (a procedure that kills soil organisms). To prepare for sowing, tractors only chisel a thin furrow. Crop residues and dead weeds rot down to improve soil, protect the ground from sunlight and retain moisture. Importantly, conservation agriculture avoids the labour costs of organics.

However, there are environmental drawbacks. Weed-killing chemicals damage wildlife and human health. For example, Roundup, the most common weedkiller, washes into waterways and is acutely toxic to beneficial insects, frogs, fish, birds, earthworms and soil microorganisms. It is also a danger to the health of farm workers (Sundquist 2004, p. 7; Leu 2006, p. 2). Atrazine is one of the world's most commonly used herbicides, and has been found in rain samples from 30 to 90 per cent of sites tested in Greece and the USA. It interferes with the endocrine system, causing cancers in humans and animals (Wu et al. 2009). The toxic effects associated with these chemicals intensify as weed species develop resistance and more herbicides are sprayed.

Grazing and agroforestry

Large animals grown for meat generally cause environmental problems. Overgrazing is common (Watson 1992). Too many livestock compact the soil, killing soil microorganisms and leaving a hard crust that grows little fodder and does not admit rain. Without cover, the soil washes away (Thomas & Kevan 1993). Solutions cost money. Deep-rooted perennial pasture species reduce the risks of **salinity** and soil erosion. Properties can be fenced internally and livestock moved to allow paddocks to rest and recover. Nevertheless, the solution to grazing pressure is always to reduce herds, cutting profits. The time required to implement careful grazing management is also costly (Sundquist 2004).

A common technique is to combine grazing with timber crops—**agroforestry**. The farm benefits from the biodiversity of species in a woodland environment. This can be profitable—for example, in improving the quality of milk, the numbers of stock and reproduction rates—even though up to 8 per cent of the pasture has been removed to grow trees (Cullen et al. 2003, pp. 10, 14). Nevertheless, agroforestry costs money in fencing and planting trees, and returns on the timber take decades to eventuate. So while it is advised that 30 per cent of native vegetation cover may be necessary to prevent ecological damage, figures between 2 and 4 per cent are more common (Cullen et al. 2003, pp. 13, 14).

Water and salinity

Around the world, irrigated agriculture is in trouble. The groundwater aquifers from which water is usually pumped are drying out. The amount of water being taken out is much more than the

amount that is seeping down to the aquifers from rainfall. This is likely to become an immense problem in countries as different as India and the United States (Roberts 2009).

In Australia, there are salinity problems with irrigated agriculture, which currently covers 2.5 million hectares (Murray-Darling Basin Commission 2004). With irrigation, the increased water in the soil dissolves salts, which rise to the surface, inhibiting the growth of plants. The irrigated area ultimately becomes a useless desert (Lawrence & Vanclay 1992; Thomas & Kevan 1993). The issue of water rights in the Murray-Darling Basin has become a point of political contest between environmentalists and downstream water users on the one hand, and farmers in upstream locations on the other. Irrigation removes water from rivers that used to fill wetlands. Toxic blue-green algae flourish when the river is not flowing strongly. Without a good flow to flush out salt, it accumulates in the lower reaches. The lakes from which Adelaide used to get part of its water supply are now too salty to use. Climate change is making this situation worse (Dillon 2011; Connell 2011).

Where land has been cleared, 'dryland' salinity can occur. The National Land and Water Resources audit of 1997–2002 showed that 6 million hectares of agricultural and pastoral land in Australia is suffering from dryland salinity problems, and predicted that 17 million hectares would be affected by 2050 unless drastic measures were taken (National Dryland Salinity Program 2004, p. 10). Rainfall on higher areas travels down the slope, where it causes the water table to rise, bringing salt to the surface. This salty area of low ground becomes poisonous to most plant life. Prior to land clearing, this process was prevented by deep-rooted tree species. These trees brought water up from their roots, releasing it to the air and storing it in their foliage. Water did not move down the slope, causing problems (Lawrence & Vanclay 1992).

Clearing slopes for pasture or cereal crops is profitable. But once salinity develops, it is difficult to reverse. Almost all the land upslope from the salting problem has to be replanted with trees and shrubs. Then, it is likely to take 50 to 100 years for the salting to be reduced (Stirzaker et al. 2002, p. 35; National Dryland Salinity Program 2004, p. 39). Where salinity is a problem there are no tree or shrub alternatives that can return a profit. 'The conclusion of recent studies is that no profitable system of farming, even applying "current best practice" could control salinity' (National Dryland Salinity Program 2004, pp. 73, 79, 83). Large amounts of public money would have to be spent. An estimated 17 million hectares of trees would need to be planted in areas with low rainfall, and farmers compensated for the area taken out of grazing or cropping.

A quick-fix engineering solution is to dig channels to take salty water away from plant roots. About 10,000 kilometres of these have been constructed (Thompson, Collett & Cummins 2012). There are various drawbacks. The raised edges of the channels have to be maintained to prevent surface water from flooding in when rainfall is heavy. If the channels become blocked, they will also fill up, spilling salty water onto fields. What can be done with the salty water from these drains? It is all too common for farmers to channel their drains to a big pond on the edge of their farm. After heavy rain, the pond spills onto the neighbouring farm. Salt leaks out to destroy roads and buildings. Grand visions of channels all the way to the coast become a rationale for ignoring these negative effects.

The long-term 'costs' of Australia's salinity problem are difficult to assess. The annual cost in lost production and destroyed infrastructure is estimated at A\$230 million, which is only a small fraction of the value of Australia's A\$35 billion agricultural industry (Stirzaker et al. 2002, p. 4). So, while these up-front costs of salinity are low, the costs of stalling salinity are prohibitive. Other costs are the damage to water supplies in downstream urban areas and the loss of habitat for native wildlife. These costs are not the concern of farmers using the river for irrigation; they have to worry most about their own profitability.

Environmental problems beyond the farm gate

Ecological problems are not confined to the paddock. Farming, food transport and storage use fossil fuels. More calories of energy are used to produce fertilisers, run farm machinery, transport and store food than are present in the food itself. In the United States, three units of energy are used in farming for every unit of food energy consumed. Adding the energy costs of transporting and processing food, there are 10 units of energy needed. As a result, 17 per cent of energy use goes into food production and distribution (Mannion 1995). So modern agriculture is dependent on cheap fossil fuel energy—especially oil.

One reason that this poses a problem is **global warming**. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change maintains that we need to cut carbon dioxide emissions (and fossil fuel use) by 80 per cent by 2050 (IPCC 2007). To allow for economic growth in developing countries, rich countries would have to cut emissions to about 5 per cent of what they now use (Trainer 2007). Unless this is done, the most likely result is a warming that would seriously increase the costs of agriculture, not to mention more disastrous long-term effects. We are also likely to run out of cheap oil. The peak of discoveries was in 1960 and since then less and less oil has been discovered. Yet world consumption is rapidly increasing. The **oil peak** is defined as the time when oil will become much more expensive. Most forecasts expect this by 2020. In accord with this theory, the price of oil increased enormously between 1970 and 2008—to US\$140 per barrel. Following the Global Financial Crisis, the price has dropped to \$39. The slump in the economy slowed demand. In addition, oil-rich countries are flooding the market to forestall the development of more expensive sources of oil. The low price has also been engineered to harm the economies of Iran and Russia. These circumstances are very particular and the exhaustion of accessible oil supplies is still the key background factor—prices will go up as rich sources of oil are finally exhausted or when the economy recovers (Heinberg 2013). What would make more sense is to begin setting up the physical and social structures that are going to be necessary in an agricultural economy without cheap oil (Gunther 2002).

Without cheap energy for transport and refrigeration, we would have to produce food locally (Trainer 2007). Today, the average distance food has travelled to reach the plate of a US resident is 2000 kilometres (Durning 1991, p. 159). This far-flung distribution makes perfect economic sense. Consumers spend more buying exotic foods. It is cheaper for a large supermarket chain to produce a uniform product and distribute it over a large area than it is to market a different variety in each locality. Bananas from Coffs Harbour are sent to Sydney to be bought by big food conglomerates and then redistributed back to Coffs Harbour to be sold. Packaging of food also causes environmental problems. The two factors producing excessive packaging are long-distance transport of food, and competition between businesses to attract consumers. The consumer merely chooses the most attractive packet on the shelf. Consumers become part of a system in which unnecessary mountains of plastic, aluminium and paper are manufactured and distributed.

The problems for the environment caused by food production are exacerbated by food waste, which is about one-third of all food produced (UNEP 2015). Producing this wasted food contributes as much in greenhouse gases as the whole energy consumption in the United States (Lipinski et al. 2013). Waste occurs whenever something cannot be marketed at the full price. Firms keep it out of circulation rather than undermine the market. Dented cans of tomato soup must be thrown into locked dumpsters. Distribution of waste to a 'good home' is always a cost. Restaurants throw away food rather than distributing it. Finally, consumers waste food. In a perceptive ethnography of UK households, Evans (2014) demonstrates that the imperative to cook and eat 'properly' is

usually interpreted to mean providing a new meal from fresh ingredients every night. Mothers, who are usually in charge of provisioning and cooking, manage their schedules by shopping once a week, meaning that intended meals may never be cooked if circumstances intervene, leading to waste. The duty of care suggests providing an abundance of food at each sitting and buying foods that are healthy but may not end up being eaten by the family, as well as throwing away food that is perceived to be a danger to health.

Food production and developing countries

In developing countries, peasant and tribal subsistence has been replaced by food production for the international market (Bennett & George 1987). A wealthy elite monopolises the land. For example, in Pakistan in 2009, 2 per cent of households controlled 45 per cent of all land and a mere 0.8 per cent of households owned more than two hectares (USAID 2009). In Brazil, 10 per cent of farmers own 80 per cent of the land (Duffy 2009). There is a similar degree of unequal land tenure in the rest of the developing world. On the land owned by these elites, **cash crops** are grown for the international market. Environmental problems are similar to those in developed countries—erosion, toxic pollution, overgrazing. As in developed countries, these problems are caused by competition for market share and profits.

In the lands dominated by these international interests, produce such as rubber, sugar, tea, coffee and meat are all grown in areas where wild animals and plants recently dominated. Sixteen million hectares in developing countries are planted for export crops of coffee, tea and cocoa (Trainer 1995, p. 155). Annually, 100 million kilograms of meat is exported to the United States from Central America, mostly from land that was recently tropical rainforest (Trainer 1995, p. 34). Twenty per cent of a national park in Sumatra, Indonesia, has been occupied by illegal coffee plantations exporting their product and selling it to companies including Nestlé, Kraft, Lavazza and Starbucks—this in a national park that is home to endangered elephants, rhinoceroses and Sumatran tigers (Shahab 2007).

When land is taken over by international interests, peasant farmers are driven into poverty. Seventy per cent of the world's poor live in rural areas (IFAD 2010). Inadequate holdings are over-exploited. Displaced subsistence farmers clear forested land, destroying areas of high biodiversity. Soil erosion can follow, and spoil this land for farming.

For those of us in the rich countries, our affluence is bought at the expense of environmental destruction, not only in the countries in which we live, but also in the rest of the world.

How are environmental problems linked to global capitalism?

The ecological problems of food production come from economic and political structures. There are three basic classes in today's world. First, there is the global capitalist class. The richest 1 per cent (73 million people) own 48% of the global household wealth (Oxfam 2015). Second, are the affluent middle class of all countries and the relatively affluent working class of the developed world. These people are the global consuming class. This is the next 19 per cent (1.4 billion) of the global population, who own another 46 per cent of the world's wealth (Oxfam 2015). Third, the rest of the world's population are the global poor—the unemployed of developed countries and the subsistence peasants, low-wage workers and unemployed urbanites of developing countries. This bottom 80 per cent of the world's population (5.84 billion) own only 5 per cent of the world's wealth (Oxfam 2015). Almost two billion of these people are not getting an adequate diet. FAO

claims 805 million 'do not have enough to eat' (FAO, IFAD & WFP 2014) and WHO estimates that 1.62 billion people are suffering from anaemia, from insufficient protein and vegetables (WHO 2005, p. 7). Each of these three groups has a role in the ecological problems of food production. It is their interaction that creates the problems.

Prior to the colonial period, most land in developing countries was used for subsistence production by peasants or by tribal owners. Now, much land is controlled by the global rich and is used to grow crops for affluent consumers. Large **transnational corporations** dominate. In 2006, the top ten seed companies controlled 57 per cent of the global seed market. Two large companies controlled 75 per cent of the global trade in grains. Four companies controlled the global cocoa market (Bloom et al. 2009). Farmers compete to reduce prices because shareholders will sell their shares if environmental measures reduce profits. Ecological measures that cost money are impossible. Transport for these export crops is itself an ecological problem. The side effect of this land use is to push many of the poor into inadequate holdings, prone to erosion and that were, until recently, the homes of wild animals and plants.

In the developed world with high wages, the drive for profits reduces human labour in farming through high-input agriculture and heavy machinery. Large agricultural companies have to worry about their investors. If they spend money on sustainability they reduce profits, driving away investors. For small owner-operated farms, the price of environmental repair is high, given that farm income is minimal. Government subsidies prop up inadequate farm incomes while supermarket chains make the profits (Garcia 2004). The basic problem of **capitalism** and the environment is a mismatch between profit and sustainability. For example, it costs money to halt soil erosion, so in any given year profits are higher if nothing is done (McLaughlin 1993, p. 32). Owners are assumed to have full rights to use their property for maximum profit. Any impediment has to be fought for as a special case, usually after environmental damage has become severe. The wealth of owners makes them a powerful lobby group (McLaughlin 1993).

For a government in the developed world, a serious investment in environmental repair could be achieved through regulations that force changes. The profitability of farming would drop as farm owners had to pay to conform to the regulations. Export earnings would fall and food prices rise. Alternatively, taxpayers could fund this restructuring. Then, the money paid by consumers in higher taxes would be diverted from other industries that supply the consumer goods taxpayers now buy. There would be a damping down of consumer demand. Either way, this investment in rural restructuring would be at the expense of profits or real incomes.

Governments are of course aware that agriculture is destroying farmland, with disastrous consequences (Lawrence & Vanclay 1992). So they do make some effort to support sustainable land use, but it is far from adequate. In Australia, Prime Minister John Howard introduced a plan for the Murray–Darling River system. The plan focuses on maintaining a good flow in the river system to flush out salinity and nutrients. The basic idea is to use less irrigation water, with open channels replaced by pipes. Some irrigators will sell their water licences back. Thirteen billion dollars is to be spent over four years to put 2750 billion litres per year back into the river system. Doing this will leave another 10,873 billion litres for irrigators (LeFeuvre 2015). This plan has been bitterly attacked, with the argument that farmers will leave the industry in droves. This proposal is just scratching the surface of the problems in agriculture and yet for every one of the 4 years to 2019 it is costing about 10 per cent of the annual value of Australia's agricultural industry (ABS 2006). In other words, commercial agriculture has not been able to run in a sustainable way. This failure has ended up costing Australians a lot of government money. The cost is so large as to call into question the future of agriculture in Australia.

A fundamental group to be considered are affluent consumers. Capitalism has depended on sales of consumer goods to workers in industrial countries. With increases in productivity, the provision of consumer goods has continually increased. Consumers choose food that is either the cheapest or that fits their desire for luxury goods. They are reluctant to pay more or restrict their choices—by buying only organic produce, only free range meat, less meat, only food that is locally produced, only food supplied in bulk in reusable jars or paper bags, and so on. One approach would be to castigate these consumers for their wasteful consumption and their environmental ignorance. But why does this consumption appear necessary and attractive? Affluent consumers are also **alienated labour** (Marx 1978). Affluent consumers have to get a paid job. As employees they have no control of what they produce, no control over who gets the products, and no control over their work conditions. Work is alienated, a burden, not a creative and sociable pleasure. It is in consumption and leisure that affluent workers exercise free choice and their creative and social capacities.

All this ties into the way affluent consumers look at food. Expensive, well-packaged and luxurious food seems a fair reward for a life of thankless labour. Food is one of the few morally acceptable pleasures (Pont 1997). In fact, the foods that are transported from developing countries—at great cost to the environment—are the epitome of luxury and morality. Meat and dairy products are an appropriate reward for hard masculine labour and necessary for healthy growth; sugar a sweet pleasure and an apt reward for appropriate femininity; coffee, tea and chocolate—all stimulating but legitimate drugs—an aid to concentration at work or a reward after work. These factors make it difficult to get consumers to reform their food purchasing. They will oppose tough environmental regulations if it means they have to pay more or have less choice.

Ruralisation and suburban farming

Urbanisation distances consumers from the environmental consequences of food production. Within capitalism, it makes economic sense to separate farms from cities, so that cheap labour or large machinery can be used. It makes sense for alienated workers to want luxuries from far-off places. This separation is not necessary. People could be reorganised to grow their own food locally (Trainer 1995). Frederick Gunther, a Swedish writer, suggests **ruralisation** of the urban population. We have to stop transporting food long distances and start composting our sewage. Agricultural products would be produced for villages of 200 people, supplied by farms of 40 hectares. Villages would end up being a kilometre apart and would grow all their own food. Nutrients would come from composted sewerage and from legume intercrops grown to fix nitrogen (Gunther 2002, p. 266). Writers such as David Holmgren and Ted Trainer think local farming can be achieved without relocation out of the cities. They argue that it would be more practical to use our suburbs to produce most food in the cities (Trainer 1995; Holmgren 2005).

Social alternatives to capitalism

The socialist solution

The aspects of capitalism that lie behind environmental damage are unlikely to disappear without a radically different social organisation. A move to a democratically organised socialist system has been proposed as the solution (Smith 2015). The argument is that a socialist government is in a position to control environmental damage—through its ownership of firms. Most production would be planned and controlled by a government responsive to popular pressures to consider environmental issues. While socialists are not proposing a dictatorship of the kind associated with Soviet-style regimes of the past, critics of socialism are sceptical that the problems of Soviet-

style economies would go away. Inefficiency and wasteful allocation of resources are argued to be inherent in economies largely owned by government (Sayer 1995). Another problem is that labour would be alienated in a socialist economy—people do not have any control in their jobs. As now in market economies, people would expect an increasing affluence to justify their compliance. The environment might come last for a government attempting to satisfy consumer demands.

The gift economy

The 'gift economy' or 'non-market socialism' is another alternative to capitalism. There would be no money and no wage labour. Instead people would produce things for their own consumption or as gifts—a vast extension of the voluntary work now done by citizen groups. Links between producer clubs would allow technologically complex goods and services. People would be motivated to work by desires for status and the pleasure of giving, as well as by the knowledge that their work was necessary for the whole community. The standard of living would be the effect of multiple gift networks, linked by 'compacts' or agreements to produce and deliver goods and services to other producers and to consumers (Leahy 2011; Nelson & Timmerman 2011). Collectives of researchers, media and administrative workers would help producer collectives to see what was required and coordinate agreements.

This social alternative could help the environment. Farmers would conserve their land, to live well and be able to continue to farm, give food and be appreciated by the community. Status would come from work that looked after the natural environment. Because 'income' would depend on gifts, no amount of hard work would lead to wealth. So there would be no point in producing useless items. Creativity and choice would be turned to environmentally benign production. People would not depend on owning more consumer goods to express themselves. An organic agriculture with an emphasis on tree crops would work well—providing creative work as well as sustainable production (Mollison & Holmgren 1978). The gift economy would depend on generosity and egalitarianism. Pleasure would come from giving to people in need and taking care of other species.

Real utopias

It seems unlikely that the ordinary people of the rich countries are likely to embrace such drastic changes any time soon. People are still hoping that business as usual will continue and fearful that it may not. Those who would like to see an alternative to environmentally destructive agriculture have to consider what might work in a market-dominated economy. While the structures of capitalism create environmental damage, it can make sense to see how those structures can be evaded. Different versions of this approach have been proposed. Erik Olin Wright coins the term **real utopias** to explain locally successful alternatives to the market economy (2010). Julie and Katherine Gibson-Graham use the term 'diverse economy' and point to enterprises that are not really capitalist and manage to function well despite that (Gibson-Graham 2006).

We can see permaculture and the organics movement as examples of this approach. Consumers of organic or permaculture products are buying foods that have been farmed to look after the environment. They have stepped sideways from their expected role in a market economy, which is buying the cheapest product. Instead they are spending money to look after the planet. Organic and permaculture commercial farmers are making a decision to take on a more risky farming business that usually makes less money. Instead of running a business to make the highest possible profit they are making a decision to prioritise environment and lifestyle (Birnbaum & Fox 2015).

While 'organic' agriculture is associated with market distribution, the permaculture movement also includes many non-market initiatives. The most simple of these is for people

to grow food sustainably for their own households. Tree-change owners of small farms are also undertaking permaculture training to maximise food production for their own use. Community gardens are being set up in most towns around the world to allow people to come together and use some public space to provide food for themselves and their neighbours. In some countries, cooperatives of young radicals have occupied abandoned farming land. These initiatives remove food production from the market imperatives that stand in the road of sustainability (Birnbaum & Fox 2015).

The 'slow food movement' has embodied similar departures from the market system. The name is to contrast with 'fast-foods', which impose a generic global cuisine, bringing foods from anywhere at the cheapest possible prices, driving workers and consumers alike into a frenetic pace of consumption and production. Slow foods are those grown by small farming enterprises, devoting time to crops well suited to the environment and local traditions. The aim is to make farming a calling rather than simply a way to make money. Consumers are encouraged to pay more to enjoy food at their leisure and to prefer the quality that can be achieved by **sustainable agricultural** production (Germov et al. 2011). By doing this, consumers take some responsibility for the conditions of food production. Localisation cuts the use of fossil fuels to transport and store food (Barber 2014).

Charitable organisations can act outside the constraints of the market economy to make agriculture more sustainable. For example, in Australia an organisation called Second Bite tackles the issue of food waste by linking supermarkets, restaurants and farms with community groups and food banks—improving nutrition for the poor and cutting down on food loss. In 2012, Second Bite collected and distributed 3000 tonnes of food (Lipinski et al. 2013).

In many countries of the developing world, farmer cooperatives have begun to develop sustainable alternatives to conventional agriculture. In South America, left-wing governments have responded to demands from the rural poor. They have taken land out of the hands of absentee landowners and given it to farmer cooperatives growing food for the market and for their own consumption. Governments have aided such enterprises by purchasing the farms' produce for schools or urban poverty relief. These cooperatives also meet environmental targets (Wright 2010).

In the developing world, rural poverty and hunger have been hard to eradicate. Entrepreneurial projects are usually unsuccessful. On a small plot, it may be possible to grow all the food you need for your household—but it is difficult to grow enough so that sales from your farm will allow you to *buy* all the food you will need. Inadequate business skills undermine commercial endeavours. Small-scale farmers cannot use big machinery or expensive inputs. What works is subsistence agriculture—produce goes directly to the household. Organic and permaculture techniques increase productivity without requiring farmers to purchase inputs. For example, making compost or digging bunds to hold water. These solutions assist non-market agriculture to be successful in providing food for the poor at the same time as they look after the environment (Leahy & Goforth 2014).

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at environmental problems caused by agriculture today. The structure of the capitalist economy can account for much of this. Yet it seems unlikely that capitalism will vanish overnight. In the meantime, various strategies make sense. One is to continue the uphill battle to control agricultural degradation through regulations and incentives. The other is to promote alternative social and economic organisations that step sideways out of the market economy, allowing some relief from market pressures. Some examples are the slow food, permaculture and organics movements, the international NGOs, farmer cooperatives and subsistence agriculture.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- The problems of modern agriculture come from technologies that maximise profits by cutting costs.
- Technological solutions to these problems are only accepted if they promise to compete on profits.
- Environmentally adequate solutions are unable to dominate the market.
- Environmental problems in agriculture also go beyond the farm gate.
- In developing countries, cash crops displace poor farmers and take up the habitat of wild species.
- Global capitalism can be seen as a major social cause of the environmental damage produced by agriculture.
- It appears unlikely that capitalism will be replaced in the near future. Useful strategies evade the pressures of the market to construct a more **sustainable agriculture**.

Sociological reflection

Go to your local large supermarket and examine the origin of the foods you usually eat.

- For all the foods you usually buy, is there an organic alternative available? What is the price difference compared with your usual product? Where is the organic food grown?
- How many of the foods that you usually eat could be grown in your own neighbourhood? How would you cope if your diet were to be restricted to foods that could be grown in your local area?
- Look at the pesticides and herbicides sold in the supermarket. Do a web search and find out if the chemicals contained in these products could be harmful to your health.

Discussion questions

- 1 What environmental problems are addressed by minimum tillage, agroforestry and deep drainage?
- 2 What are the economic disincentives for food forests, organic agriculture and localised agriculture?
- 3 Why is it so hard to get effective environmental reform of agriculture?
- 4 Could socialism or a gift economy avoid environmental problems?
- 5 What alternative forms of agricultural production and distribution take place in your locality?

Further investigation

- 1 Farming today is not sustainable. We will end up with starvation even in the rich countries. Discuss.
- 2 Sustainable agriculture cannot be practised in the context of the market. Discuss.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

Birnbaum, J. & Fox, L. (eds) 2015, *Sustainable Revolution: Permaculture in Ecovillages, Urban Farms and Communities Worldwide*, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA. Delightful vignettes of permaculture working around the world.

Dunlap, R.E. & Brulle, R.J. (eds) 2015, *Climate Change and Society: Sociological Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Hansen, J. 2009, *Storms of My Grandchildren*, Bloomsbury, New York. A scientist presents some of the more worrying findings about climate change.

Heinberg, R. 2013, *Snake Oil: How Fracking's False Promise of Plenty Imperils our Future*, Post Carbon Institute, Santa Rosa, California. How the oil peak has not gone away but has just been delayed

Pretty, J. 1999, *Regenerating Agriculture: Policies and Practice for Sustainability and Self-Reliance*, Earthscan, London. A thorough introduction to the problems of industrial agriculture and the alternatives.

Roberts, P. 2009, *The Coming Crisis in the World Food Industry*, Bloomsbury, London. An engaging account of what is going wrong in agriculture today.

Schuster, G., Smits, W. & Ullal, J. 2007, *Thinkers of the Jungle: The Orangutan Report*, H.F. Ullmann. An optimistic book about palm oil and the fate of the orangutans.

Trainer T. 2010, *The Transition to a Sustainable and Just World*, Envirobook, London. How could we live well in a low energy future?

Holmgren Design—Permaculture Innovation and Vision: www.holmgren.com.au.

One of the founders of permaculture.

Thoughtful and wide ranging discussion of permaculture and the state of the world.

The Simpler Way: www.thesimplerway.info. Ted Trainer's website, with good discussion of many environmental and social issues.

United Nations Development Programme: www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/search.html?q=annual+reports. Annual reports on everything to do with developing countries.

Documentaries

Garcia, D.K. 2004, *The Future of Food*, Lily Films. Covers the problems of GM foods and multinational control over agriculture, as well as sustainable alternatives.

Leahy, G. & Leahy, T. 2013, *The Chikukwa Project*. A feel-good story out of Africa. A brother and sister team go to investigate how an African community of 7000 people have restored their landscape and gained food security. A project that has lasted twenty years: www.thechikukwaproject.com

Post Carbon Institute 2004. *The End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and the Collapse of the American Dream*, Electric Wallpaper, Canada. A documentary that proposed solutions somewhat different to those proposed by Australian permaculture writers.

The Community Solution 2006, *The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil*, Community Service Inc. A fascinating documentary. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba's cheap oil vanished and it had to reconstruct its agriculture.

Websites

Gift Economy: www.gifteconomy.org.au.

Website of Terry Leahy (author of this chapter) with much detailed discussion of agriculture and other topics.

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CHAPTER 3 WORLD HUNGER: ITS ROOTS AND REMEDIES

Frances Moore Lappé

OVERVIEW

- › What is the extent of world hunger?
- › What is the conventional explanation for world hunger and what are its shortcomings?
- › What are the real causes and remedies of world hunger?

To the question ‘Why hunger?’ the prevailing answer has long been ‘scarcity’, and the solution has seemed equally clear: we end hunger by alleviating scarcity through extending the West’s proven economic model to the world’s hungry people. But how does a scarcity explanation hold up in light of the facts? Behind the scarcity scare is the fact that while the global population more than doubled between 1961 and 2011, world food production grew even faster. The world produces enough food to provide every human being with nearly 2900 calories a day (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Statistical Division 2013). To understand world hunger we need to think differently. World hunger actually results from a set of beliefs governing human relationships that in turn generate *artificial* scarcity.

We know that wherever people have been made hungry, particularly women and children, there is an unequal distribution of power. Ending hunger is less about supplying missing ‘things’—such as seeds, water,

fertilisers—than it is about embracing a values-driven approach that aims to achieve greater equity and creativity in human relationships. This approach re-embeds economic life in networks of relationships shaped by shared human needs and values—those of inclusion, fairness and mutual accountability. Put most simply, the root cause of hunger is not scarcity of food; it’s a scarcity of *democracy*. For genuine democracy to thrive, or even survive, its practice must evolve towards what I call living democracy, or democracy practised not as a particular political structure, but as a set of system values. Living democracy is proposed as a way of life in which everyone has a voice as the principles of inclusion, fairness and mutual accountability expand to economic and social relationships.

KEY TERMS

agribusiness
agroecology/sustainable farming
colonialism
cooperative
frame
food sovereignty
genetically modified (GM)
Global South, Global North
Green Revolution
living democracy
microcredit

Introduction: What is the prevailing frame for explaining and alleviating hunger and what are its shortcomings?

The scarcity frame

In 1996, at the World Food Summit in Rome, national leaders from 185 countries pledged to halve the number of hungry in the world by 2015 (World Food Summit 1996). In 2000, world leaders further committed to the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with a specific target for reducing by half the percentage of hunger by 2015 (UN Development Programme 2003, p. 1). Measured by percentage, the goal was effectively met. If, however, measured by number, hunger in the developing world has decreased by just one-fifth since 1990 (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 8). The number of people who are undernourished, according to a 2015 United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization report on food insecurity, is 'almost 795 million people worldwide, including 780 million in the developing regions' (UN FAO, IFAD & WFP 2015, p. 4). In 2016, the MDGs were superseded by a new set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with ambitious targets set a further 15 years in advance to 2030 (UN 2016; see Box 3.1).

Another variable that needs to be factored into these statistics is that hunger is not limited to developing countries. According to 2015 statistics published by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UN FAO) almost 15 million people in developed regions suffer long-term calorie (energy) deprivation (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 8; see also Chapter 4 on food insecurity). The measure the UN FAO uses to calculate hunger captures only calorie, not nutrient deficiency. Capturing both calorie/kilojoule and nutrient deficiency is needed to provide a comprehensive and accurate measure of 'nutritional deprivation', afflicting at least one-quarter of the world's people, with two billion people having insufficient intake of at least one micronutrient (UN FAO 2013, p. ix). This means being so deprived of healthy food, and the safe water needed to absorb its nutrients, that one's health suffers (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 16). 'Being deprived' refers to the result of inequities in power relationships blocking people's access to food and sanitary conditions.

While global food production is sufficient to feed the world's population, there is a widening disconnect in the distribution of calories and nutrients, with roughly one in eight people now being obese, increasing the risk factors for heart disease, diabetes and other health issues. While obesity has a higher prevalence rate in the **Global North** than the **Global South**, the population density in the Global South means that almost two-thirds of the world's population of people who are obese live in the Global South (Ng et al. 2014). The terms Global South, and its opposite, Global North, are used as relatively neutral terms and are not intended to denote geographical location. The term Global South is intended to describe developing countries that are not necessarily uniformly poor or lacking in resources.

Global initiatives and much of the vast literature about the roots of hunger assume one cause—scarcity. People go hungry because of the lack of fertile soils, modern technologies, quality seeds, irrigation, roads, know-how and, therefore, food itself. This diagnosis has stayed remarkably consistent over the past half century; only the face of scarcity has changed. In the 1970s it was Bangladesh; today the face of scarcity is Africa. It is worth noting that food production on the African continent outstripped population growth between 1990 and 2013 by almost 22 per cent, not that far from the global average of 29 per cent (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 20). Since 1990, food production rose almost 10 per cent per person, while the numbers suffering severe calorie

deficiency south of the Sahara increased by 22 per cent (p. 20). Many analysts emphasise the physical geography of the region, including ecological deficiencies and inability to support the high birth rates—such as lack of fertile soils and irrigation that result in low grain yields (Sachs 2005). Yet this conventional explanation overlooks the fact that almost a dozen sub-Saharan countries—some with high levels of undernourished people—export more food than they import and, as Box 3.2 indicates, high birth rates are an outcome of the same system of powerlessness that creates hunger, rather than a cause.

BOX 3.1 UN 2030 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

In 2016, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were superseded by the 17 SDGs, all of which have strategies and targets to be achieved over a 15-year timespan ending in 2030.

- Goal 1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
- Goal 2 End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
- Goal 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.
- Goal 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- Goal 5 Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- Goal 6 Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- Goal 7 Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
- Goal 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
- Goal 9 Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
- Goal 10 Reduce inequality within and among countries.
- Goal 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
- Goal 12 Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- Goal 13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- Goal 14 Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
- Goal 15 Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
- Goal 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
- Goal 17 Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Source: UN (2016)

The Ivory Coast, for example, uses prime land to grow cocoa and coffee, making it a net food exporter; however, this export success has not reduced hunger or poverty (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 173). Based on UN FAO data, 'if food available within sub-Saharan Africa were equitably distributed, all Africans could meet their basic caloric needs' (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 20). India presents a similar story where scarcity cannot explain hunger. More than 190 million Indians do not get enough to eat—that's almost one-quarter of the world's hungry people—yet, '[o]ver the years from 1990 to 2012, food production per person in India has outstripped population growth by almost a third, while the number of undernourished Indians—almost one in seven—declined by just 10 per cent' (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 19).

BOX 3.2 TAKING POPULATION SERIOUSLY

Despite the evidence, many people see high birth rates and hunger in the Global South and arrive at what seems like commonsense: just too many mouths to feed. But scanning the globe, no correlation between people density and undernourishment is to be found. High birth rates are best understood not as a cause of hunger but as a symptom of the same system of powerlessness that creates hunger. Along with hunger, they are a symptom of powerlessness, especially of women denied control over their fertility. Mounting evidence from around the world suggests that as people, especially women, gain education and income, fertility rates decline. To move human numbers into balance with ecological limits requires an end to poverty and hunger. To attack high birthrates without attacking the causes of poverty, hunger, and the disproportionate powerlessness of women is fruitless (Lappé & Collins 2015, pp. 22–33).

The most commonly proposed solution to world hunger has also held steady: follow and expand the successful economic model of industrialised countries. In 1960 American economist W.W. Rostow released *Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, a title that captured well his cure for poverty; and soon the approach became gospel for a generation of development theorists. Four decades later, Jeffrey Sachs (2005), champion of the UN's Millennium Development Goals, saw the solution as the 'dynamism of self-sustaining economic growth' and called on the industrialised societies to fulfil their obligation to help the poor get their 'foothold on the ladder'. Sachs emphasised the need for more aid, more effectively given (Sachs 2005, pp. 73, 329–46).

Paralleling the overall growth prescription, the message about how to improve agriculture echoes through the decades: feeding the world requires 'modernising' agriculture by making it more like industry. Practices of over a billion poor farmers must become more and more standardised through global corporate chains supplying inputs—fertilisers, pesticides, seeds and machines—and buying and distributing outputs. In this model, farmers become links in an ever more uniform, commercial and global economic system (Sharma 2005).

In the 1990s multinational **agribusinesses** began to claim that their **genetically modified (GM)** seeds, in which genes from another species have been inserted, were the answer to world hunger. In 2006, two large US foundations announced a major initiative to address Africa's scarcity crisis through improved commercial seed and fertiliser distribution, with the goal being to jump-start a **Green Revolution** in Africa (Rockefeller Foundation and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation 2006). Within this **frame**, China and India are promoted as development 'miracles', with China cutting the number of hungry people by a quarter, to 146 million, in the period 1990–92 to 1995–97 (UN FAO 2006a). The international media has focused on grain production increases associated with the Green Revolution and strong economic growth rates in India, yet India is still home to one-quarter of the world's hungry people (UN World Food Programme 2015). The changes driving these economic outcomes require further analysis.

Shortcomings of the prevailing frame

Abundance, not scarcity, best describes the world's food supply yet millions continue to go hungry, calling into question the prevailing 'scarcity frame'. The UN agency responsible for forecasting our future food supply, the FAO, forecasts global calories available per person

in 2050 to be even slightly higher than the more than adequate supply that exists today. In China, productive advances have come less from a Western market model than from a form of 'state interference and violence,' writes Wang Hui, research professor at Qinghua University in Beijing (Schell 2004). According to the UN FAO, IFAD and WFP 2015 report, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*, China has achieved the MDG1c goal of halving the rate of hunger (UN FAO, IFAD & WFP 2015, p. 12). This is positive news; however, much of China's growth is being created with staggering ecological damage. In addition, in a country where millions of people look to industrialisation as their answer to poverty, the air is so polluted from cars, coal-fired power stations and steel plants that it is now a serious public health risk (BBC News 2016).

Through the scarcity frame, Sub-Saharan Africa appears to suffer hunger because of every sort of deficiency, although the situation is more complex and variable. For example, in 'Sub-Saharan Africa, just under one in every four people, or 23.2 per cent of the population, is estimated to be undernourished in 2014–2016. This is the highest prevalence of undernourishment for any region and, with about 220 million hungry people in 2014–2016, the second highest burden in absolute terms' (UN FAO, IFAD & WFP 2015, p. 12). Even though the prevalence of undernourishment (POU) 'fell relatively rapidly between 2000–02 and 2005–07, this pace slowed in subsequent years, reflecting factors such as rising food prices, droughts and political instability in several countries' (p. 12). The West African country of Ghana, for instance, a country in the Global South, has made rapid progress, already surpassing the World Food Summit goal of reducing the number of undernourished by half by 2015 (UN FAO, IFAD & WFP 2015, p. 12). The view of Africa as devoid of wealth ignores the fact that it is home to one-third of the world's mineral reserves and is among the top five exporters of key agricultural products, including coffee, tea, cocoa and cotton.

Viewing poor countries as simply lacking resources blinds solution-seekers to the systematic undervaluing and depletion of indigenous wealth that has occurred over centuries of colonial control and through subsequent externally driven 'development' strategies. One consequence of **colonialism**, for example, was the neglect, and in some cases, suppression, of roughly 2000 African native grains, roots, fruits and other food plants to the point that some scholars call them the 'lost crops of Africa' (National Research Council 1996; see also Rodney 1973). A sense of the richness not counted in the world's food supply is suggested in a finding of the National Academy of Sciences that 'most of Africa's edible native fruits are wild—rarely cultivated or maintained or improved' (quoted in Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 18).

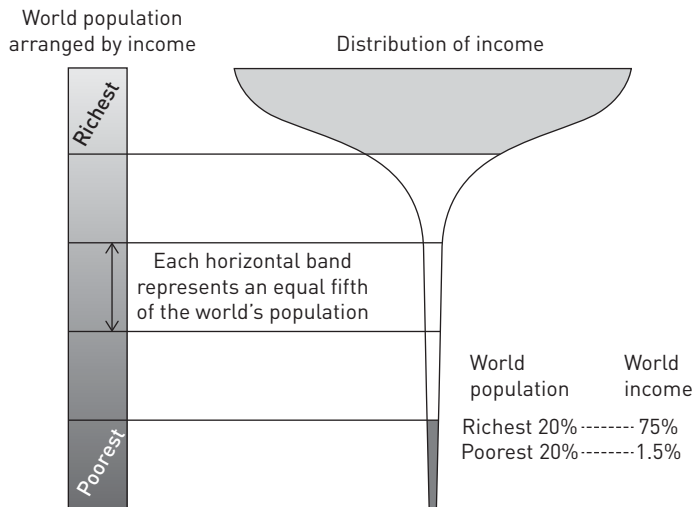
The prevailing scarcity frame assumes humanity can continue to increase food output by spreading fossil-fuel-based fertilisers and pesticides, and other technologies, including GM seeds (see Box 3.3), and can feed the hungry via long-distance, corporation-created supply chains. Yet this approach has already wrought vast ecological damage, virtually none of which is registered in the price of food. It is assumed that the dominant market-driven growth solution has already proven it can conquer hunger. Yet in the United States, where the model is most firmly entrenched, one in every seven Americans do not always have access to enough food for an active and healthy life (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015, p. 6) despite the fact that the United States is the world's leading agricultural exporter.

BOX 3.3 GENETICALLY MODIFIED SEEDS

GM seeds are often promoted as the solution to hunger, as in this 1998 European advertising campaign, by GM manufacturer Monsanto: 'Worrying about starving future generations won't feed them. Food biotechnology will'. Today, Monsanto controls the genetically engineered traits in seeds planted on 80 per cent of corn and over 90 per cent of soy acreage in the United States (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 91). As Lappé and Collins state, '[h]alf of commercial seeds are now controlled by three seed giants—Monsanto, DuPont, and Syngenta—limiting the capacity of farmers and plant breeders to create new, sustainable crop varieties. Intellectual property rights on seeds, and thus on life itself, are diminishing biodiversity and creating vulnerability for farmers, and for all of us' (p. 119).

In addition, as farm technology progressively replaces human labour, farmers and rural workers migrate to urban centres (Sachs 2005, p. 36). Yet, mega-cities in poor countries are overcrowded and lack basic services. This leads to a deepening wealth divide that growth itself does not close. Even during the booming 1990s, every US\$100 in economic growth worldwide brought just US60 cents to reducing the poverty of the world's billion poorest people (Woodward & Simms 2006, p. 3). As the world economy has grown over the past decades, the income chasm separating the top fifth and the bottom fifth of the world's people has more than doubled (UN Development Programme 1999, p. 36) and 80 per cent of people now live in societies where inequality is increasing (UN Development Programme 2005, p. 36). The unequal distribution of global income has been represented as a champagne glass, as depicted in Figure 3.1, where the richest 20 per cent of the population have 75 per cent of the world's income (the wide top of the glass), while the bottom 40 per cent of people (the narrow stem) live on around 5 per cent of global income, and the poorest 20 per cent account for only 1.5 per cent.

FIGURE 3.1 Unequal distribution of world income: The Champagne-glass effect



Source: Adapted from UN Development Programme (2005, p. 37)

The scarcity frame suggests that increased foreign aid is a viable solution to world hunger. While greater resources transferred to poor communities could help people build power over their lives, aid does not necessarily touch many of the deepest roots of hunger (see Box 3.4) that deprive poor people of power in the first place. While the industrial nations pledged almost four decades ago to increase foreign development assistance to 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income, according to a 2013 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report only five countries had met this longstanding UN target (OECD.org 2013). A limitation of foreign assistance is the way in which it is used to promote a donor's foreign policy goals. Half of US aid is considered military and 'economic, political/security' assistance; however, the majority of US foreign aid goes to Middle Eastern countries that the United States sees as strategically vital for its foreign policy and anti-terrorism strategy. In 2012, the top three countries receiving US military aid were Afghanistan, Israel and Egypt, all three violators of human rights according to Human Rights Watch (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 189).

Among developed nations, the United States is still the world's largest development aid donor; however, in 2012 this was about 0.19 per cent of its gross national income, compared to the United Kingdom, which contributed 0.56 per cent (Oxfam America 2014, p. 6). In the fiscal year 2013, international development and humanitarian assistance represented just 0.7 per cent of the US federal budget (p. 7). Conditions placed on aid have also been limiting. Beginning in the 1980s, most countries in the Global South were required, in order to receive foreign help, to cut back their government's role in guiding the economy and to reduce public sector spending on education and health-care while opening local markets to increased penetration by global corporations (Bello et al., 1994).

Three key characteristics are needed for food aid to work for hungry people. These are, firstly, to use food aid primarily for short-term emergencies; secondly to 'untie' food aid to promote the use of more locally grown food in poor countries rather than ship in food from the donor country and, finally, to stop allowing charities to sell food aid to fund their operations (Lappé & Collins 2015, pp. 204–205). Some alternatives to the traditional type of aid are outlined in Box 3.4.

BOX 3.4 EMPOWERING AID

Is there such a thing as truly empowering aid? Aid that contributes to people gaining confidence, courage, and skills that make democratic 'system change' more possible? Among nations with reputations for supporting social movements attacking the roots of hunger are the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Canada. Moreover, certain organisations that began as charities—Oxfam, for example, whose name derives from its 1942 founding as Oxford Committee for Famine Relief—have continued to evolve. Their strategies now include not only direct aid, but public education and lobbying campaigns in the Global North to change the policies mentioned earlier that impoverish the Global South. One example is the re-greening being undertaken by small farmers spreading the practice of agroforestry in Niger, Burkina Faso, and elsewhere in West Africa (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 242). As Lappé and Collins state, '[t]he Dutch, Swedish, and German governments' development agencies, among others, are helping farmers incorporate this ecological advancement across this drought-prone region. Farmer-to-farmer training in agroforestry is a part of their support. USAID and the World Bank are also investing in the spread of agroforestry' (p. 213).

What are the real roots of hunger?

While the proximate cause of hunger is that a person lacks food, the key question to ask is—why? As has been discussed, there is no absolute lack of food and even where millions go hungry—from Brazil to India to Africa to the United States—food is exported. Hunger is a symptom of a lack of power, the root of power meaning 'to be able,' or 'the capacity to act.' Power is a dynamic quality in all human relationships. Since all life seeks to sustain itself, life-destroying hunger is proof that people have been denied power, denied the capacity to protect themselves and their offspring. In other words, since the world's supply of food is more than adequate, and no one *chooses* to go hungry, the very existence of hunger is a sign of power imbalances so extreme that some people have been made powerless even to meet their survival needs. Hunger-causing power imbalances are due to:

- concentrating control over land
- shrinking share of profits for poor producers
- trade rules favouring the already wealthy
- the debt burden falling on the poor.

These four causes are now discussed in more detail.

Concentrating control over land

Since arable land is necessary to grow food, rural people without land are vulnerable to hunger. Land ownership in Guatemala is highly inequitable. Roman Krznaric (2005) stated that 2 per cent of the population controls 72 per cent of the land; more recently Phyllis Robinson (2010) stated that 2 per cent of the people own 98 per cent of the land with 22 families owning almost all of the wealth. It is a similar situation in Brazil, where an estimated 1 per cent of the population owns 45 per cent of all land and nearly five million families are landless (USAid 2011, p.4.)

Shrinking share of profits for poor producers

Over a billion of the world's poorest people are small farmers, many producing for export. Their livelihoods, and thus whether their families go hungry, depend on the prices they receive for their crops. Yet, the 'global commodity markets' on which they depend 'are increasingly dominated by fewer global transnational corporations,' writes former Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler (2004, pp. 9, 13), of the UN's Commission on Human Rights, adding that global corporations 'have the power to demand low producer prices, while keeping consumer prices high, thus, increasing their profit margins.' The real prices farmers received for their agricultural commodities fell almost 80 per cent over a 40-year period between 1961 and 2002 (UN FAO 2004, p. 10). The consequence is that farmers themselves receive a shrinking share of economic benefit from exports. In addition to controlling and thus benefiting most from agricultural exports, multinational corporations advance their own corporate interests by working with powerful local interest groups to profit from extracting other resources—from tropical woods to diamonds to plant germplasm (Mgbeoji 2006).

Trade rules favouring the already wealthy

In 2015, agreement was reached on a new trade agreement known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), reminiscent of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), involving a dozen Pacific Rim countries, which legally binds signatory countries to rules governing food safety and farm subsidies. Former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich has called the TPP 'NAFTA on steroids' (quoted in Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 181). Yet like all such trade agreements, they require the signatory nations to make legislative and policy changes or face the threat of substantial sanctions on their exports (Lappé & Collins 2015). Many of the required changes also raise concerns for the environment and income inequality.

Debt burden falling on the poor

Poverty and hunger are actively generated. According to the UK-based Jubilee Debt Campaign (JDC), since the GFC global debt levels have actually risen, resulting in 'a boom in lending to impoverished countries, particularly the most impoverished—those called "low income" by the World Bank', trebling between 2008–2013 (JDC 2015, p.1). In an interview with a JDC policy officer, Tim Jones, the *Guardian* reported that '[d]ata in the World Bank's global development finance 2012 report shows total external debt stocks owed by developing countries increased by US\$437 billion over 12 months to stand at US\$4 trillion at the end of 2010' (Mead 2012).

Rules governing trade, government subsidies and debt are made by the economically more powerful countries and their representatives, and serve to transfer wealth and potential wealth from poor to rich, perpetuating the unequal distribution of wealth and the cycle of poverty.

Towards the end of hunger

Having debunked the myth of world hunger being caused by scarcity, what is the alternative? Power imbalances have always been created and maintained not by brute force alone, but by belief systems that justify them and encourage their embrace even by those suffering from their consequences. As more and more people abandon the flawed premise that hunger is about the lack of 'things' and begin to see hunger as symptomatic of extreme power imbalances in human relationships, other possibilities arise. From the village level to the level of international commerce, growing numbers of people are working effectively to end hunger and poverty by:

- 1 Freeing their political systems from control by concentrated wealth through economic and political rules to keep power equitably shared and to expand citizen engagement in problem solving
- 2 Creating fair and efficient economies by ensuring that access to life's essentials—food, land, health-care and education—are governed by standards that sustain life, including fairer business and financial models, not simply by supply and demand
- 3 Building knowledge-intensive, ecologically sound agriculture sustained by the ongoing learning of farmers who increase available food as they sustain eco-systems.

These points will now be examined in more detail.

Freeing political systems from the influence of money

In the effort to free the political process from the control of wealth, Bolivia provides an interesting example. Bolivia has reduced the number of people undernourished from 2.6 million in 1990 to 1.8 million in 2016. As a proportion of undernourished in the total population during this time period, it represents a decrease of 58 per cent (UN FAO, IFAD & WFP 2015, p. 47). Decades of community organising allowed those disenfranchised people to realise their united power and at least begin to remove the grip of money on Bolivia's electoral process. In an interview soon after his 2006 election, President Morales, the first president of indigenous majority origin, stressed the importance of public financing of campaigns, to separate financial interests from the political process. He himself took no private money and after the election returned back to the state half of the million dollars in public funds he had received. Unfettered by expectations of wealthy donors, Morales moved forward on land reform, the hunger-fighting potential of which is enormous when considering that, at that time, the wealthiest 7 per cent of Bolivians controlled roughly 90 per cent of the land (Reel 2006). Land reform in Bolivia has been a hallmark of the Morales Government, as has the right to food. In 2009, a national referendum overwhelmingly approved a new constitution that enshrined the right to food. In what is known as the Patriotic Agenda to fight hunger, Bolivia has halved the proportion of the population that is calorie-deficient since 1989 (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 255).

It can be difficult for people to see how positive interaction between government and the economy can end hunger because the dominant frame sees government and the market as enemies; in this frame the goal is to 'free' the market from government control (Friedman 1962). However, an effective market actually *depends on* government to be truly democratic and to free the country from monopolies. According to a 2012 Oxfam Research Report, the four largest commodity traders in the world, 'Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus, collectively referred to as "the ABCD companies" are dominant traders of grain globally and central to the modern agri-food system' (Murphy et al. 2012). This concentration proves that corporate capitalism is not inherently competitive. Continuing competition depends on enforcing anti-monopoly standards, another key rule-setting function of government that has an impact on hunger.

Devolving key public decision-making to village councils has the potential to contribute to the end of hunger. Consider the Indian state of Kerala, which has achieved levels of literacy and health comparable to those in industrial countries. In 1996, Kerala launched a participatory planning effort, where '40 per cent of the state's budget was transferred from traditionally powerful state-level departments to around nine hundred village planning councils' (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 263). The authors state that '[h]undreds of thousands of citizens were trained in planning and budgeting ... [resulting in] advancements in housing for the poor, small-scale irrigation, local roads and other infrastructure, health and education services, and projects especially beneficial to women and those who under the Indian caste system were once known as "Untouchables"' (p. 263).

Government rule-setting that establishes workers' rights to form trade unions, thus gaining bargaining power, also helps lower the risk of hunger. George Long (2013) argues that in the USA, for example, during the period 2001–2011, 'on average, union workers receive larger wage increases than those of non-union workers and generally earn higher wages and have greater access to most of the common employer-sponsored benefits as well' (Long 2013, p. 16).

Creating fair and efficient economies: Access to food as a human right

Food should be considered a human right, not just a market commodity. In 2004 the UN's FAO Council adopted 'voluntary guidelines for the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food' (Windfuhr & Jonsén 2005, p. 15); at least 24 countries have enshrined this right in their constitutions, either for all citizens or specifically for children (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 167).

In 2010, Brazil added the right to food to its constitution. Forming community-based action groups from the 1970s through the 1990s, civil society in Brazil worked long and hard for the right to food. In 1998, about a hundred social-benefit organisations, social movements, academic institutions, and religious and other groups came together in Sao Paulo to create a national forum on food security. In 2002, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a former metal worker, was elected as president. His stated mission was that by the end of his term every Brazilian would eat three meals a day. Under his leadership, the *Fome Zero* campaign—Zero Hunger—was born and within its first six years had reduced the proportion of Brazilians living in poverty by 42 per cent. In addition, 'Brazil's Family Farming Procurement Program directly supports small family farmers by guaranteeing a market for what they grow. Government purchases replenish the country's food stocks or go to institutions that help to reduce hunger, such as schools offering free meals or the "people's restaurants"' (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 254).

Rural people without access to land are vulnerable to hunger. Where land reforms have redistributed land, but left beneficiaries without a political voice to secure credit and markets, farmers have gained little. Yet where power shifts occurred during land reform processes of the twentieth century, as happened in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China and Cuba, rural people saw big improvements in their lives (Rosset 2006, p. 312). In Brazil they have created arguably the largest and most effective citizen movement in the Western hemisphere. Founded in 1980, this is the Landless Workers Movement, known by its Portuguese abbreviation MST.

The MST movement was a response to what its founders saw as indefensible: less than two per cent of Brazil's landowners controlled about half the land, often gained illegally and much of it unused (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 244). In 1988 Brazil's new constitution issued in an era of agrarian reform by providing the government with the power to seize rural property that was not being put to social use. The MST undertook many 'occupations' of unused fertile land to force the government to act and 'almost 1500 MST members lost their lives, mostly at the hands of angry landowners and illegal police action. Through extraordinary commitment and sacrifice, more than 370,000 families are now building new lives in their own communities on about 20 million acres, spanning almost every state of Brazil' (Lappé & Collins 2015, p. 245). While MST families gain the legal right to live on, and to farm, a parcel of land—and to pass it on to their children, they do not own this land. That 'would just privatize the plots,' the MST leadership wrote to Lappé and Collins, 'allowing people to sell it like any other private property' (p. 245).

Hunger-ending economies require new models of business that foster more equitable power relationships. One model merges the role of owner and worker (a distinction assumed to be essential in the dominant economic model) in worker **cooperatives** that are controlled neither by a single owner nor by outside investors, but by workers who are also owners. A core principle is the equitable sharing of responsibilities and benefits. Cooperatives of all kinds—owned by producers, consumers, service providers—are growing worldwide. In fact, more people today are members of cooperatives—one billion—than own shares in publicly traded companies (p. 258).

Cooperatives are one key within a wider movement for economic equity, countering an increasingly global market driving power into ever-fewer hands. Called the Fair Trade movement (see Box 2.5), it arose in its current form in the 1980s because of outrage at how little of the retail price of agricultural products is actually retained by farmers in the Global South (less than 10 per cent of the retail price goes to the growers of coffee beans and bananas, and only 1 to 3 per cent to the tea growers) (Fairtrade 2013). Fair Trade is based on the notion that consumers are willing to pay more for products that they know are made under safe labour and environmental conditions and provide a fair price to producers. As Lappé and Collins state, it ‘involves over 1.4 million small growers of coffee, cocoa, sugar, tea, bananas, honey, cotton, wine, fresh fruit, chocolate, and flowers, and more in roughly sixty countries. In 2012, \$90 million in premiums paid by consumers went to small farmer cooperatives’ (2015, p. 257). Ghana provides one effective example of Fair Trade (see Box 3.5).

BOX 3.5 CITIZENS VOICE THEIR VALUES THROUGH MARKETPLACE CHOICES: FAIR TRADE IN GHANA

Lappé and Collins (2015, pp. 258–259) detail this remarkable story, stating that ‘[m]ost Ghana cocoa farmers do not earn enough to lift themselves out of poverty. Yet some are now co-owners of Divine Chocolate, the world’s first Fair Trade chocolate company. Beyond fair pay, these farmers—as co-owners—receive a share of Divine’s profits, and they have also gained a voice in Ghana’s cocoa industry’. The story began in the early 1990s, when Ghana’s cocoa market went from public to private hands. ‘Backed in part by the UK fair-trade company Twin Trading, Ghanaian farmers joined forces to create the cocoa cooperative Kuapa Kokoo—meaning “good cocoa growers.” Its three goals for its members are: dignified livelihoods, increased female participation, and environmentally friendly farming practices. The co-op sells its members’ cocoa to the Cocoa Marketing Company and the government export agent takes care of weighing, bagging, and transporting it to market . . . Because of all these benefits, Kuapa Kokoo says, membership has climbed to 65,000 growers organized in about 1400 “village societies”, which is almost 10 per cent of all cocoa farmers in Ghana’.

In the early 1970s, Bangladeshi Muhammad Yunus realised that credit is a form of power. He saw that poor people who were forced to borrow from moneylenders that charged exorbitant interest rates remained poor, no matter how hard they worked. Because the low interest commercial banks would not lend to the poor, Yunus developed a new model of **microcredit** called Grameen (‘Village’) bank. Yunus (2006), who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, calls Grameen a ‘social business’, a profit-making institution serving the goal of poverty alleviation. Grameen’s success helped to launch an international microcredit movement. Among the fastest growing may be those involving no ‘bank’ at all, where borrowers, usually groups of financially disadvantaged women, handle the collection and borrowing decisions themselves.

Empowered farmers: Ecologically sustainable solutions

Ultimately, hunger cannot be ended unless food is produced in ways that maintain healthy soils and water. In the dominant frame, there is a particular way of producing food: a centralising, standardising system in which global corporations sell identical inputs (patented seeds and

fossil-fuel based fertilisers and pesticides) to farmers worldwide who sell their crops to pay for them and to buy food. Farms become ever bigger and increasingly dependent on distant suppliers and buyers. This model has devastating ecological and community consequences, as noted earlier.

An alternative approach is **agroecology** or **sustainable farming**, with both social and ecological dimensions. It promotes small farms and diversified farming to ensure decentralised power and produces more satisfying community relationships. Aligned with agroecology and in response to the use of GM seeds, a counter-movement supporting genetic diversity has arisen across the globe. From India to Central America and Africa, farmer movements are actively resisting the corporate control of seeds and promoting the tradition of saving and sharing seeds. 'Seed banks', such as the Millennium Seed Bank in the UK, which 'is the world's largest, where almost two billion seeds from over 34,000 plant varieties are tucked away' are also being created across the world as projects of this movement (Lappé and Collins 2015, p. 119).

In the sustainable farming approach, farmers work with flora and fauna peculiar to their area, which is the opposite of standardisation. Pest control and desired yields are achieved by understanding and managing ecological interactions and using minimal purchased inputs. Such farming is often called 'low-input' or 'low-intensity'. Actually, it is low in use of purchased inputs, but is attention- and knowledge-intensive. Farmers do not simply follow a manufacturer's or government agent's uniform instructions; they share their experience and, often, labour and seeds. Sustainable farming works to improve output less by applying purchased products and more by developing better methods—including double-dug beds, intercropping, composting, manures, cover crops, crop sequencing, natural pest control, no-tillage and more (Lappé & Lappé 2002; Pretty 2002).

In this spirit, the international movement of small farmers, La Via Campesina, is pursuing policies to enable countries to achieve what it calls **food sovereignty**—producing enough domestically to be free from hunger regardless of the vagaries of the international market. In response to well-organised farmer pressure, the West African country of Mali in 2006 became one of the first countries in the world to make the goal of food sovereignty explicit public policy.

Conclusion

It is tempting to view hunger as a moral crisis, when it is more usefully understood as a crisis of imagination. Humanity is trapped in a failed scarcity frame of world hunger—a way of seeing that underestimates both nature's potential and the potential of human nature. As this chapter has shown, there is a clear link between addressing hunger and democracy—a '**living democracy**' conceived as a system of values of inclusion, fairness and mutual accountability shaping all arenas of life, including the economic, in all societies. To be part of the answer to world hunger means being willing to take risks in challenging power imbalances to ensure the right to food for all.

Acknowledgment

The author thanks Lauren Williams, John Germov and Jenny Noble for revising the chapter for this edition, which draws extensively on material published in *World Hunger: 10 Myths* (Lappé & Collins 2015).

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- Scarcity has long been the most common explanation for world hunger even though the world produces enough food for all to eat well.
- The dominant belief that poverty and hunger are caused by a *lack of things*—seeds, fertile soils, irrigation and roads—ignores the real roots of hunger. These deficiencies are actually symptoms of economic rules in which wealth accrues to wealth leading to *extreme power imbalances in human relationships*.
- Addressing power imbalances to end hunger, citizens across the globe are working to remove control by wealth over the political process, taking responsibility for creating fairer markets, and establishing food as an enforced human right.
- Citizens are devising more democratic business and financial models and, acting in their communities and through their governments, are creating participatory forms of decision-making to establish standards and rules (including the right to healthy food) grounded in the shared values of inclusion, fairness and mutual accountability.
- Citizens are proving that empowered farmers, building on traditional land wisdom and advancing ecologically sound practices, not only increase available food and free people from dependence on an ever-more concentrated market; they also offer the best hope for future food security.

Sociological reflection

- What are some steps you could take to help end world hunger?
- What policies could your country implement to contribute to ending world hunger?
- Do you agree that access to food is a basic human right?

Discussion questions

- 1 What is the prevailing view of world hunger, its causes and cures?
- 2 In searching for solutions, what does it mean to shift focus from a scarcity of 'things' to equitable relationships among people?
- 3 Why does foreign aid often not substantially reduce world hunger?
- 4 What are the biggest obstacles to ending hunger?
- 5 What are some of the new models of economic relationships citizens throughout the world are developing to end hunger?
- 6 What are the most important roles of government in ending hunger?

Further investigation

- 1 What specific changes in national and international economic policies and business structures can help to end world hunger?
- 2 What might the realisation of a *right* to healthy food look like in your community or nation? What would be the costs and benefits?

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books and reports

- De Schutter, O. 2014, *Final Report: The Transformative Potential of the Right to Food*, Human Rights Council, United Nations General Assembly, www.srfood.org/images/stories/pdf/officialreports/20140310_finalreport_en.pdf
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- Lappé, F.M. & Lappé, A. 2002, *Hope's Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet*, Tarcher/Penguin, New York: Via a journey on five continents, captures diverse, democratic approaches to more effective food systems.
- Lappé, F.M. & Collins, J. 2015, *World Hunger: 10 Myths*, 3rd edition, Grove Press, New York: Takes on each of the most common misunderstandings about hunger and highlights solutions.
- Rosset, P.M. 2006, *Food is Different: Why We Must Get the WTO Out of Agriculture*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York: Argues that food should be treated as a right and protected to ensure sustainability. It demystifies policies of the World Trade Organization and introduces small farmers' movements working for national policies of food sovereignty.
- Shiva, V. 2005, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace*, New Society Books, Boston: Defines a reconceptualisation of democracy to include economic life and our relationship to the natural world.

Websites

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- Focus on the Global South: www.focusweb.org
- Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy: www.foodfirst.org
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations: The Right to Food: www.fao.org/righttofood/right-to-food-home/en/
- Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP): www.whiteband.org/en
- International Forum on Globalization: www.ifg.org
- International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty: www.foodsovereignty.org/
- Jubilee Debt Campaign: <http://jubileedebt.org.uk/>
- New Economics Foundation: www.neweconomics.org
- Oakland Institute: www.oaklandinstitute.org
- Small Planet Institute: www.smallplanetinstitute.org
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>
- UN Human Development Reports: <http://hdr.undp.org/en>

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CHAPTER 4

FOOD INSECURITY IN AUSTRALIAN HOUSEHOLDS: FROM CHARITY TO ENTITLEMENT

Danielle Gallegos, Sue Booth, Sue Kleve, Rebecca McKechnie
and Rebecca Lindberg

OVERVIEW

- › What is food insecurity?
- › Why is food insecurity an issue in high income countries?
- › What does a human rights approach look like in alleviating food insecurity?

Food and nutrition security exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences. It is underpinned by four pillars: availability, access, stability and utilisation.

A neoliberal government approach to the alleviation of food insecurity is conceptualised as an individualised responsibility. As a result, emergency food relief agencies are the primary safety net for food insecure households in Australia, with the dominant response provided by charitable food relief through soup kitchens, meals, vouchers and food parcels. While the efforts of the charitable sector are admirable, they are also problematic as they are based on a moral responsibility to help needy people and are ineffective in addressing the issue of food insecurity. The heavy emphasis on food philanthropy and humanitarian

assistance work has undermined government responsibilities regarding the right to food.

This chapter will identify social and environmental determinants of food insecurity: the measurement of food insecurity and its social and physical outcomes. It will critique current responses practised to alleviate food insecurity at an individual household level, and explore the nature of a human rights approach that moves food from a need to an entitlement and ensures human dignity is maintained.

KEY TERMS

charitable food organisations
consumerism
coping strategy
deficits-based model
food access
food availability
food insecurity
food security
food stability
food utilisation
human rights
neoliberalism
productivism
safety net
social security
welfare

Introduction

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has defined **food security** as 'when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets the dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (Committee on World Food Security 2012; Pinststrup-Andersen 2009). This definition links food security with nutrition security and is supported by a framework that identifies the four pillars of food security outlined in Box 4.1. The definition is further underpinned by international law and the Right to Food, where an active and healthy life is defined as one that is fulfilling, dignified and free from anxiety (Ziegler 2008).

BOX 4.1 THE FOOD SECURITY FRAMEWORK: THE FOUR PILLARS

Availability refers to a reliable and consistent source of enough quality food for an active and healthy life. At a macro level, this has been the primary focus of nation-states; however, simply increasing production is not enough to ensure availability at a household level. The availability of food may include home food production, transport systems to ensure food is available away from where it is grown, and exchange systems for food. Food needs to be available in socially acceptable ways that meet the definition of human dignity. Availability does not necessarily predict access.

Access acknowledges the resources required in order to put food on the table, and could be economic or physical (transport). It refers to the food needed by all household members to meet dietary requirements and food preferences, and to achieve and maintain optimal nutritional status. This takes into consideration prioritisation of food by the household over other goods and services as well as intra-household distribution of food.

Utilisation refers to the intake of sufficient and safe food that meets individual physiological, sensory and cultural requirements. It also refers to physical, social and human resources to transform food into meals. It encompasses food safety as well as sanitary and hygienic conditions.

Stability recognises that **food insecurity** can be transitory, cyclical or chronic. If food security is to exist, then availability, access and utilisation need to be stable over time and not subject to weather variations, food price shifts or civil conflict.

(Carletto et al. 2013; Ecker & Breisinger 2012)

Emerging initially as a way of conceptualising the production of enough food on a national scale to remove the spectre of hunger, food security has, with the rise of **neoliberalism**, had a stronger focus on the household and individual (Jarosz 2011). The concept of food security is complex and multifaceted where agriculture, gender, poverty, equity, economics, climate change and health intersect (Jarosz 2011).

High-income countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada have worked to build strong agricultural infrastructures so that they can produce a surfeit of food. The rise of neoliberalism has seen a concurrent increase in agribusiness where **productivism** and the expansion of agriculture and the value-adding to foods post-production (irrespective of social and environmental cost) is seen as the solution to food insecurity (Lockie 2015, Lawrence et al. 2013; Department of Agriculture 2012). However, despite this excess of food there are members of the population that still struggle to put food on the table and, as a result, have compromised social, physical and emotional health (Cook et al. 2013; Seligman et al. 2010). The emphasis,

however, is shifting away from a focus on quantity-only to a more nuanced approach where quality (nutritionally, culturally and from a safety perspective) is considered. Importantly for high-income countries and countries undergoing the nutrition transition, there is recognition that quality is not only about adequate energy and protein. Access to energy dense–nutrient poor foods and limited access to nutrient-rich foods that contribute to an ‘active and healthy life’ is now considered an integral element of food insecurity.

Food security is ostensibly underpinned by the right to food enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). However, with political systems where the mantra is personal responsibility within a market-driven economy, the focus has shifted from ‘**human rights**’ to the ‘rights of the consumer’. Initially, food insecurity was regarded as being based on an ‘individual’s ability to produce or purchase food and ... not [as] a human right’ (Jarosz 2011, p. 120). More recently, in line with other discourses around **consumerism**, the argument has been that the consumer has the power to shape the food supply and make demands on the food system to meet individual needs (Rneafsey et al. 2013). In other words, failure to do this is a deficit of the individual, whether it is a lack of nutrition knowledge, or a reduced capacity to procure foods (Dowler & O’Connor 2012). A rights-based approach, after Amartya Sen, argues that hunger is not an involuntary lack of food but rather entitlement failure (Sen 2000). In the case of famine, these entitlements include four main legal sources of food: production-based entitlement (growing food); trade-based entitlement (buying food); own-labour entitlement (working for food); inheritance and transfer entitlement (being given food by others) (Sen 1981).

In environments where famine is not looming, Mariana Chilton and David Rose (2009) argue that ‘a rights-based approach focuses on ways in which conditions and environments can be altered so that people take an active role in procuring food’ (p. 1207). Good nutrition, therefore, should not be something reliant on acts of charity but is, rather, ‘the duty and obligation of a country to its people’ (p. 1207). The rights-based approach focuses on accountability and transparency from government, public participation and addressing vulnerability and discrimination (Chilton & Rose 2009).

This chapter will examine, within the Australian context, how we measure food insecurity, who is experiencing food insecurity and its prevalence. It will also explore the determinants and health outcomes of food insecurity, critique current responses employed to alleviate food insecurity at a household level and explore the nature of a human rights approach.

Measuring and monitoring food security

The collection of large population data sets from a **deficits-based model** can be seen as continuing to marginalise certain groups. The data has the potential to create a binary between normative and deviant behaviour, which can be used ‘to inform political and administrative decisions about interventions to improve health and reduce deviance’ (Couch et al. 2015, p. 129). Alternatively, a data vacuum or lack of well coordinated data or inadequate data could mean the issue fails to have any political traction and there is no recognition that interventions are required. From a human rights perspective, an interagency approach could collect data on food security that would monitor the situation; educate and encourage public participation; set goals for action; tailor advocacy efforts; and inform nutrition and poverty-related policy (Chilton & Rose 2009).

The varied and complex nature of food security creates significant challenges in its measurement. This is reflected by a lack of consensus (within countries and internationally) regarding the core household indicators that are required to assess food security status. As a

result, a number of tools (both direct and indirect measures of food security) are utilised that vary in the pillars of food security they assess, the content they measure, and the quantity and quality of data collected (Carletto et al. 2013; Coates 2013). In Australia, efforts to monitor food insecurity at the household and community levels are, at best, ad hoc. With limited collaboration or consensus across organisations working to address the issue, a variety of measures to assess food insecurity have been adopted, which have limited opportunities for comparisons and the identification of prevalence. Lack of measurement keeps a potentially politically embarrassing problem essentially invisible. However, for those at the frontline, working in the **welfare** sector, emergency food relief and academia, the issue is visible, salient and growing.

At the community level, two of the main indicators of food insecurity are indirect measures, and include healthy **food access** baskets (which provide an indication of food affordability, but not food insecurity), and the number of individuals accessing emergency food relief. The latter serves to underestimate the true burden of food insecurity, only assessing those at the most severe ends of the food insecurity spectrum. As a **coping strategy**, accessing charitable food relief is recognised as the strategy of last resort (Lambie-Mumford & Dowler 2014; Loopstra & Tarasuk 2015).

At the household level, formal data collection by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) every three years directly assesses food insecurity via the use of a single item that asks 'in the last 12 months, have you run out of food before you had money to purchase more?' (ABS 2013). For respondents who answer affirmatively, this item is followed up by a question assessing whether household members went without food. This attempts to provide an indication of the level of severity of food insecurity experienced (ABS 2013). This data is collected in the National Health Survey (NHS). It should be noted that one, or even two, items are unable to capture the full spectrum of such a complex phenomenon (Bickel et al. 2013). In the case of food insecurity, it provides a simplistic view, suggesting the issue to be one of quantity alone and failing to consider quality and the ability to obtain food via socially acceptable means. The sole focus of the indicator is on 'running out of food'; thus it is only able to assess 'food insufficiency' (the more severe end of the food insecurity spectrum), and fails to capture the largest proportion of food insecure households—those who may be experiencing the phenomenon in its milder forms. Less severe food insecurity may manifest as stress or anxiety related to food acquisition or the household budget. This group includes those who may be utilising coping mechanisms such as adjusting normal food intakes, supplementing with lower quality foods, and eating smaller portion sizes. Families that have not reached, nor may ever reach, the more severe end in which food in the household is depleted, may still have compromised health and human rights (Bickel et al. 2013).

Research has consistently shown that the use of this single-item may result in an underestimation of up to ten percentage points when compared to the prevalence of food insecurity ascertained by more comprehensive multi-item tools. The predicted prevalence of food insecurity among the general Australian population may, therefore, be closer to 15 per cent (Nolan et al. 2006), rather than the 4 per cent reported for the general population in the findings of the most recent NHS (ABS 2015a, p. 6). In addition, this prevalence is likely to be further underestimated due to underrepresentation of the groups at highest risk of food insecurity, because of a reliance on landline telephone sampling and data collection from households (Grande & Taylor 2010; Turrell & Najman 1995).

Underestimation of the true prevalence of food insecurity has resulted in the perception that it is not a highly significant problem among the Australian population except for those most disadvantaged. Under this assumption, and with claims that the neoliberal welfare system is

sufficient to meet the basic financial requirements of living, successive federal governments have successfully relegated the responsibility of addressing food insecurity to non-government organisations (NGOs), most commonly emergency food relief (EFR) providers.

To truly encapsulate the extent of food insecurity and its social and health outcomes, monitoring and surveillance efforts require a coordinated approach using comprehensive and frequent measurement at the household, community and national levels. No existing tools (including the single-item currently used in the NHS and the widely used, multi-item US Department of Agriculture Food Security Survey Module) successfully assess the four pillars of food insecurity. Rather, the majority of tools have a sole focus on food 'access', specifically financial access, failing to assess other barriers to food access, or any factors pertaining to **food availability**, **food utilisation** or **food stability**. As such, there are no existing measures able to comprehensively identify the barriers to food security, thus limiting opportunities for the development of effective policy and interventions. Surveillance would ideally connect data on income, housing affordability, food security, food pricing and affordability, nutritional adequacy and diet quality to provide a comprehensive picture. This approach would clearly identify food as one of the cornerstones of human rights and inform a long overdue anti-poverty strategy in Australia.

Who is food insecure in Australia?

Food insecurity in high-income countries disproportionately affects those experiencing a higher level of relative disadvantage. Disadvantage is usually conflated to mean 'low income', and these households are more likely to be food insecure. The majority of people on low incomes tend to rely on **social security** and pensions as their primary income source, and can struggle to afford food and other basic needs (King et al. 2012). Highly marginalised individuals, such as people experiencing homelessness (Booth 2006; Crawford et al. 2015), refugees, asylum seekers (McKay & Dunn 2015; Gallegos et al. 2008) and Australians who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander—especially those living in regional and remote areas (ABS 2015b)—are at the greatest risk of food insecurity and are the most likely to experience the issue long-term. For some of these groups low income is only one factor contributing to food insecurity. Lack of access to household equipment for food preparation and storage, housing shortages, overcrowding and lack of food availability (due to infrastructure or culture) are also known contributors (Baillie et al. 2010).

With the affordability of housing and utilities on the decrease there appear to be growing numbers of the 'working poor' and 'low/low-middle income' Australian households at risk of food insecurity (Ramsey et al. 2012). Melbourne households in medium socioeconomic areas have been reported as experiencing food insecurity at levels similar to or above national data (Kavanagh et al. 2007). This is supported by recent analysis of the Victorian Population Health Survey food security data indicating that low-middle income Victorians are experiencing food insecurity, and for some households this a weekly or fortnightly occurrence (Kleve et al. 2015).

What is the prevalence of food insecurity in Australia?

As mentioned previously, the 2011–2012 NHS reported that approximately 4 per cent of people were living in a household that, in the previous 12 months, had run out of food and had not been able to afford to buy more. Of these, 1.5 per cent went without food (ABS 2015a). Based on this

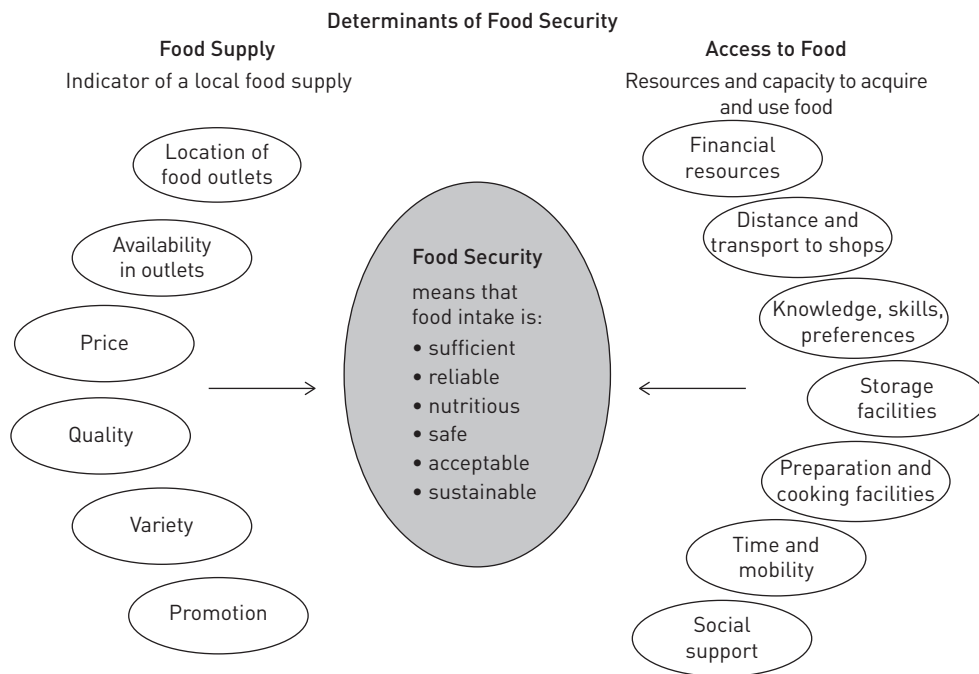
figure, which we know to underestimate the prevalence of food insecurity, 900,000 people in Australia would describe their household as food insecure. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households, the same question identified 22 per cent were food insecure with 7 per cent going without food; in non-remote areas, the proportion was about 20 per cent, increasing to nearly 31 per cent in remote areas with two-thirds of these (21 per cent) going without food (ABS 2015b).

Other countries that have a similar development index have food insecurity prevalence rates more than three times those of Australia. The low prevalence rates reported in Australia are due, in part, to the flawed questions used in monitoring. In the United States, for example, over 48 million Americans are defined as food insecure (approximately 14 per cent of households) (United States Department of Agriculture 2014). In Canada, 13 per cent of households experience food insecurity (Tarasuk et al. 2014), and in New Zealand, an estimated 15 per cent of households are affected (Carter et al. 2010). The United Kingdom lacks routine data on food insecurity and instead has been monitoring the use of **charitable food organisations**. In 2013–2014 there was a spike in the use of these agencies, suggesting more British households were struggling to have physical, social and economic access to food (Loopstra et al. 2015).

Using the same tool as used in the USA, which is more sensitive than the single question used routinely in Australia, the prevalence rate in suburbs identified as experiencing higher levels of disadvantage in the capital cities of Sydney and Brisbane was 25 per cent (Nolan et al. 2006; Ramsey et al. 2012), approximately the same as among university students (Gallegos et al. 2014). In Australia, the supposed adequacy of the welfare safety net has been used to explain the 'low' prevalence of food insecurity (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry 2012); however, the cost of a diet to meet the health and nutritional needs of a household has never been taken into consideration in determining appropriate payments (Gallegos 2016). In addition, sequential welfare cuts in Australia have meant that government income streams are no longer adequate to prevent individuals and families from sliding into poverty, increasing the risk of food insecurity. While adequate monitoring is necessary to highlight the salience of food insecurity as an issue for Australian households, the data could still be misconstrued. For example, in the UK the government used food insecurity data to scapegoat poor families by blaming them for their own situation (McCarron & Purcell 2013), rather than highlighting fundamental failures of the welfare and food systems.

Determinants of food insecurity in Australia

The causes of and contributors to food insecurity are complex and include structural and agentic factors that are often intertwined. The importance of the factors depends on whether the situation is chronic, cyclical or due to a shock or event. Cyclical events, for example, include the second week of a fortnightly pay schedule, children starting back at school, or regular heavy rainfall/snowfall that prevents access to food. Shocks may include natural disasters that limit food availability or a medical diagnosis requiring medical treatment that changes household budget priorities. An entire household, community or region may be unable to maintain food security due to chronic disadvantage. Some of these determinants are outlined in Figure 4.2; they are then described in more depth using the four pillars of food security framework outlined in Box 4.1.

FIGURE 4.2 DETERMINANTS OF FOOD SECURITY

Reproduced with permission from Rychetnik et al. (2003) Food Security Options Paper, NSW Centre for Public Health Nutrition.

Availability

In a country such as Australia, which produces enough food to feed nearly three times its population, food should be widely available. However, there are two areas of food insecurity related to food availability. The first relates to food availability in remote areas. Remote areas in Australia are those with limited access to services, as defined by distance from a centre with more than 1000 persons (AIHW 2004). The supply of food to rural and remote communities is a logistical challenge and a major factor affecting diets for the 15 per cent of the Australian population who live in those areas (ABS 2014).

In rural and remote areas of Australia, natural disasters and weather events—such as flooding, cyclones and bushfires—can impact on the growing, transport and retailing of food. In some locations, such as regional Western Australia, nutritious foods such as fruit and dairy cost 30 per cent more than the comparative retail price for the same item in the city (Pollard et al. 2015; Smith & Lawrence 2014). Community stores (stores located in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that are owned by the community), have been found to have poorer quality and lower variety of fruit and vegetables when compared with urban stores (Everingham 2015). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have traditionally had rich hunting and fishing opportunities. However, since colonisation availability of these traditional food sources they once relied upon has declined, increasing reliance on these stores (Gracey 2000).

Availability of health-promoting food choices across the spectrum of advantage and disadvantage also needs to be considered. There have been reports of higher availability of and

access to fast food restaurants (and therefore, access to energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods) in disadvantaged areas in high-income countries (Pearce et al. 2007). In Australia, areas where health-promoting food availability is lowest, fast food consumption is highest (Thornton & Kavanagh 2012).

Access

Economic resources are a major factor in determining people's capacity to afford sufficient nutritious food (Lee et al. 2011). For people on low incomes, food is often the only budget item with any element of flexibility (Lambie-Mumford & Dowler 2014). There is a constant negotiation and renegotiation as households attempt to balance competing needs. Ensuring access to one of the other fundamental human rights—shelter—is often a priority. Over 50 per cent of Australians spend more than 30 per cent of their disposable (after tax) income on housing and experience household affordability stress (Wood et al. 2014). Low-income households spend proportionately more of their income on food (Kettings et al. 2009; Palermo 2011). Those households relying on welfare payments need to spend 40 per cent of their disposable income in order to afford a nutritious diet, as opposed to 20 per cent for the average Australian family (Kettings et al. 2009).

There is less Australian evidence on the prevalence and experiences of food insecurity for those on low to middle incomes. Modelling of a Western Australian working family, with a weekly household income (based on minimum wage, with government benefits) of \$1352 had a budget surplus of only \$9.63 per week after accounting for expenditure on housing utilities, food and beverages, transport and other household living costs (Western Australian Council of Social Service Inc. 2014). The reality for such households is that this small surplus can be quickly absorbed by unexpected expenses and force adjustments to flexible budget areas—such as money for food—increasing the risk of food insecurity. Aside from income, additional economic factors associated with food insecurity that should be considered include housing tenure, household expenses (including utilities), financial stresses, volatility in income, employment, financial management capabilities and wealth as measured by capacity to save and accumulated assets (Gorton et al. 2010; Gundersen & Garasky 2012).

While food insecurity has an inverse relationship with income, not all food insecure households are income poor and not all low-income households are food insecure (Olabiyyi & McIntyre 2014). Evidence from other industrialised countries, such as Canada, the United States and France, has revealed the presence of food insecurity in higher income households (Olabiyyi & McIntyre 2014; Martin-Fernandez et al. 2013; Coleman-Jensen et al. 2013). Reasons for the development of food insecurity in these higher income households mirror those on lower incomes. They include fluctuating incomes; discretionary household spending (gambling, smoking, alcohol consumption); changes in household composition (arrival of a child, aged parent); chronic health conditions; more than one economic unit in the household (e.g. a share house with individuals who may not combine economic resources); unexpected events such as housing cost increases; and job loss (Olabiyyi & McIntyre 2014).

Physical access is another factor contributing to food insecurity. A Melbourne study reported that access to food was compromised not only by insufficient funds but also due to physical barriers such as lack of transport (both personal and public transport), and limitations related to the lifting or carrying of groceries (Burns et al. 2011; Burns et al. 2015).

Utilisation

Food-literate individuals living in food insecure situations are potentially able to source and extend food sources for a longer period of time, until resources are so depleted that it is no longer possible

(Vidgen & Gallegos 2014). For migrant and refugee people who, prior to coming to Australia, were food literate and food secure in their own contexts, arriving in a new environment, potentially with a low income, means that sourcing culturally appropriate foods can be difficult (Gallegos et al. 2008). This is transitory for some, but may become chronic for others if the underlying issue is related to structural factors such as income, housing or transport.

Being able to prepare foods, know the nutritional content and manage a household budget are all tenets of food security. However, care needs to be taken to avoid families managing on low incomes being described as passive victims of the system with little agency, or irresponsible consumers who have failed to make informed choices (Crotty et al. 1992). The literature on coping strategies used by households tells a different story. Households utilise a range of strategies including buying in bulk; shopping at different stores based on price; determining foods to purchase based on need and money available; prioritising food based on children's needs; sacrificing convenience for a better deal; extending meals with cheaper foods; and buying foods that will keep frozen or dried rather than fresh (Rose 2011; Crotty et al. 1992; Wiig & Smith 2008).

Utilisation of food is also dependent on housing status. For example, the estimated 105,000 Australians experiencing homelessness (ABS 2011) have a compromised ability to buy, store and prepare food due to the limited facilities they can access during itinerant periods. Katrina Doljanin (2004) describes the food insecurity experience of a client with mental health issues, who lives in a rooming house (where individual rooms are available for rent), eats irregularly and only has access to a small fridge. Without a well-stocked and well-resourced kitchen and a home in which to prepare food, people in crisis often turn to friends, family or charities. In remote areas of Australia the situation is more complex, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family groups are very mobile and often use other 'family' members for short- and long-term accommodation, resulting in overcrowding. Overcrowding creates demands on kitchen space and capacity. In addition, poor access to power and electricity can limit the ability to prepare and store foods within the household (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet 2008).

Strategies to alleviate food insecurity in Australia

Australia has typically relied on the social security safety net, arguing that this support allows vulnerable households to meet all their needs, including food. However, there is growing recognition that as welfare payments are not indexed (i.e. increased to maintain their real value over time so they are not eroded by inflation), there is a limit to the ability of families on welfare to access affordable housing, utilities and food. The social security safety net fails to address the cyclical nature of food insecurity, nor does it assist families who are employed but anxious about where their next meal is coming from. The failure of state systems or entitlements to ensure food security (as a human right) has resulted in the rise of the charitable sector and a focus on developing individual responsibility. The next section explores charitable food relief in Australia.

The rise of charitable food relief

In the absence of major ideological shifts and the political will to truly address the structural causes of poverty, charitable food relief has become entrenched as the dominant response to

addressing food insecurity in Australia and other countries with neoliberal welfare states (Riches & Silvasti 2014). The charitable food sector, including faith-based, voluntary, community food, food rescue and not-for-profit organisations, has stepped in to deliver assistance, with some financial support provided by the government (with annual funding of approximately \$64 million in 2014). This financial support is used by the charitable food relief sector for meal provision, food parcels, food vans, vouchers, soup kitchens and food banks for up 8 per cent of the population (Lindberg et al. 2015).

Food relief has been a feature of the Australian charitable landscape since colonial times. The NSW Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and Benevolence, founded in 1813, provided care for 'the poor, the distressed, the aged, and the infirm' of Sydney (The Benevolent Society 2015). What is new, is the rapid expansion and omnipresence of food banks in Australia. Charitable food relief has matured from small ad hoc operations, such as local churches providing hot soup, to a nationwide operation involving big business and the corporate food industry. The 2014 Food Bank Hunger Report describes the 'industry' as a 'conduit between the food and grocery industry and 2500 charities that provide emergency relief. In 2013/14, food banks received 29.9 million kilograms of food—mainly unsaleable items from manufacturers, retailers and farmers—which was an increase of 16 per cent on the prior year (Foodbank Australia 2014). The annual food bank survey of the 2500 member agencies revealed more than half a million Australians were assisted with food relief each month (Foodbank Australia 2014). In the United Kingdom, a survey of just 460 food banks revealed an estimated half a million people accessing these services every year (Downing et al. 2014).

'Beggars can't be choosers'

Despite the impressive scale of food banking and the reach of charitable food agencies, there are notable shortcomings to meeting needs. Recent data indicates almost 60,000 Australians seeking food relief each month (40 per cent of whom are children) are unable to be assisted. Of those assisted, 65 per cent do not receive all they require. Frontline agencies indicate 28 per cent more food is needed just to meet current demand (Foodbank Australia 2014).

International evidence suggests food bank users are dissatisfied with the quality and quantity of food (Hamelin et al. 2002; Loopstra & Tarasuk 2012; McNeill 2011; Nugent 2000). While individual self-worth was compromised by having to rely on poor quality food in some cases (Horst et al. 2014; Kratzmann 2003), there were other examples of expressed resignation with the reliance on food banks, namely that 'beggars can't be choosers' (McNeill 2011; McPherson 2006; Nugent 2000). Needing to use a food bank can evoke negative feelings of shame, stigma, humiliation, discomfort, powerlessness and frustration (Douglas et al. 2015; Garthwaite et al. 2015; Hamelin et al. 2002; Hicks-Stratton 2004; Horst et al. 2014; Kratzmann 2003; Loopstra & Tarasuk 2012; Perry et al. 2014; Zipfel et al. 2015).

Power, politics and the positive re-framing of food banks

Charitable food organisations are attractive to neoliberal governments as they are highly effective in deflecting attention away from the lack of government policies that address the structural causes of food insecurity. In other words, food charity effectively de-politicises food insecurity. Public criticism is instead diverted with 'good news' stories about feeding hungry families, redirecting food waste, improving environmental credentials, championing volunteerism and applauding food manufacturers for good corporate citizenship. Cutting through the rhetoric,

Dowler and O'Connor (2012) argue that charitable food sector responses serve to 'legitimate the bureaucratic and substantive inadequacies of welfare systems and insecure employment for insufficient wages, and institutionalise demeaning distribution systems which create and sustain dependency' (p. 14).

In this way, charitable food organisations reiterate the rhetoric of food insecurity as an issue of individual responsibility. The approaches of charitable food organisations tend to operate 'downstream'. In other words, they focus on the individual, with strategies such as handing out food or developing cooking skills. Organisations often assume deficits in knowledge and skills, such as budgeting, cooking and nutrition, as the primary determinants of food insecurity and, while framed as empowering, could be seen as shifting responsibility back to the individual (Chilton & Rose 2009). Such approaches fail to acknowledge that diet quality is mediated by diet cost and that education alone will not change food prices (Aggarwal et al. 2011).

Charitable agencies have responded to these criticisms adopting 'household improvement and support models' in an attempt to provide less stigmatising programs that focus on improving conditions for vulnerable communities (Collins et al. 2014). These programs include community gardens, community kitchens, food boxes, and cooking skills workshops, and aim to increase participant knowledge in a dignified way. However, these strategies often fail to reach the intended target group, and are not necessarily a long-term solution to food insecurity (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum 2007).

A recent review by Sharon Friel and colleagues (2015), evaluating actions to address inequalities in healthy eating, found little high quality evidence for the effectiveness of targeted food relief interventions aimed at disadvantaged households accessing healthier diets. As the authors stated, 'focusing on direct action to help people eat more healthily misses the heart of the problem: the underlying unequal distribution of factors that support the opportunity to eat a healthy diet' (Friel et al. p. ii84).

From charity to entitlement

A human rights approach offers opportunities for the analysis of the structural causes of poverty, rather than symptoms, and the impact of government action or inaction on people living in poverty (Gready & Phillips 2009). Indeed, human rights have been described as becoming a truly mobilising force when they are connected to everyday experiences (Donald & Mottershaw 2009). However, the right to adequate food enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Office of the High Commissioner United Nations Human Rights 1966) has not been universally ratified. The United States has not ratified the covenant and continues to express resistance towards economic and social rights (Picard 2010). Australia ratified the covenant in 1975, but it does not form part of Australia's federal domestic law and is not scheduled to, or declared, under the Australian Human Rights Commission Act. In terms of the right to food, this means that complaints are not able to be lodged with the Human Rights Commission, leaving only the option of raising hunger as a general systemic issue with government (Booth 2014).

The right to food encompasses more than physiological need and nutritional adequacy. The right to food forms part of the broader right to an adequate standard of living that includes the right to clothing, housing and social services. The nation-state (the government of the signing country) has an obligation to respect, protect, facilitate and fulfil the rights of claim holders (citizens) (Haddad 1998). Human rights encompass entitlements along with the standards and mechanisms of accountability to ensure those standards are achieved.

Human dignity is implicit in the right to food and comes from the ability to provide for one's self. Dignity is the gauge of human suffering that can be tied to individual experience (Mann 1998). It has been asserted that violations of dignity negatively impact individual health and wellbeing. Dignity violations could include the experience of being stereotyped, discrimination, neglect, lack of agency and freedom (Mann 1998) and some of these are evident in the literature examining food bank users' experiences (Douglas et al. 2015; Garthwaite et al. 2015; Loopstra & Tarasuk 2012). Kent (2005) argues that if people have not had a chance to influence what or how they are being fed, then their right to adequate food is not being met.

Rights-based approaches to food insecurity

A right-to-food approach offers advantages over charitable responses through a legal framework that holds governments accountable to rights violations with the principle of human dignity upheld. This approach represents a seismic shift from charity (neoliberal welfare) to entitlements and dignity. According to Nadia Lambek (2015), the right to food is a useful theoretical framework for collective action and analysing failures of the food system; it serves as a tool for policy analysis and a unifying force for charitable sector and non-government organisations. Oxfam and Action Aid have endorsed a rights-based approach to food security, albeit a broad interpretation (Claeys 2015). Human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, which originally refused to engage with the right to food, have gradually included it in their mandates (Chong 2008). This approach is more in line with an 'upstream' philosophy, and includes strategies aimed at preventing rather than managing food insecurity.

The Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2004) were developed to provide practical guidance. Nation-states were encouraged to nominate a specific agency to oversee, coordinate implementation and develop a strategy to ensure food and nutrition security for all, including progress indicators (Dowler & O'Connor 2012). More than a decade after the guidelines were established, there has been some progress in developing countries (Oxfam 2014), but the voluntary nature of the code limits progress in wealthier countries.

Operationalising the protection and promotion of human rights and the right to food includes key tenets that reaffirm, educate, engage, protect and respect. These activities together are designed to generate political and public will for improving the right to food as a fundamental human right. Enacting the right to food will require education and training to promote greater understanding of human rights; lobbying and advocacy (see Box 4.3); mobilising communities, especially those affected by poverty; and developing a sensitive and specific surveillance and measurement tool.

BOX 4.3 RIGHT TO FOOD COALITION

The Right to Food (RTF) Coalition was founded to organise the 2014 *Putting Food on the Table: Food Security is Everyone's Business* Conference in Western Sydney. Feedback from conference attendees and stakeholders indicated ongoing interest in maintaining the RTF Coalition post-conference.

The RTF Coalition is a network of organisations working across Australia to address food insecurity. The RTF Coalition aims to raise awareness of food insecurity, to stimulate research, to share information about successful policy and program initiatives to address food insecurity, and to undertake joint advocacy.

A Call to Action for governments, endorsed by 2014 RTF Coalition conference participants, outlines five areas for RTF action. These are:

- 1 There should be no extension of the consumption-based Goods and Services tax (GST) to all food, and current exemptions including fresh fruit and vegetables should remain GST free.
- 2 Proposed changes to welfare for young people under 30 years of age requiring a 6-month wait for benefits should be dropped.
- 3 Systematic and ongoing research into the prevalence and effects of food insecurity is needed.
- 4 A strategic national approach to food insecurity must be developed.
- 5 Australia must progress its commitment to implement the recommendations from the World Health Organisation (WHO) Commission on the Social Determinants of Health. (Right to Food–2014 Food Security Conference–Call to Action).

Local RTF groups are active in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales and Queensland, under the umbrella of the national RTF group. All groups work to an agreed national plan of action, as well as undertaking local action and advocacy as appropriate to local circumstances. An RTF conference is planned every two years. The RTF website provides a platform for communication of ideas, projects and initiatives; for more information, see www.righttofood.org.au/

Conclusion

Despite an apparent abundance of food, food insecurity is a real and pressing issue for an increasing number of households in high-income countries. The determinants of food insecurity are complex and involve structural and individual factors across a broad spectrum of areas. The situation is exacerbated by inappropriate and inadequate monitoring and surveillance. Government support of the charitable food relief sector represents a neoliberal approach to addressing food poverty, which is ineffectual and serves to entrench power differentials while deflecting criticism away from structural government policy shortfalls.

A charitable approach is still necessary as a safety net for more disadvantaged households, for those with transitory food insecurity and for those in crisis. However, if Australia is going to develop long-term strategies to alleviate poverty and empower individuals and communities, a seismic shift to a human rights approach is needed. A human rights approach, including the right to food, shifts the balance from charity to entitlements. It offers a viable and promising alternative to galvanise a range of key players, such as non-government organisations, professionals, lobbyists and affected communities. While progress to realise economic, social and cultural rights, such as the right to food, is limited, rights-based strategies offer scope for policy analysis and a framework for accountability.

The goal of food security is to ensure that people do 'not have to make trade-offs between immediate poor nutritional status and long term livelihood sustainability' (MacMillan & Dowler 2012, p. 199). In taking a more upstream approach, advocacy efforts need to ensure that all members of society have access to a living wage that includes being able to afford a diet that meets cultural and nutritional requirements for a healthy and active life; affordable housing; and environments where food price volatility is managed and healthy food options are available and affordable (Gallegos 2016).

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- Food insecurity has four key pillars: availability, access, utilisation and stability. It is underpinned by human rights. In high-income countries, food insecurity manifests as hunger as well as limited access to affordable nutrient-rich foods.
- The prevalence of food insecurity is underestimated in Australia due to ad hoc and inadequate surveillance and monitoring. This is in the interests of neoliberal governments who are then able to ignore the problem and argue for individualised approaches.
- In the absence of major ideological shifts and the political will to truly address the structural causes of poverty, social and health inequalities, charitable food relief has become entrenched as the dominant response to addressing food insecurity in Australia and other countries with neoliberal welfare states.
- A charitable approach has the risk of polarising households on low incomes into becoming either passive victims of the system with little agency, or irresponsible consumers who have failed to make informed choices. The depth and breadth of coping strategies used by these households to alleviate or delay hunger contradicts these views.
- A human rights approach with a focus on the structural and societal causes of food insecurity would galvanise collective action to ensure strategies were implemented empowering individuals to utilise their agency and maintain their human dignity.

Sociological reflection

In this chapter we have explored food insecurity within a high-income country context, where the responsibility for ensuring households can feed their members has been delegated to charitable organisations.

- What are the relative contributions of structure and agency to food insecurity?
- Is it ethical that charitable organisations are increasingly providing households with food?
- Where is the power held in providing food through charitable agencies?
- How does food insecurity arise in wealthy nations like Australia?
- What are some solutions to alleviate food insecurity in the long term?

Discussion questions

- 1 Discuss the determinants of food insecurity. Are these within an individual's 'control'?
- 2 Who is most at risk of food insecurity and why?
- 3 Describe the advantages and disadvantages of monitoring and surveillance of food insecurity.
- 4 What is the motivation for supermarkets to be involved in charitable food relief?
- 5 What would be some human rights approaches to alleviating food insecurity? How might these approaches be operationalised, and what actors might be involved?

Further investigation

- 1 Neoliberal governments have a vested interest in keeping members of the population on low incomes hungry. Discuss.
- 2 Food banks have become corporatised and are a part of Big Food. State cases that argue for and against this statement.
- 3 Using a class lens, discuss the differences between food sovereignty and food security.
- 4 Explore the relationships between the agendas of the sustainability and emergency food relief discourses.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books and reports

- Baum, F. 2015, *The New Public Health*, 4th Edition. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Fabian Society 2015, *Hungry for Change*, Fabian Society, London: fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Hungry-for-Change-web-27.10.pdf
- Pascoe, B. 2014, *Dark Emu: Black Seeds Agriculture or Accident?* Magabala Books, Broome WA.

Websites

- Australian Council of Social Services: acoss.org.au
- Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance: australianfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/
- Drexel University Center for Hunger-free Communities 2015, *Witnesses to Hunger*. www.centerforhungerfreecomunities.org/our-projects/witnesses-hunger

Food and Agricultural Organization, *Food Security Statistics*: fao.org/economic/ess/ess-fs/en/

Food Bank Australia: foodbank.org.au/

International Food Policy Research Institute: fao.org/economic/ess/ess-fs/en/

PROOF Food insecurity policy research: <http://nutritionalsciences.lamp.utoronto.ca/>

Right to Food: righttofood.org.au/right-to-food

Second Bite: <http://secondbite.org/>

Films and documentaries

- Jacobson, K. & Silverbush, L. 2013, *A Place at the Table*. This film examines food insecurity in the United States and explores the impact of poverty on hunger and of food insecurity on health.

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CHAPTER 5

THE POLITICS OF GOVERNMENT DIETARY ADVICE: THE INFLUENCE OF BIG FOOD

Marie Bragg and Marion Nestle

OVERVIEW

- › What trends exist in the development of dietary guidelines and food guides in English-speaking countries?
- › How do stakeholders affect the development of government dietary guidance, especially guidelines for sugar consumption?
- › Why is dietary advice vulnerable to political influence?

Although dietary guidelines and government policies are based on science, they are also subject to pressures from food companies concerned about the commercial implications of advice to restrict certain nutrients or foods. This

chapter reviews recent examples of food industry—often referred to as Big Food— influence on dietary advice, particularly advice about sugar consumption, issued by the World Health Organization, the United States, Canada and Australia between 2004 and 2015. These examples suggest the need for governments to establish processes to keep dietary recommendations free of political influence.

KEY TERMS

dietary guidelines
food guides
nutrient standards
public health nutrition

Introduction

Governments issue dietary advice to their citizens in order to promote consumption of agricultural and food products, as well as to promote health. In the United States, for example, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) has produced **food guides** for consumers since the early 1900s. The early guides were designed to help Americans overcome nutritional deficiencies and typically recommended increased consumption of foods from a variety of groups. To the extent that such guides encouraged eating more of a greater variety of food to prevent nutrient deficiencies, they elicited little opposition. Such advice benefits all stakeholders in the food system, from producers to consumers. With the shift from prevention of nutrient deficiencies to the prevention of chronic conditions—for example obesity, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke and certain cancers—in the latter half of the twentieth century, dietary advice began to focus on restrictions on intake of dietary components that raise risks for these conditions: energy (measured in calories or kilojoules), saturated fat, cholesterol, sugars and salt—and of their principal food sources. This kind of advice inevitably provokes opposition from the affected food companies.

The history of **dietary guidelines** and food guides is rife with examples of controversy about advice to 'eat less' of any nutrient or food. Food companies are businesses and, like any business in today's global marketplace, seek to expand sales, meet growth targets and produce returns for investors. Given that all but the poorest countries in the world provide more food on average than is needed by their populations, the food industry is especially competitive. The US food supply, for example, provides about 3900 calories (16,300 kilojoules) per person each day, nearly twice the average amount of energy required. Yet unlike shoes, clothing and electronics, consumption of food is limited even for those with the largest appetites, making competition especially intense. The need to sell more food in an overabundant marketplace explains why food companies compete so strenuously for a 'sales-friendly' regulatory and political climate. It also explains their aggressive defence of the health benefits of their products, their intensive lobbying efforts, and their attacks on critics of their marketing, sales and lobbying practices (Nestle 2013).

There are all too many examples where the food industry has succeeded in inducing government agencies to eliminate, weaken or thoroughly obfuscate recommendations to eat less of certain nutrients and their food sources. It is able to do this in part because of the complexities of conducting human nutritional research. Humans, unlike experimental animals, cannot be caged and fed controlled diets, a problem that makes research results difficult to interpret. This chapter offers examples of the ways economic pressures and scientific uncertainties affect recent dietary advice from the World Health Organization (WHO), Canada, the United States and Australia, especially advice to reduce sugar consumption. Strong evidence links high sugar intake to obesity and related conditions (Morenga et al. 2013), and the sugar industry ('Big Sugar') is especially diligent in opposing advice to eat less of its products.

Sugar advice by the World Health Organization

The recent history of sugar industry efforts to influence dietary recommendations begins in the early 2000s with an especially well-documented example: the attempt by the WHO to recommend limits on sugar consumption. WHO set out to develop a global strategy to reduce the burden of illness and death related to poor diet and inactivity that would include evidence-based

recommendations along with action plans and implementation policies (Waxman & Norum 2004; Norum 2005).

Its process began with an expert consultation involving international scientists who were asked to review existing research and make recommendations. The research review was published in 2003 as Technical Report 916 (WHO 2003a). The process further involved consultation with stakeholders in member states, UN agencies, governmental and nongovernmental organisations, the food industry and other private sector groups, and negotiation with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations to co-sponsor the effort. The Global Strategy, released jointly by the two UN agencies, was ratified by member states in May 2004 (WHO 2004).

The dietary guidance components of this process proved especially contentious. In 2002, the Expert Consultation committee drafted a preliminary research review that included quantitative goals for intake of specific nutrients. The one for 'free' sugars—those added during processing—advised restriction to 10 per cent or less of total energy intake, a level consistent with decades of similar targets from numerous countries (Cannon 1992). The US 1992 Pyramid food guide, for example, recommended a range of 7 to 13 per cent of calories from added sugars, depending on caloric needs (USDA 1992). For a diet containing 2000 calories (8400 kilojoules), this goal specifies a daily limit of 50 g of 'free' sugars, about the amount in just one 16-ounce (475 mL) soft drink. For most Americans, this is half the amount typically consumed (DGAC 2015). Sugar producers and trade groups complained that neither sugars nor their primary food sources had been shown to cause obesity (World Sugar Research Organization 2002). In the United States, lobbyists for sugar trade organisations induced the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to submit critiques of the draft based on materials they had developed (Steiger 2002). Although sugar groups ostensibly based their arguments on science, their concerns were clearly economic. Such a recommendation, they said, would be likely to produce detrimental effects on the agricultural economy of sugar-producing countries (Khan 2003).

Just prior to release of Technical Report 916, the US Sugar Association threatened not only to publicly expose flaws in the report, but also to ask Congress to withdraw US funding for WHO; it demanded that WHO withdraw the report. Sugar groups also induced the co-chairs of the US Senate Sweetener Caucus to ask the HHS Secretary to use his influence to have the report rescinded (Briscoe 2003). In arguing against the 10 per cent target, sugar groups invoked US standards for nutrient intake published as Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), a scientific organisation that conducts research studies for federal agencies. In developing the DRIs, the IOM (2002) established an upper limit for daily sugar intake at 25 per cent of calories as safe for preventing an increase in the risk of nutrient deficiencies. Sugar groups, however, chose to interpret the 25 per cent limit as a *recommendation*. In response, the IOM president wrote to HHS to deny that his organisation endorsed the 25 per cent upper limit as a goal (Fineberg 2003). Nevertheless, the published version of Technical Report 916 continued to include the 10 per cent goal for 'free' sugars.

During development of this report, WHO and FAO began drafting the Global Strategy. Early in 2003, the agencies sent a consultation document to member states that omitted quantitative targets for nutrient intake. In comments on the document, food industry representatives urged WHO to recognise that all foods can contribute to healthful diets and to emphasise nutrient adequacy, physical activity, consumer education and personal responsibility (WHO 2003b). Behind the scenes, they lobbied to convince member states that use of Technical Report 916 as the research basis for the Global Strategy would adversely affect the economies of sugar-producing countries (Waxman 2004; Norum 2005).

In May 2004, the 57th World Health Assembly endorsed the Global Strategy, but with major concessions to industry lobbyists (WHO 2004). As ratified, the Global Strategy stated that foods high in fat, sugar and salt increase the risk for non-communicable diseases, but said only to 'limit the intake of free sugars.' No mention of Technical Report 916 or its 10 per cent sugar recommendation appeared in the report, not even in a footnote.

Fast forward to 2015 when the WHO again issued advice about sugar intake. In preparation, WHO commissioned two research reviews to use as a basis for policy recommendations, one on the effects of sugars on chronic disease (Morenga et al. 2013) and the second on dental disease (Moynihan & Kelly 2014). Both reports strongly linked sugar consumption to those conditions. On that basis, WHO recommended that added sugars be restricted to no more than 10 per cent of energy, but stated that reducing intake to 5 per cent would provide even greater health benefits. In what can only be viewed as an understatement, WHO said that reductions of this magnitude 'will require substantial debate and involvement of various stakeholders' before policy makers can act (WHO 2015).

WHO released the report despite extensive sugar-industry lobbying and objections during and after its preparation (European Committee 2015). We can only speculate on what changed in the intervening decade, but countries everywhere were experiencing rising levels of obesity, a problem that threatened to bankrupt their health-care systems. The evidence linking excessive sugar intake to weight gain had grown in strength and no longer seemed debatable. WHO could use these facts to resist lobbying pressures. An analysis of the sugar industry's lobbying efforts concluded that they had little effect on the final guidelines and that 'WHO's guideline-making process is relatively robust to industry influence' (Stuckler et al. 2016). The analysis attributed the robustness to WHO's exclusive health mandate and its independent review process.

Australia's 2013 dietary guidelines

In February 2013, Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) released its updated Australian Dietary Guidelines to the public, aimed at advising individuals on the proper amounts and types of food to consume in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle and to decrease the risk for developing dietary related diseases (see Table 5.1 for the headings of each guideline). Recognising the increase in overweight and obesity among Australians, the guidelines emphasised ways to prevent weight gain, including cutting back on foods containing saturated fats, added salts and added sugars (NHMRC 2013).

TABLE 5.1 Australian Dietary Guidelines

Guideline 1: To achieve and maintain a healthy weight, be physically active and choose amounts of nutritious food and drinks to meet your energy needs.
Guideline 2: Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from these five food groups every day.
Guideline 3: Limit intake of foods containing saturated fat, added salt, added sugars and alcohol.
Guideline 4: Encourage, support and promote breastfeeding.
Guideline 5: Care for your food; prepare and store it safely.

Source: NHMRC (2013)

Compared to the previous dietary guidelines released in Australia in 2002, the new guidelines placed greater emphasis on consuming wholesome food items rather than specific nutrients. The guidelines recommend eating lots of fruits and vegetables, consuming mostly unprocessed grains and cereals, reducing consumption of salt, fat and sugar, and being more active.

The Australian guidelines were developed in a research-based, two-step process. The NHMRC first appointed a group of scientists to conduct systematic reviews of studies investigating the link between food, diet and health, and published these findings in an evidence report (NHMRC 2011). A second group was then appointed to independently review the evidence and construct the guidelines with a focus on usability (NHMRC 2013). The report describes the guidelines in a clear and transparent manner. It outlines each guideline, describes the evidence that supports the guidelines, rates the strength of the evidence from 'A' through to 'C' and provides advice on how to implement the recommendations. The guidelines also offer specific advice for groups with special needs, such as pregnant women, infants, children and others (NHMRC 2013).

The guidelines advise cutting back on added sugars in an effort to improve overall health. The summary report states the link between sugar consumption and increased risk for tooth decay (dental caries). The guidelines advise reducing intake of sugar-sweetened energy drinks, and instead increasing consumption of water.

The guidelines emphasise the link between sugar-sweetened beverage consumption and weight gain, which rates a 'B' grade level for the quality of the research. They note that consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is associated with type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome (a risk factor for heart disease and diabetes). Because sugar consumption in Australia is high, the guidelines appropriately recommend a general reduction in sugar intake for all individuals.

As might be expected, the sugar industry argued against the guidelines. George Christensen, a Member of Parliament with the Queensland National Party, publicly accused the NHMRC of demonising sugar and using weak evidence to support advice to limit added sugars, especially from sugar-sweetened beverages (Dunlevy 2012). Representing the largest sugar-growing district in Australia, Mr Christensen accused the NHMRC of attempting to 'create a nanny state and decimate one of our most important agricultural industries.' Despite these industry complaints, the 2013 guidelines unambiguously advised the public to limit sugar intake.

US dietary guidelines

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have jointly issued dietary guidelines at five-year intervals since 1980. The first three editions were voluntary. In 1990, the US Congress required the agencies to revisit the guidelines every five years. The guidelines now constitute US policy for preventing chronic disease for all citizens over the age of two years. Although virtually unknown to the public, they greatly influence what the public eats. They govern the content of federal nutrition programs, constitute the basis of food guides (pyramids and plates) for public education, and are widely invoked by nutrition professionals, journalists and food companies. Advice to eat more of a nutrient can be used by companies to market products. Because 'eat less' advice might turn the public away from products, every new set of guidelines elicits substantial controversy. Every edition requires appointment of an advisory committee to review the research, hold hearings, review testimony and write a report. Each of these steps is subject to intense lobbying by food companies and trade associations. Food companies nominate candidates for committee positions, submit research reviews on the value of their products to health, testify at hearings, and meet with agency

officials to promote the health benefits of their products and the lack of compelling evidence for adverse effects (Nestle 2013).

Since 1980, the guidelines have endured objections from the meat, egg, dairy, alcohol, soda (soft drink) and snack food industries. Prior to 2005, the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committees (DGACs) could ignore the lobbying and write guidelines with minimal interference from the sponsoring agencies. That year, the agencies decided that their staff would take over the task of writing the guidelines, basing them on the DGAC's research report. Whereas the work of the DGACs is entirely transparent—videotapes and transcripts of meetings and correspondence are placed online—the agencies write the actual guidelines in secret, thus permitting even greater politicisation of the process. Furthermore, the agencies now require the DGAC to take an entirely 'science-based' approach to evaluating research, thereby enabling food industry critics to use scientific uncertainty as a basis for challenging guidelines they deem undesirable.

These politics are reflected in the history of the sugar guidelines, as summarised in Table 5.2. Whereas the 1980 and 1985 guidelines simply stated 'avoid too much sugar', the recommendation has become more complicated and obfuscated over the years.

TABLE 5.2 Evolution of the US dietary guideline for sugars

YEAR	SUGAR GUIDELINE OR RECOMMENDATION
1980	Avoid too much sugar
1985	Avoid too much sugar
1990	Use sugars only in moderation
1995	Choose a diet moderate in sugars
2000	Choose beverages and foods to moderate your intake of sugars
2005	Choose and prepare foods and beverages with little added sugars or caloric sweeteners, such as amounts suggested by the USDA Food Guide and the DASH Eating Plan
2010	Reduce the intake of calories from solid fats and added sugars
2015 DGAC Report	Added sugars should be reduced in the diet and not replaced with low-calorie sweeteners, but rather with healthy options, such as water in place of sugar-sweetened beverages

Source: USDA and HHS at www.health.gov/DietaryGuidelines/

The 2010 dietary guidelines

The election of President Obama in 2008 ushered in a variety of changes in US food politics. Early in 2010, First Lady Michelle Obama announced 'Let's Move!', a program aimed at reducing childhood obesity by encouraging healthier diets and physical activity. To establish an agenda for Let's Move! President Obama appointed senior officials of federal agencies to a task force charged with making recommendations for action. When this committee released its report in May 2010, First Lady Michelle Obama's staff set about implementing its recommendations (White House 2010). Over the following year, USDA and HHS—with considerable input from the White

House—released the 2010 DGAC's 455-page research report (DGAC 2010) and the 95-page dietary guidelines policy document based on that report (USDA & HHS 2010).

The DGAC noted that its report was distinctly different from previous research reports. The Dietary Guidelines were now addressed to an American public largely overweight or obese. The DGAC had used a newly developed Nutrition Evidence Library at USDA to answer scientific questions, and it considered the total diet in making specific recommendations. Nevertheless, neither the DGAC nor the Dietary Guidelines stated issues directly. Although the final guidelines report noted that sodas and juice drinks provide nearly 37 per cent of all added sugars in US diets, it does not explicitly say to consume less of these drinks. Instead, the committee and the guidelines introduced a new euphemism: SoFAS—solid fats and added sugars—only translated into food terms on page 67 of the guidelines document: 'Drink few or no regular sodas, sports drinks, energy drinks, and fruit drinks. Eat less cake, cookies, ice cream, other desserts, and candy. If you do have these foods and drinks, have a small portion.'

The 2015 dietary guidelines

As always, the 2015 DGAC reviewed the research and wrote a lengthy report (571 pages). Its most controversial recommendation? Diets based largely on plant foods are not only better for health, but also for environmental sustainability (DGAC 2015). When the agencies posted the report online for public comment, 29,000 individuals and groups responded. Meat industry groups objected vehemently and induced Congress to introduce a rider into agricultural appropriations bills insisting that dietary guidelines be 'limited in scope to only matters of diet and nutrient intake', thereby excluding sustainability from consideration and making it clear that Congress intended to intervene in dietary guidelines if they were unfavourable to industry.

Sugar industry groups also objected. The DGAC report noted (2015, p. 20) that nearly half of US sugar intake comes from beverages other than milk and 100 per cent fruit juice, and that research on sugars and health is 'compatible with a recommendation to keep added sugars intake below 10 per cent of total energy intake'. Interestingly, this recommendation survived in the final guidelines that were released in December 2015 (US Department of Health and Human Services & US Department of Agriculture 2015).

Sugar on US food labels

Soon after WHO released its sugar recommendations, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed to revise food labels to establish a Daily Value, in this case an upper limit, for added sugars—at 10 per cent of energy intake (FDA 2015). Nutrition Facts panels on US food packages currently list total sugars in grams per serving without distinguishing natural from added sugars or placing the amount in the context of a daily diet. Sugar industry objections focused on the biochemical similarity of natural and added sugars, the lack of science supporting a role of sugars in obesity, and the level of the target percentage. In 2016, the FDA adopted those proposals, giving food companies time to begin listing Daily Values for added sugars on their labels.

Big Sugar lobbying in the US

Industry lobbying is a major obstacle to the enactment of national and international policies to reduce sugar intake. Industry lobbyists use their power and money to sway sugar legislation in their favour, and to ensure that policies that might hinder sugar production or sales are never enacted or enforced. In the United States, sugar lobbying has a long and well documented history.

In 1966, the US National Institute of Dental Research (NIDR), well aware of research linking sugar consumption to dental disease, initiated a program to research and plan interventions to eliminate tooth decay within a decade. In 1971, the NIDR launched the National Caries Program to reduce dental caries. Although unknown to outsiders at the time, the sugar industry greatly influenced the program's research priorities (Kearns et al. 2015).

The sugar industry's aim was to block interventions that might suggest eating less sugar, and instead focus on reducing sugar's harmful effects. The industry preferred to support research on enzymes that could break up dental plaque and vaccines against tooth decay. Industry representatives developed relationships with NIDR staff and submitted reports to sympathetic staff members that were incorporated almost in their entirety into the NIDR's call for research applications. Notably missing from National Caries Program priorities was research that might lead to reduced sugar consumption.

Another example: In 2009, health advocates in the United States convinced some members of Congress to propose excise taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages as a way to reduce health-care costs. Spending by lobbyists for soda companies such as PepsiCo, the Coca-Cola Company, and the American Beverage Association increased sharply to nearly \$40 million that year, from about \$5 million the previous year. The measure did not pass (Nestle 2015).

One more example: In 2010, Congress passed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act to improve the nutritional quality of school breakfasts and lunches. These meals constitute a major source of nutrition for children in low-income households. The act used science-based standards to set limits on the amounts of sugar, salt and saturated fat in school meals. Many companies linked to Big Sugar interests publicly supported the act; their companies could now produce uniform products to meet the new standards (Goldman et al. 2014). But when the USDA wrote regulations to implement the act, sugar companies objected. The draft rules included two options: to limit the amount of sugars to 35 per cent of calories (the caloric-limit) or to 35 per cent by weight (the sugar-by-weight-limit). About 70 health professional groups submitted comments advocating for the more restrictive calorie-limit method. But nearly 1200 comments from grocery trade associations and food manufacturers supported the sugar-by-weight option. The final rule limited acceptable products to 35 per cent by weight.

Canada's dietary advice

In 2007, Health Canada released 'Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide', an update of its 1992 version (Health Canada 2007a). Like all such guides aimed at the public, this one was intended to improve food selection and promote nutritional health by recommending intake of specified numbers of servings from various food groups. Canada has issued such guides since 1942. The evolution of the advice is notable for the substantial increase in the number of recommended servings. For the first 50 years, the guides were based on a 'foundation diet' approach designed to ensure intake of the minimum amount of food needed to meet the nutritional requirements of most people in the population (Health Canada 2002). In 1992, however, Health Canada switched the basis of the Guide to a 'total diet' approach. This called for diets that would meet energy and nutrient requirements defined by standards that had just been developed (CIC 1990; Bush & Kirkpatrick 2003). These standards were based on research on single nutrients, an approach that leads to higher levels that encompass the nutrient needs of most individuals within a population. The 'total diet' approach resulted in advice to consume more food and, therefore, more calories. Its effect was to double the

recommended number of grain servings, more than double the number of vegetable and fruit servings, and increase the number of meat servings by 50 per cent.

Responses to the release of the 1992 Guide indicated substantial food industry influence on its development and content, as revealed in newspaper accounts such as 'Industry Forced Changes to Food Guide ...' (Anon, 1993) and 'Food Guide Changed After Industry Outcry' (Evenson 1993). Such accounts were based on documents obtained under Canada's Access to Information Act, which revealed that earlier drafts had been altered in response to protests from beef, egg and sugar producers. The then Minister of National Health and Welfare, Benoit Bouchard (1993), defended the Guide as 'based on sound science' and reflecting the 'total diet' approach: 'There are no good foods or bad foods,' he said. 'It is the overall choices of foods made and not any one food ... that determines healthful eating'. Despite this statement, the 1992 Food Guide design—a rainbow—was intended to indicate that some foods are better than others and should be eaten in greater quantities; its largest bands were devoted to the grain and vegetables and fruit groups.

A decade later, concerns about rising rates of obesity and chronic diseases suggested the need to revise the Guide (Shields & Tjepkema 2006). The prevalence of obesity in Canada had occurred in parallel with a 14 per cent increase in available calories in the food supply (Statistics Canada, 2002). Furthermore, Canada had jointly participated with the United States in development of **nutrient standards** and was using them (Health Canada 2007b). Revising the Food Guide provided an opportunity to reverse the 'eat more' messages of the 1992 version.

To do so, Health Canada conducted a series of consultations and stakeholder sessions, and worked closely with advisory groups (Health Canada, 2007b). Critics immediately complained that industry groups appeared to be overrepresented in the process. Invitational stakeholder meetings included far more industry than independent experts (Health Canada 2004a; 2004b). Critics charged that members of advisory committees had ties to food industry groups, had potential conflicts of interest, and lacked independence and expertise (Jeffery 2005; Freedhoff 2006). Although the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health had nominated potential members, none of its nominees was appointed (Jeffery 2005). Meanwhile, food companies and trade associations hired lobbyists and submitted detailed briefs to ensure that the Food Guide would reflect their interests (Waldie 2007).

In late 2005, Health Canada proposed to decrease the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables from 5–10 to 5–8 and to increase servings of meat from 2–3 to 4 for men. Commentators judged this proposal as 'obesogenic.' They calculated that following the Guide would produce diets overly high in calories (Kondro 2006). The Dairy Farmers of Canada met with Health Canada to complain that the Guide placed soy milk in the milk category, and would lead to reduced milk consumption (Payne 2006). How Health Canada dealt with such complaints can only be surmised. Reviewers of early drafts were required to return them, and neither draft guidelines nor transcripts of consultations or committee meetings were posted on the Internet.

As published, the 2007 Guide was more complicated than the previous version. The most significant changes from 1992 were an increase in the minimum number of vegetable and fruit servings and a decrease in grain servings. Changes from the 2006 draft were a reduction in the prominence given to soy milk, and elimination of a food shopping tip to 'buy local, regional, or Canadian foods when available.' The final Guide advises consumers to be active, read food labels, limit trans fats, satisfy thirst with water, enjoy eating, and eat well. 'Eat well' includes an 'eat less' message: '[by] limiting foods and beverages high in calories, fat, sugar, or salt (sodium) such as cakes and pastries, chocolate and candies, cookies and granola bars, doughnuts and muffins, ice cream and frozen desserts, soft drinks, sports and energy drinks, and sweetened hot or cold drinks' (Health Canada 2007a). The reasons for such changes, however, are not stated.

Contradictions between the written messages and the illustrations make the Guide difficult to interpret. For example, it recommends 'Drink skim, 1%, or 2% milk each day' and 'Select lower fat milk alternatives', yet illustrates dairy products in their full-fat versions. The meat illustrations do not depict red meats at all and exclusively depict meat alternatives such as fish, beans, tofu, eggs, nuts and peanut butter (Health Canada 2012).

The messages on sugar consumption appear especially misguided. The Guide groups fruit juice into the daily recommended fruit serving, a recommendation that is questionable given that many fruit juices contain just as much, if not more, sugar than sodas. Similarly, it classifies sugar-sweetened cereals as grain servings. Although the written messages say to choose foods prepared with little or no added sugar, the illustrations include foods high in sugars. Such contradictions can confuse consumers using the information to inform their food choices (Picard 2014).

Canada's 2015 nutrition labelling system

In August 2014, the Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation issued a report on the effects of sugars, recommending that intake of free sugars not exceed 10 per cent of total daily energy or, ideally, less than 5 per cent. The Foundation called on the Canadian Government to clearly label free sugars on the labels of food products, and to group all sugars together when listing ingredients on product packaging. The government, it said, should restrict the marketing of all foods and beverages to children, and educate Canadians about the risks associated with excessive sugar consumption.

The government, however, adopted only some of this advice when it proposed to update food labelling regulations in 2015 (CFIA 2015). It had established mandatory food labelling—the Nutrition Facts Table—in 2003. To address the rising prevalence of chronic disease, the labelling rules needed revision. Officials held two consultation rounds to identify problems with the existing system. Consumers said they did not understand serving sizes or the names on ingredient lists, and wanted information about sugars.

In response, the government required food colors and other additives be listed by their common names, and provided an explanation of the per cent Daily Value. With respect to sugars, the government followed the Foundation's recommendation to group all sugar-based ingredients together, thereby moving them higher on the ingredient list. But it decided against requiring labelling of *added* sugars. Instead, it planned to institute a Daily Value for total sugars of 100 grams—an amount that constitutes 20 per cent of total calories for people consuming 2000 calories a day—twice what was recommended by the Foundation, the WHO, and other health authorities. It also gave the food industry five years to adopt the changes once they would be enacted (Government of Canada 2015). Once again, industry lobbying had diluted public health messages. (See Chapter 6 for a discussion of industry lobbying and the Australian food labelling system).

Conclusion

Nutrition scientists maintain—quite correctly—that science is complex, that individualisation makes sense for advising people about their own diets, and that dietary standards and dietary guidelines are meant as tools for professionals, not the general public. Because standards and guidelines are the basis of food guides for the general public, they need to be based not only on science, but also on the need to communicate basic principles of diet and health to an increasingly confused public. As chronic diseases overtake nutrient deficiencies as **public health nutrition**

problems, dietary guidance should encourage people to optimise eating patterns by clearly stipulating the foods best eaten on a habitual basis. Dietary guidance should also explicitly encourage people to reduce energy intake by greatly reducing sugar consumption.

Governments should be responsible for providing accurate and sound nutrition advice to their populations; the fact that most have difficulty doing so is an indication of the power of food companies to influence the process. Nutrition and health advocates should be diligent in encouraging governments to issue dietary advice that is clear, unambiguous and useful to the public. In backing up these sound nutrition recommendations, governments need to adopt and uphold policies aimed at guiding the public to leading a healthier lifestyle through appropriate consumption. Individuals cannot easily change their eating behaviour on their own, and need policies to make the food environment more supportive of healthful food choices. Policies to help people reduce sugar consumption and to curb lobbying efforts ought to greatly improve public health.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- Governments issue dietary guidance to improve the health of their populations.
- Advice to consume more of a country's agricultural and food products in order to prevent nutrient deficiencies is usually uncontroversial.
- Advice to restrict intake of certain foods, like sugar, to prevent obesity and chronic diseases is inevitably controversial.
- Sugar companies use the political process to weaken, undermine or eliminate dietary guidelines that suggest eating less of their products.
- To avoid controversy, dietary guidelines and food guides tend to weaken or obfuscate public health messages; to express advice in terms of nutrients, not foods; and to issue more complicated and individualised advice rather than straightforward public health recommendations.
- Despite political pressures, dietary guidelines and food guides invariably recommend diets based mainly on foods of plant origin: vegetables, fruit and whole grains.
- The sugar industry has major influence on policy implementation, especially when it comes to policies that threaten to put sugar-containing products at risk.
- A noteworthy advance in food politics is the WHO's recommendation of no more than 10 per cent of energy from added sugars.

Sociological reflection

Dietary guidelines and food guides, although apparently 'science-based', are created by individuals who serve on government committees and are subject to the same kinds of influences as any other members of society. Because the food industry is the sector of society with the strongest stake in the outcome of dietary guidance, government agencies and committee members are strongly lobbied by industry. Controversy over dietary advice derives from the contradiction between the health-promoting goals of public health and the profit-making goals of food companies.

- Consider the language used in the Australian Dietary Guidelines in Table 5.1. Which of these guidelines would be most resisted by the food industry?
- How do these guidelines compare to those developed in the United States, Canada and elsewhere?

Discussion questions

- 1 Why do governments issue dietary guidelines and food guides?
- 2 Who are the principal stakeholders in the development of dietary guidance?
- 3 How important are dietary guidelines and food guides? Whose interests do they serve?
- 4 How does Big Food (transnational food companies and sugar trade groups) influence dietary guidance?
- 5 How do nutrient standards and dietary guidance illustrate trends towards the increasing complexity and individualisation of dietary advice?
- 6 How could public health approaches improve the development of dietary guidelines and food guides?

Further investigation

- 1 Why does public health nutrition policy rely so heavily on dietary guidelines? What alternative approaches could governments use to improve public health?
- 2 Are dietary guidelines equally useful to affluent and economically disadvantaged groups?
- 3 Examine the influence of Big Food on public health nutrition policy.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books and reports

Nestle, M. 2013. *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. Revised and expanded edition. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Nestle, M. 2015. *Soda Politics: Taking on Big Soda (and Winning)*. Oxford University Press, New York.

World Health Organization 2015. *Guideline: Sugars Intake for Adults and Children*. WHO. Geneva, http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/149782/1/9789241549028_eng.pdf

Websites

Canada's Guidelines for Healthy Eating: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index_e.html

Codex Alimentarius (FAO/WHO Food Standards): www.codexalimentarius.net/web/index_en.jsp

Dietary Guidelines for Americans: www.health.gov/DietaryGuidelines/

Dietary Guidelines for Australians: www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/dietsyn.htm

Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)—Nutrition and Consumer Protection: www.fao.org/ag/agn/index_en.stm

Food Guides by Country: www.fao.org/ag/agn/nutrition/education_guidelines_country_en.stm

Food Politics: www.foodpolitics.com/

Food Standards Australia New Zealand: www.foodstandards.gov.au

United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA): www.fda.gov

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CHAPTER 6

FOOD LABELLING: AN INFORMATION BATTLEFIELD

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OVERVIEW

- › In what ways do food labels play a role in promoting trust and accountability in the food system?
- › How do symbols on food labels serve to support social identity or stigma?
- › What factors have facilitated or limited changes in regulation of nutrition information on food labels?

The food label is a key form of communication; it tells consumers about the food they have purchased, its quality, authenticity, beneficial qualities and potential health impacts. Its role is to confirm trust in the product, through signifying accountability for honest trading and assurance of safety. The food label is also symbolic. It can serve to communicate wider food system factors, to reinforce social identity and to act as a focal point for social stigma. Nutrition labelling has increased in prominence, and also in function. It is moving from passive

information provision to being considered an intervention to address the challenges of chronic illnesses. The rise in nutrition labelling has occurred concurrently with significant changes in economic policies, increased power of global food companies and changing roles of governments and governance. The food label is now a highly contested space that reflects the authority and power structures and forces within society.

KEY TERMS

accountability
agri-food
empty signifier
front-of-pack labelling
health claims
social identity
social norms
stigma
symbol
values-based labelling

Introduction

The food label is a finite space faced with an ever increasing demand to contain ever more information. It is one of the most highly valued and sought after communication channels in the marketplace. It is also a highly contested space with competing pressures from consumers and food suppliers, a competition which demands of government a more strategic approach to food labelling policy.

(Blewett et al. 2011, p. iii)

Espousing the qualities and points of differentiation of food products has always been part of the exchange or procurement of food, and a core activity in all societies. The seller or provider describes the food according to its freshness, quality, special properties or uniqueness, while the purchaser or recipient makes judgments based on the food's appearance, their personal requirements, relative 'cost' or other quality attributes. With the advent of food packaging, the 'buyer' has become more reliant on the information and representations on the packaging or label, the selling points identified by the food manufacturer, as well as prior experience of purchasing. Mass production, transport and sale of packaged food have become ubiquitous around the world, and so too have food labels and the array of promises and information they contain.

It is important to keep the size of food manufacture and trade in perspective. They are both big business, which places the food label into a prime position of economic power. In Australia, food exports were valued at \$31.8 billion in 2012–13, with 1.6 million people employed in the food industry and farm fisheries, while total food production was worth \$42.8 billion (Department of Agriculture 2014). The food industry association states that food and grocery manufacturing comprises almost one-third of manufacturing in Australia, and is worth \$119 billion (Australian Food & Grocery Council and Ernst & Young 2015). Within this massive economic environment, the food label is core, as it communicates with the purchaser and thus facilitates business.

As trade in food has grown, there has been a greater separation and distance between food grower or manufacturer and the purchaser of the food. This has resulted in greater reliance on non-personal forms to communicate the attributes of the food product, making food label and marketing strategies critically important. Initially the door-to-door salesperson would verbally reinforce the food label information in their sales activities. Such marketing was quickly overtaken by various forms of mass communication, starting with radio and television, then environmental signage (billboards and the sides of buildings and buses), and more recently with the Internet and social media.

The purchaser or procurer of food has also developed along with social change, and the attributes sought from foods are complex. The primary premise of safe food remains—with strong overtones of nurturing—nourishing, 'good for you' and health-promoting (from a variety of perspectives). Added to these premises are other qualities of foods that reflect the diversity of our social structures. People seek foods with qualities that reflect social position and identities, religious beliefs, cultural background, commitments to environmental or social justice values, nationalist sentiments, forms of technology and personal ethical values. Overarching concerns about budget, convenience, personal flavour preferences and organoleptic properties remain. The food label needs to communicate this array of attributes in a manner that is meaningful and understandable by the consumer.

With greater complexity within societies come competing perspectives. This is also true of the role and importance of the food label. At one level it provides information to enable

people to nourish themselves so as to undertake day-to-day tasks and maximise their growth, development and wellbeing. However, with greater expectations regarding the attributes of foods and the various roles that food plays in people's lives comes differences of opinion about food label information. Views differ about information priorities, who and what to trust, roles and responsibilities of different agents, and where accountabilities lie.

Food labels act as a vehicle to reflect or mediate stigmatising attitudes and result in unintended social responses, as has been the case with 'halal' labelling of foods resulting in social backlash and outcries (Thomsen 2014). Whether people can even read or understand the food label and its information is important to consider, as many in the community are illiterate, innumerate or speak English as a second language. Thus, those of the dominant language in the community have their interests dominate the food label. As identified by Neal Blewett in his foreword to the extensive review of food labelling law and policy in Australia (shown at the beginning of this chapter), the label is 'a highly contested space' (Blewett et al. 2011, p. iii).

In this chapter we will explore several key areas relating to food labels. First, the focus will be on some community-oriented issues, including the concepts of trust and **accountability**, **social identity** and food label **symbols**, and the potential of the label to reinforce **stigmas**. Second, the roles of government will be analysed, including how roles vary in response to community values, economic agendas and increasing recognition of the food label as a legitimate vehicle to support public health initiatives. Finally, two food labelling case studies will be presented: nutrition and health-related claims and **front-of-pack labelling**. Through these case studies, the intersections between community, government and the non-government sector will be explored.

Community and food labelling

Trust and accountability

A very early aspect of food labelling was in relation to accountability for true representation of the food and to prevent adulteration and subsequent harm to the consumer. Foods needed to be presented in a truthful manner and not mislead the customer. Early 'labels' were imprints in the product (the baker's name or initials imprinted in a loaf of bread), an indication of the weight (measure) of the product or a name that reflected the region of origin (most commonly applied to wines).

Such matters were focused on ensuring accountability in the trade transaction—customers should receive the product they thought they were buying and should not be adversely affected by consuming it.

Currently, products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin use a symbol as a geographic indicator (GI) (World Intellectual Property Organization 2016).

The issue of trust in the food transaction remains a fundamental issue for food labelling today. Maintaining trust can be far more complex in its execution and may affect thousands or millions of people, as was the case when it was revealed that meat products in the United Kingdom labelled 'beef' contained up to 100% horsemeat. Consumers were outraged, and their trust in the food production system—as presented to them via the label information—plummeted (see Box 6.1).

BOX 6.1 HORSEMEAT SCANDAL

In 2013, British food inspectors found that meat patties labelled as beef contained horsemeat, in some cases up to 100% of the product. The issue is one of mislabelling—people were deceived when they purchased the product. In addition, the products were sold to schools and other institutions. The discovery prompted countries in Europe to also test their beef products—and many were found to contain horsemeat. Sixteen European countries were affected.

The issue of mislabelled meat changed from an isolated case of customer deception to a symbol of a broken food system. Consumers felt deceived. They were asking, 'If manufacturers are substituting horsemeat for beef and "getting away with it", what else is happening to "our" food that we don't know?' It highlighted that people really did not know what was in their food or where it came from.

To further complicate the issue, while consumption of horsemeat per se was not a food safety issue as long as it has gone through the correct testing processes—as people in many countries eat horsemeat—horsemeat can contain the veterinary drug phenylbutazone, which can have negative impacts on human health. There was potential for the 'safe' beef product to be 'unsafe' horsemeat, and people's trust in the information provided on the food label was shaken further. In the UK, consumers' trust in the food industry dropped by a quarter, as measured by a consumer poll soon after the event (*Which?* 2013).

Food production systems are now very complex with integrated market chains, concentrated ownership structures, a wide range of food retail outlets and high use of technology. Balancing the power and responsibilities within the food system is a question of accountability (Kjaernes et al. 2006). The role the food label plays within this complex scenario is unclear—but from the consumer perspective it is the most important point of contact with the food system.

The food label is the point of accountability from the food manufacturer or retailer for a quality product, as well as being the government's responsibility to safeguard the health of its constituents. In this manner, the food label could be considered as an '**empty signifier**': a nodal point that is both universal in scope but is given meaning by the particular elements it stands in relation to. An empty signifier can be used for multiple purposes, depending on the power struggle between social entities (Wrangel 2015). In the example of the horsemeat substitution, the food label projected that the food was safe for human consumption and comprised certain elements. When this was found not to be the case, the context changed and the food label took on the role of identifying the untrustworthy—the implicated brands—and, by implication, became the symbol of a broken and untrustworthy or unhealthy food system (Tesseris 2016). The marketing term 'brand loyalty' or consumer brand identification can be considered the positive version of the label as signifier, but new research also explores the concept of consumer brand de-identification, noting that brands can simultaneously attract and repulse consumers (Wolter et al. 2016). Clearly each consumer is placing the label information into their own context, so the product takes on different significance. Thus both the personal and the wider environmental elements are important to understanding the role of the food label and how it conveys meaning to the consumer.

Symbols and social identity

Within societies, groups form around shared values and often use symbols to strengthen their allegiances. Symbols can be considered to have both a face value and a hidden value. At face value, a symbol on a food label may communicate specific information about the product; for example,

its contents ('apple pie'), where it was manufactured ('made in ...') or its relevance to the customer ('ready to eat'). A hidden value or credibility of a symbol can be very powerful in conveying overall perceived quality of the product, which may align with a person's beliefs (Carpenter & Larceneux 2008). For example, 'Fair trade' symbols align with personal beliefs about trade inequities, support for poor farmers and alleviation of poverty. This credibility may be undermined if there is lack of consensus between experts about the quality of the products or their regulation. When the symbols are managed by one independent and trusted third party, the symbol conveys a high level of credibility (Balineau & Dufeu 2010). The Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), a well recognised and respected organisation in Australia, introduced the 'RSPCA Approved Farming' symbol because they believed 'people can eat meat or eggs and still care about the welfare of the animals that provide it' (RSPCA 2015).

Symbols are increasingly being used on food labels. At a broad level symbols may represent wider societal values to which groups align and signify product differentiation. There are numerous examples of symbols on food labels. The earlier reference to geographic indicators (GI) is one example, as the symbols used by different regions clearly aim to claim particular qualities that distinguish the product, be it a wine from the Barossa Valley in South Australia (perceived as a quality wine-making district) or a cheese from King Island in Tasmania (where special climatic conditions are claimed to contribute to its award-winning cheeses). By itself, a GI symbol might not be sufficient to convey the full message of differentiation, but when accompanied by an explanation or other contextual information GI symbols have been shown to influence purchasing (Carpenter & Larceneux 2008).

Symbols can be used by groups to challenge the status quo within the **agri-food** system and society more widely. **Values-based labelling** uses symbols to distinguish a product on quality as well as on values. 'Dolphin-friendly' symbols indicate a move away from mainstream fishing methods that are considered harmful to dolphins, such as use of drift gill nets to catch tuna. 'Fair Trade' symbols indicate that the food has been produced and marketed in a manner that is in partnership with the farmers to provide fairer prices and additional support (Fairtrade Australia New Zealand 2014). The Fair Trade symbol thus reflects a value of greater social justice as well as a challenge to the dominance of the mainstream suppliers of that product. Elizabeth Barham (2002) argued that such values-based labelling not only reinforced pre-existing **social norms** but also proposed new social norms—Barham used the example of labelling to support animal welfare and rights—and as such was a political process (Barham 2002).

Values-based labelling, with the potentially dual roles of reinforcing and proposing new social norms, is not without its problems. For many years consumers were supportive of 'organic' labelling, seeking to use their food purchase choices to influence the food system away from using chemicals in food production, while at the same time anticipating superior taste and health benefits. However, the drive behind the 'organic' symbol was strongly influenced by commercial interests, particularly organic farmers wanting to differentiate their product. Disagreements and competition between these commercial interests led to variations in interpretation, governance and use of different symbols (including variations in terms and production processes), use of a variety of symbols and terms around the same issue, and ultimately resulted in fracturing public support for the message (Blewett et al. 2011). Uncertainty about the meaning of *organic* and its various symbols undermined consumer confidence in other related symbols, such as 'free range', 'cage-free', or 'pasture raised' chickens (Oaklander & Hamilton 2015).

Health organisations have also used symbols on food labels to challenge the status quo. The Heart Foundation in Australia and several other countries used the 'Tick' symbol to differentiate

products that met improved nutrient profiles for different product categories—for example, lower saturated fat, lower salt or lower kilojoules. Consumers had a high level of trust in the Heart Foundation and selected foods based on the Tick symbol, sharing their values of choosing healthier food products (Young & Swinburn 2002). The use of the Tick symbol was clearly directed at the status quo of food manufacturers, challenging them to modify their products or be considered unhealthy by consumers. With a change in the governance of food labelling to include a government-led front-of-pack regulation, the Tick was retired in 2015 after being used by the Heart Foundation for 26 years (Heart Foundation 2015).

Stigma

Use of symbols on food labels can have differing consequences, depending on the wider social environment. At the product level, marketers are very aware that certain symbols may serve to stigmatise their food product. The case of labelling for genetically modified (GM) components provides an example of stigmatisation. In the USA, GM components in foods were classified as 'generally regarded as safe' (GRAS) and were treated no differently to traditional food sources. The USA led the development of GM foods, and they became ubiquitous in the US food supply. GM components in foods are not required to be listed on the food label in the USA (US Senate 2015). However, attempts to introduce GM foods into other countries such as the European Union (EU) and Australia have been met with community resistance and different regulatory approaches. Strict labelling regulations were introduced in the EU in 2003 to support informed consumer choice and traceability of GM components if unforeseen issues arose in the future (European Union 2003). In Australia, food containing GM components above a certain level must include a declaration on the food label (Food Standards Australia New Zealand 2013).

Food marketers in the USA are concerned about labelling their products as containing GM components, partly because of the cost involved in tracing the origins of all food components, but also due to the stigma now associated with the GM label. Pam Ellen and Paula Bone (2008) applied stigma theory to the labelling of GM food products and found that such labelling significantly influenced three primary dimensions of stigma: negativity of the mark, deviance and undesirability, and perceived risk (Ellen & Bone 2008).

The power of symbols on a food label should not be underestimated; they have the ability to support social cohesion, as well as the power to challenge power structures or precipitate social divides. Unanticipated market backlashes have occurred when manufacturers have instigated the use of a symbol on their food label, perceiving it to be a market advantage, only for it to become the target of antagonistic market segments. One example of this is foods labelled and promoted to depict halal foods—foods deemed as acceptable for people of Islamic faith to consume. Such labelling reflects the marketers' anticipation of increases in their market share based on the significant numbers of Muslim consumers interested in products that comply with their religious requirements. However, such labelling has provided a focal point for existing prejudices, resulting in significant backlash, especially via social media and with, in some instances, significant impact on commercial contracts. The Fleurieu Milk and Yoghurt Company of South Australia discontinued the process of obtaining Halal certification for some of its products—as well as a lucrative contract to supply Emirates Airlines—following a social media backlash from anti-Islamic groups (Roberts 2014). The halal symbol, while it is an attraction to people sharing Islamic beliefs, also became a target for racist groups with shared anti-Islamic beliefs. The food label became a focal point where contemporary social tensions were enacted.

Roles and responses of governments

Roles of governments regarding food labelling

As identified by Neal Blewett in his report on food labelling law and policy (Blewett et al. 2011), the **role of government** in relation to food labelling requires a strategic approach that acknowledges the competing pressures from consumers and food suppliers, as well as from within government itself. At the core of this strategic approach are the views of what constitutes an appropriate role of government. These views vary both between citizen groups and economic players, and also within those groups. At one level, the role of government is to safeguard sound economic practices by preventing fraud and deception. Early food label actions by government focused on this role, with medieval governments acting to regulate sales of basic food commodities such as bread and wine on the basis of quality, differential costs based on quality indicators and the prevention of deception—for example, substituting inferior ingredients (Moore 2001). This government role served to both safeguard the interests of the purchaser and to ensure fair trade.

In many ways, these transaction-related roles have remained the primary food labelling remit of governments, but additional demands and expectations have been placed upon them. Citizens' health was of concern to governments when it regulated poor commercial practices, such as adulteration, adding ingredients that could cause harm, or high-risk food preparation (including food manufacturing) practices—in other words: food safety matters. The role of government was to ensure commercial processes ran smoothly, including the minimisation of immediate risk.

This risk-minimisation role has been debated and expanded in response to the evolving food production system. Greater complexities are now involved in agriculture, food manufacture and transport. Consumer expectations of access to information about foods they purchase have expanded. Societal views of risks to health mitigated through food now encompass longer-term chronic illness, as well as risks from contamination or food-borne illness. The acute allergic reactions some people have to certain foods and food ingredients, such as peanuts or gluten, have required their declaration on the food label to minimise specific risks of harm. Food manufacturing and production processes have changed and, in some instances, a labelling response has occurred, such as declaration of pasteurisation, irradiation or genetic modification. Additionally, citizen groups are calling on governments to step in and respond to their demands for values-based information on which to make food choices—for example, country of origin of the food.

Labelling and the changing role(s) of governments: Labelling logic review

The expanding expectations of governments in relation to governance of the food label have been responded to in ad hoc ways and with varying responses, resulting in confusing arrays of food standards, consumer protection laws and food manufacturing guidelines. One attempt to try to bring some order to understanding and responding to the food labelling role of government was undertaken in Australia in 2009 when an independent panel was appointed to review food labelling law and policy (Blewett 2011). In undertaking its task, the Panel needed to explore the role of the food label within society, the public controversies over food, and how the competing interests of communities, industries, marketers and governments were reflected in this finite space.

The *Labelling Logic* report recommended a hierarchy of issues for the government to consider in determining food labelling policy, one that reflected the government's responsibility primarily to protect people's health, followed by other issues such as honest representation of the food product,

and supporting consumers to make informed food choices, as shown in Figure 6.1. The Panel identified an array of technological and values-driven areas on food labels but decided that it was not the government's responsibility to mandate or 'govern' such aspects of food label information—rather, they should be left to 'market forces'. If market forces or industry self-regulation were not effective, then the government role would be to regulate the issue within a legislated framework.

FIGURE 6.1 Food labelling hierarchy



Source: Reproduced with permission of the Australian Government Department of Health.

Labelling Logic clearly articulated a view of the role of government to oversee labelling directed at the health of individuals and communities, in terms of health protection (minimising risks associated with handling, preparing and consuming foods); aiding individual decision-making; and facilitating structural change to help consumers make healthy choices across populations (preventative health).

This Australian Government report, in taking a specific view, is rare, and such a view is not common across sectors, between countries or even within governments. Industry-oriented sectors generally consider that governments should have a minimal or no role in mandating information requirements on food labels, believing that it should be left to market forces and industry self-regulation. In contrast, many consumer groups expect governments to require greater disclosure of information on food labels related to nutrients perceived to impact on health (such as disclosure of the amount of trans fat or palm oil), or to mandate standard definitions for commonly used terms (such as 'organic') to reduce misleading or confusing practices.

Government regulation of food labels varies significantly between countries. Some countries may impose particular 'values-based' standards to reflect community sentiment, such as the vegetarian labelling requirements in India, which is a predominantly Hindu country, many of whom are vegetarian (Indian Government 2011). Such regulations are possible when most food trade is within a country.

As global trade in food has become stronger, an international approach to food labelling has become more common, resulting in a convergence of regulation. The international food code, *Codex Alimentarius* (Codex) of international food standards, guidelines and codes of practice, was established in 1963 by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to harmonise international food standards and facilitate international food trade (World Health Organization and Food and Agriculture Organization nd). The Codex primarily

reflects a more traditional, commerce-related approach to food labelling rather than the values-based principles increasingly being demanded by community groups and citizens. For example:

General [food labelling] principle 3.1: Prepackaged food shall not be described or presented on any label or in any labelling in a manner that is false, misleading or deceptive or is likely to create an erroneous impression regarding its character in any respect. (Food and Agriculture Organization 2001, p. 3)

The creation of the Codex was one of the first steps towards regulatory convergence among national governments. One purpose of the Codex was to provide a set of agreed, well-researched standards for countries with limited resources for developing their own food labelling regulations. An additional outcome of the presence of the Codex was the convergence of regulations. Individual countries' food standards legislation increasingly focus on the same key matters and utilise similar approaches, resulting in a certain level of uniformity around the globe.

One ramification of the development of an international code of food standards is the diminution of a country's autonomy and accountabilities to their own citizens, as governments are obliged to consider consistency with the Codex, and to legally justify any variations from it. The importance of this code was strengthened in the 1990s when it became a reference point to resolve trade disputes under international law (Food and Agriculture Organization nd). Increasing accountability of governments to global obligations is occurring in many fields of society. Following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, governments became very focused on their regulatory roles and a high degree of convergence occurred as financial regulations were strengthened and also made more consistent with the global trade environment (Turner 2012). Regulatory convergence has also been observed following incidents of food-borne illnesses that affect many countries (Lindner 2008). As societies have become more urbanised, facing similar challenges in terms of food provisioning and transport, there is a need for packaged and safe foods. There is also increasing similarity in health profiles across countries that reflect modern societal pressures. Food regulatory needs are likely to become more similar, including governments' approaches to food labelling.

As the influence of global trade issues on government practices has become stronger, the traditional roles of government have become less clear. The institutional system involving *Codex Alimentarius* has been operating for many decades to provide guidance and benchmarks against which national governments can determine their legislative power to develop food labelling standards. Other mechanisms are now being established that will influence food-labelling actions by governments. Free trade agreements between two countries or between blocks of countries are starting to exert their influence. Of particular concern to many citizen groups is the Investor–State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clause built into many trade agreements. This clause allows companies to sue governments if they bring in regulations that may impact on that company's capacity to trade across national borders (Townsend 2013). This is the clause that has the most potential to impact on food labelling. In Australia, the legislation demanding plain packaging of cigarettes has already been challenged through such a mechanism and, if the company is successful, the Australian Government may be liable for hefty fines (Australian Government Attorney-General's Department nd). Governments will become more wary of introducing food labelling legislation that may have a positive public health impact—for example, mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling—because of the potential threat of litigation. Many citizen groups consider this process a very real challenge to the sovereignty of governments and their capacity to introduce food-labelling (and other) legislation that could serve the public good or reflect their citizens' values.

Consideration of governments' roles in relation to food labels requires consideration of wider policy changes and how these changes may impact on the basic relationships between governments and their citizens.

The rise of neoliberal economics and label information

The food label has been used by manufacturers to extol the qualities of their food products, ranging from freshness, location of origin, special attributes or health benefits. This label-based information informs the potential purchaser of the food's attributes to encourage them to buy the product. Since the 1990s, the growing strength of the market economy, neoliberal economic policies and the opening up of trade borders have encouraged governments to focus generally on reducing prescriptive regulation to facilitate trade and reduce the costs required for governments to monitor and enforce such regulations. Food regulation has been a particular focus, with the mantra of 'minimum effective regulation' underpinning food regulation policies. Box 6.2 outlines the evolution of food standards in Australia, and provides an example of the power of the market to influence regulatory processes.

BOX 6.2 THE EVOLUTION OF FOOD STANDARDS AGENCIES IN AUSTRALIA SINCE 1991

The National Food Authority (NFA) was established in Australia in 1991. Food legislation is a state responsibility under the Australian constitution and each state had its own processes to develop and enforce food standards. Up until 1991, food products sold within Australia had to comply with the different food standards of states and territories, including labelling requirements. This situation was becoming untenable for food industries who wanted to trade across state borders, so the NFA was created to streamline the development of Australian food standards. In recognition of the high level of trade between Australia and New Zealand, New Zealand then joined Australia's food standards processes, with the formation of the Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) in 1996, renamed in 2001 as Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ).

In 1998 one of the first international trade agreements was established between Australia and New Zealand: the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Agreement (TTMRA), which allowed for legal recognition of certain regulations of the other country, including food regulations. Foods that met the food standards in New Zealand could automatically be sold in Australia and vice versa. One consequence in relation to food trade was the immediate importation of energy and sports drinks into Australia. Such foods were legal under New Zealand's food regulations but had been restricted from sale in Australia where the food fortification regulations were more restrictive. With the introduction of joint food standards across both countries in 2001, regulation of energy and sports drinks was included—and they have subsequently become ubiquitous in Australia.

Underpinning the neoliberal economic rhetoric is the principle that consumers can make informed choices about the products they buy, and thus there should not be a requirement for government intervention in the form of prescriptive regulations that serve to 'protect' consumer interests. However, being able to make informed choices requires access to information in a form that is understandable to the consumer. The rise in neoliberal economic policies resulted in an increased focus on the consumer's right to know. One of the underlying principles of FSANZ (and of its predecessors NFA and ANZFA) is that it is legally required when developing food standards to consider the provision of adequate information that will allow consumers to make informed choices.

The rise of nutrition-related food labelling

The review of Australian and New Zealand food regulations commenced in 1996 and resulted in the current framework for food standards, including a range of mandatory requirements for information on the food label. Until then, the mandatory food label information primarily reflected food safety matters (for example, use-by dates and storage instructions) and commercial matters (product name, ingredient list, manufacturer or importer contact details). Inclusion of nutrition information was voluntary unless a nutritional claim was being made. New mandatory information introduced in 2001 had an increased focus on nutrition- and health-related information, including the nutrition information panel and the presence of allergens. More extensive information regarding the representation of the food (the label needed to declare the amount of key or identifying ingredients, such as the percentage of apple in an apple pie) was also mandated. These requirements for information focused on providing information on the food label in a standardised manner, so that consumers could meaningfully compare products.

Following the introduction of the mandatory nutrition information panel on food labels in Australia, the role of the food label in relation to public health came under greater consideration. Consumers and citizen groups have increasing expectations for access to information about the health-related qualities of foods (Pollard et al. 2013). One response has been to empower people to effectively use food label information for health decision-making through apps for use on mobile devices such as the Food Switch App (The George Institute nd). Developed in Australia, the Food Switch App is now available in major countries around the world, reflecting global consumer interest in food label information in an accessible form. Governments have also been grappling with the potential of food labels to address the challenges of reducing the social and economic costs to communities of food-related chronic diseases and conditions, such as diabetes and overweight and obesity (Card 2013). Fundamental to considering the role of the food label in relation to public health are the evolving social understandings of the roles of the different key groups within society—government, citizens and economic interests—and their agency in moulding the institutions of governance.

Nutrition and health-related claims

The area of food label information that deals with nutrition and health-related claims provides an illustration of the conflicting demands on the food label and how it is governed. Food manufacturers aim to differentiate their products, often promoting special health-related qualities or attributes that appeal to particular market segments. Consumers want information about the foods they purchase, but in a form that they can understand and use to make informed choices to maximise their health outcomes or to help manage chronic illness. Governments fundamentally have a role to regulate the provision of information to ensure it is accurate and not misleading. However, there are a number of related issues that form part of the deliberations around nutrition and health-related claims, as outlined in Box 6.3.

Not only are regulatory principles contested but so are the processes of developing food label policies and regulations. To what extent should economic interests be involved in decision-making about the policies and regulations that will govern them? Is this a conflict of interest? Or is it necessary to ensure the resulting regulation is feasible to implement? As identified by Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization, 'In the view of WHO, the formulation of health policies must be protected from distortion by commercial or vested interests' (Chan 2013). Similarly, to what extent should citizens be involved in the processes? Or are they considered not to possess the competence or necessary technical understandings to engage fully

BOX 6.3 NUTRITION- AND HEALTH-RELATED CLAIMS: POINTS TO CONSIDER

Governance of fair trading, or protection of the citizens' health?

Are nutrition- and health-related claims just a form of information provision about the food product? Or do consumers respond to the claims as if they are health advice, and what are the risks in them doing so—such as ignoring or not seeking advice from health professionals? If the latter, do governments have a role in protecting consumers (Marks 2011)?

Representation of food

Does more information on food labels assist or limit making informed food choices?

Do nutrition and **health claims** on food labels reinforce public health advice, such as Dietary Guidelines, or is their proliferation actually confusing consumers (Hasler 2008)?

Legitimacy and privileging of knowledge

Whose knowledge is considered legitimate, and how is this governed?

How can consumers gauge the veracity of nutritional claims? How has the judgment been made regarding the truthfulness and accuracy of information? What evidence is considered legitimate? Does industry self-regulate or does government intervene?

What is the role of government: reactive, neutral or proactive?

Should (or could) governments prohibit nutrition- and health-related claims? Is the role of government just to manage fair transactions or check the appropriate scientific evidence base for the claims? Or do governments now consider information on food labels as an effective mechanism for public health intervention in its role to prevent and manage chronic illness? (Philipson 2005)

in the deliberations (Rothstein 2007)? For further details regarding the evolution of the current food standards relating to nutrition- and health-related claims in Australia, refer to Mariotti et al. 2010 and the FSANZ website (Food Standards Australia New Zealand 2014).

Front-of-pack food labelling

A second case study on food labelling, front-of-pack labelling in Australia, illustrates the tensions involved in governance of the food label reflective of contemporary socio-political dynamics within countries (Blewett et al. 2011). It provides a positive—though some would argue not perfect—food labelling outcome. The *Labelling Logic* review made several recommendations regarding front-of-pack food labelling. Two recommendations specific to front-of-pack labelling were:

- **Recommendation 50:** That an interpretative front-of-pack labelling system be developed that is reflective of a comprehensive Nutrition Policy and agreed public health priorities.
- **Recommendation 51:** That a multiple traffic lights front-of-pack labelling system be introduced. Such a system to be voluntary in the first instance, except where general or high level health claims are made or equivalent endorsements/trade names/marks appear on the label, in which case it should be mandatory (Blewett et al. 2011, p. 13).

Key elements of these recommendations were that the front-of-pack system should be reflective of public health policy and priorities; interpretative so as to be meaningful to the purchaser (not just presenting factual information); use a specific style of labelling (traffic lights was recommended); and it was to be voluntary, except when the product was being positioned on health grounds, when it was to be mandatory.

Preceding and then concurrently with the food labelling review deliberations, the Australian Food and Grocery Council (2006) developed and implemented a specific front-of-pack system, a Daily Intake Guide, which was depicted as a 'thumbnail' on the food label. This front-of-pack labelling system presented in a visual form the nutrition information already required on the label within the Nutrition Information Panel. By the time the *Labelling Logic* report was submitted and deliberated on by governments, there were many thousands of food products presenting thumbnails on their labels. This strategy could be considered a 'pre-emptive' strike by the food industry, introducing a self-governed and already implemented front-of-pack label system as a *fait accompli*, thus challenging governments' need to introduce a new system. It is interesting to note that the Daily Intake Guide was introduced in November 2006 (Australian Food and Grocery Council 2006), immediately after the Food Regulation Ministerial Council announced its intention in October 2006 to explore a policy to guide the development of a front-of-pack food labelling system (Australia New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council 2006).

The Australian Government responded to the *Labelling Logic* review recommendations by supporting Recommendation 50, to develop an interpretative front-of-pack labelling system (Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation 2011). They did not support subsequent recommendations relating to the front-of-pack, arguing that the system needed to be developed first prior to implementation strategies being determined. Nor did they agree that a multiple traffic light system was necessarily the preferred system and they set about reviewing different approaches and ultimately developing a new, health star rating system (Australian Government nd).

The Australian Government's decision to develop a new interpretative front-of-pack system set the stage for the different interest groups to try to exert influence. Various committees were established, comprising food industry, government, public health and consumer representatives. The government wanted to have everyone at the table to ensure that the agreed system would have public relevance, support public health priorities and be accepted by and feasible for industry to implement (Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation 2011). However, the process was not necessarily a smooth one. The public health and consumer groups had to agree, along with other compromises, that a traffic light system (their preferred option and supported at the time by scientific evidence) was not going to be introduced and that the new system would not be mandatory. Industry had to agree that an interpretative system would be the official system, not their Daily Intake Guide. Even when the 'agreed' system was first put to the Ministerial Council (renamed the Food Regulation Forum) in June 2013, there was an immediate negative response from the peak food industry groups even though they had been involved in the committee discussions and had signed their support for the proposed system (*Packaging News* 2013).

Work continued on the system but controversy erupted when the Department of Health opened the Health Star System's website, as had been agreed by the committees, in February 2014. Within a few hours the website was closed down. In the subsequent days and weeks there was much media scrutiny about why the website was closed in such mysterious circumstances. It was revealed that the same food industry representative who had responded negatively the previous year to the health star system had personally contacted the Minister's office and indicated that, in his view, it was premature to open the website (Boothroyd 2014). It was also revealed that the Minister's chief advisor had personal financial interests in food companies, against the conditions of his appointment, and he subsequently resigned (Corderoy 2014). One of the consequences of this tumultuous period was much greater public scrutiny of the government's actions in relation to the front-of-pack system. The final Health Star System was accepted by the Food Regulation Forum in June 2014, the website was launched in December 2014 and the Health Stars are being used on food labelling in Australia and New Zealand as a voluntary system. See Figure 6.2.

FIGURE 6.2 Health star food labelling

Source: Reproduced with permission of the Australian Government Department of Health.

An interpretative front-of-pack labelling system is an important development in the role of government. Such labelling provides a 'value-based' symbol supported and enforced by government. The 'value' is evidence-based nutrition guidance consistent with the Australian Dietary Guidelines (NHMRC). As an interpretative system, it provides judgments about the relative benefits of different food products. It aims to steer customer choice in a certain, more healthy, direction and to influence food manufacturers to produce healthier food products so that they can gain or maintain their competitive advantage. However, it is also a symbol of inclusion (official dietary guidance) and, by default, one of exclusion. It does not provide other information about foods that may be considered by some as health related, such as sustainability, as has occurred in Sweden (Swedish National Food Agency 2015) and Norway (Nordic Council of Ministries 2014).

The role of governments in relation to food labelling reflects wider structures of society. Governments act to ensure the efficient operation of the market, in a manner that reflects dominant societal interests, and to protect the health of its citizens. Regulation of nutrition-related health information on the food label serves to monitor the accuracy of the information provided to ensure that trade is not fraudulent. Interpretative nutrition information, now accepted as a legitimate role of food label regulation, functions to 'encourage' or 'steer' food manufacturers in a particular direction. While such interpretative food label regulations remain voluntary, food manufacturers can choose to participate if they consider such food label information will provide a competitive advantage. Should any government propose that an interpretative food label system be made mandatory, food industries might call on the wider powers of global trade agreements to challenge government authority to do so. This will challenge the sovereignty of countries and their ability to act to protect the interests of their citizens. The food label is truly a highly contested space that reflects the authority, power structures and forces within a society.

Conclusion

The food label, modest in size, is clearly more than a source of information about food. It depicts and reflects social values, confirms social identity and aids in decision-making. Its modest dimensions belie its key strategic position at the juncture of economic, consumer, citizen, public health and government interests. The key forces in our global society use the food label as an information battlefield.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- The traditional role of a government around food labelling is to facilitate fair trade and to protect citizens from fraud and food safety risk.
- Consideration of a hierarchy of health and community values issues has now been added to a government's role to control the food label.
- Symbols on food labels can have positive roles to reinforce and support social identity, but they may also focus social stigma by others.
- Nutrition labelling of foods has increased as a reflection of increasing societal and government concerns, reflecting changes in government regulatory roles arising from changing economic policies.
- Nutrition labelling of foods has increased in scope, from passive information provision to proactive, interpretative communication.
- The food label reflects social and political debates. It is the public face of issues of governance, privilege and social identity.

Sociological reflection

Using actual or online food packages, identify four different symbols or representations on the label that reflect health or other social values. For each symbol, discuss its role in conveying trust in the food product; its role in confirming a social identity (i.e. what type of person would identify with this symbol or food?); and whether the government (or another organisation) has a role in regulating this symbol.

Discussion questions

- 1 What are the symbols or information on food packages that you look for when purchasing food? Why are these important to you?
- 2 What is the range of social values that are depicted on the food label? Whose or which social values are not depicted, and why do you think this is the case?
- 3 Is there too much information on food labels? Give your reasons.
- 4 Why is there convergence in governments' approaches to regulation of food labels?
- 5 What are the arguments for and against the prohibition of health claims on food labels?
- 6 How can citizens act to ensure that food labels reflect their needs for information on which to make informed food choices?

Further investigation

- 1 Organic labelling of food should be regulated by government. Discuss this from consumer, organic food manufacturer and government perspectives.
- 2 Discuss how the food label serves to reinforce social differences within societies and globally.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

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- Food Standards Australia New Zealand: www.foodstandards.gov.au
- Health Star Rating System: www.healthstarrating.gov.au/internet/healthstarrating/publishing.nsf/content/home

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PART 3

FOOD CULTURE: CONSUMPTION AND IDENTITY

Like cannibalism, a matter of taste.

G. K. Chesterton

When you don't have any money, the problem is food. When you do have money, it's sex. When you have both, it's health.

J. P. Donleavy, *The Ginger Man* (1955)

Certainly these days, when I hear people talking about temptation and sin, guilt and shame, I know they're referring to food rather than sex.

Carol Sternhell, quoted in Rothblum (1994, p. 53)

The chapters in Part 3 of this book are concerned with the role that food consumption plays in the processes of social differentiation and personal identity. People use their consumption practices based around food and alcoholic beverages to convey their membership of a particular social group. This consumption can symbolise social status, class, ethnic heritage, religious beliefs or lifestyle choice. Historical sociology perspectives highlight how these factors have developed over time, and how they have changed—and been changed by—food practices.

The abundance of food as a commodity in developed countries means that food manufacturers and retailers use various means to increase consumption. The food industry spends significant amounts of money in food advertising and sponsorship to continuously and persuasively encourage people to enjoy the full pleasures of food consumption. Consumers have embraced this trend, and the last decade has seen the rise of celebrity chef, each with their own restaurants, recipe books, online presence and television shows. Enjoyment of alcohol, and in particular wine, has also been promoted and glorified through the media, while health authorities, with smaller advertising budgets than alcohol companies, try to make consumers aware of the risks associated with over-consumption.

Running counter to this food hedonism trend, disciplining of the body emerged in the late twentieth century. The increasing focus on the body has contributed to 'healthism', an ideology that views health as the primary human goal. Central to this goal is the premise that the body is malleable, and that willpower is all that is needed to change it to the desired shape. The sins of gluttony and sloth have had renewed attention and can be seen in secular attitudes of lipophobia (fear of fat). For some people, particularly women, these attitudes have translated into a lifelong quest for the holy grail of the 'thin ideal', and for men into sometimes dangerous practices in

pursuit of a muscular ideal. Other people face the daily stigma of obesity, where fatism—open prejudice against overweight people—remains widespread. These attitudes are reinforced by the health messages espoused by various health authorities and diet-related industries. Regimes of body control, particularly through the regulation of food intake, are common features of Western culture. The connections between food and the body, in terms of food culture and the social construction of body ideals (and body taboos), are the focus of the final chapters of this book.

Part 3 consists of the following nine chapters, which explore how we use food and drink to symbolise our personal identity and group membership.

- **Chapter 7** explores the historical development of eating in Australia, from the traditional diets of the Indigenous people, through colonisation to modern food practices that have been strongly influenced by changes to the ethnicity of the population. Chapter 7 ends with consideration of how the time pressures of current society cause people to seek convenience in food preparation.
- **Chapter 8** uses the example of the different culinary cultures that Europe is composed of to explore challenges to traditional eating patterns, such as internationalisation and democratisation of eating.
- **Chapter 9** explores the reasons people give for their choice to not eat meat, and how the resultant rise of vegetarianism is a means of both defining the self and a social movement.
- **Chapter 10** examines the social impact of ageing on food habits, social interaction and self-identity. While biology plays some role in nutritional status with ageing, older people are at higher risk of food insecurity for a variety of social reasons, including decreased economic resources, social isolation and lack of support for disability.
- **Chapter 11** explores the continuing role that social class plays in shaping food habits. Considerations of class go beyond measures of education or income, as the foods we choose signify which social group we belong to.
- **Chapter 12** presents a historical sociology of wine in Australia by examining how wine producers, distributors and consumers have shaped regional, national and global tastes for wine.
- **Chapter 13** also focuses on alcohol, but from the perspective of why we drink the way we do, with particular attention to the cultural and structural factors that influence alcohol intake.
- **Chapter 14** explores the gendered nature of eating and the social construction of the thin and muscular ideals in Western societies. Special attention is paid to how women adopt, modify or resist the social pressure, including new evidence emerging from social media of rigid regimes of body management and dieting. Body acceptance is considered as an alternative discourse through which women resist the thin ideal.
- **Chapter 15** provides a sociological analysis of the stigmatisation of people who have obesity, and discusses what strategies people use to cope with a 'fat identity'.

CHAPTER 7

'CHEAPER AND MORE PLENTIFUL THAN IN ENGLAND': A HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN FOOD

Nancy Cushing

OVERVIEW

- › What foods have Australians eaten during the long occupation of the continent?
- › What factors contribute to decisions about eating, and how do they change over time?
- › Is there a single Australian foodway?

Much has been written about what Australians eat and why. The most influential interpretation has been that of Symons (2007) in *One Continuous Picnic*, in which he argued that Australians have consistently preferred portable foods that could be prepared and eaten with a minimum of fuss. By favouring sources informed by what ordinary Australians ate, this chapter will test Symons' proposition and suggest that while it does have

explanatory power, it does not sufficiently account for other aspects of Australian eating. This chapter suggests that economy and plenty have been most valued by Australians in choosing what to eat, at the cost of other aspects such as quality and refinement, but that these general principles have been observed differently, or not at all, by specific individuals and groups according to their own tastes and preferences.

KEY TERMS

colonisation
cuisine
foodways
haute cuisine
rations
vegetarianism

Introduction

Leading food historian Barbara Santich finished her 2012 book, *Bold Palates*, with the conclusion that Australia's food culture is characterised by the reworking of the customs and practices carried by immigrants and promoted by entrepreneurs (increasingly in a wide range of media, from cookbooks to advertising to Instagram) to suit local circumstances. After decades of study in the field, she has found little in Australian food which is entirely new, but much that has been incorporated, reinvented, enjoyed and then discarded in favour of a new borrowing, in an ongoing cycle of renewal. It could be added that this cycle proceeded at differing rates according to class, locality, ethnicity and connectedness with other **foodways** of the particular Australians involved. This conclusion should lift a weight from the minds of many earlier researchers who believed that to understand Australian eating, they had to find the ingredients, the flavours, the cooking techniques or the dishes that were unique to Australia. Freeing the food historian from the 'annoying question' of whether there is a distinctive Australian **cuisine** (Luckins 2013, p. 557), the focus can be shifted onto what it was that people actually ate, why they favoured those foods and what difference it made. Drawing on the evidence of Australian foodways from contemporary accounts, memoirs, statistics and the wealth of writing on this topic by historians, gastronomers, sociologists and nutritionists to address these questions will be the focus of this chapter. An underlying theme is expressed in the words of this chapter's title, which come from a middle-class immigrant of the 1880s, R.E.N. Twopeny. Twopeny wrote, 'Generally speaking, food in Australia is cheaper and more plentiful than in England, but poorer in quality' (1883, p. 62). The privileging of cheap and abundant food over refinement is a consistent theme in Australian food history.

Traditional Indigenous foods

The continent of Australia was peopled from its northern coastline some 50,000 years ago. Over subsequent centuries, the initial seafaring population spread into a wide variety of ecosystems and developed diverse cultures. Although Indigenous Australians are categorised as semi-nomadic, only in the least hospitable desert lands did their food quest require long hours of labour, the covering of large distances and frequent changing of campsites. In areas better provided with food resources, moves were seasonal and some groups in the south-west of Victoria built substantial wood and bark dwellings, with stone foundations, for long-term occupation. Returning to the same places over hundreds of years led to the creation of massive shell middens, some of them nine metres high and a hundred metres long, as shellfish were eaten and the shells discarded, along with bones of animals and fish, charcoal and broken tools (Flood 1999).

The foods eaten by Aboriginal groups varied according to the resources of their country. The Arrernte people of arid Central Australia divide their foods up into *ngkwarle*—honey-like foods, nectar, gum; *merne*—foods from plants; *merne ntange*—seeds; *tyape*—grubs, caterpillars and other insects; and *kere*—meat, fat, offal and blood from animals (Turner & Henderson 1994, p. viii). People living in rainforests, on coastal margins, along inland rivers and in other ecological settings had their own preferred food sources and ways of thinking about them.

For most groups, the bulk of the diet was made up of plant foods and small lizards, grubs, insects, eggs and snakes collected by women and children using digging sticks and other specialist implements. A wide range of edible elements of plants was harvested, including roots, fruit, berries, bulbs and seeds, as well as fungi, gums and nectars. Some, like the seeds of the cycads, which had to be leached of poisons, and nardoo seeds, which were ground to make flour,

required processing before they could be consumed. In the Darling Basin, some 45 different types of seeds were ground and baked into a form of bread from as early as 15,000 years BP (Before Present time) (Farrer 2005, p. 4). No formal agriculture was undertaken, but plants were carefully conserved by removing only the edible portions, and seeds deposited around campsites as plant foods were eaten became convenient sources of future harvests.

Animal foods made up a smaller and more fluctuating proportion of the diet. Debate continues about whether the hunting of megafauna—very large animals that populated Australia until the period when Indigenous people arrived (Roberts & Brook 2010)—led to their extinction, but certainly the largest surviving animals (emus, dugongs, seals, kangaroos and crocodiles) were successfully hunted by Aboriginal men using a variety of spears, boomerangs and nets, as were smaller animals, notably possums, wallabies and the monitor lizards commonly known as goannas. Small prey was cleaned and cooked whole in the ashes of campfires with the skin intact to hold in the juices. Larger animals were cooked in earth ovens lined with heated stones and with coals heaped over the top. Plant materials such as paperbark and fresh gum leaves were used to keep the cooking meat clean and to add flavour (Gollan 1978).

In generally benign climates without long periods in which food was in short supply, food storage was not a priority, but some was undertaken, of yams and live mussels, seeds held in skin bags or under bark, and dried fruits (Farrer 2005). Fire was the main tool used in land and therefore food management. Regular burning was undertaken to manipulate the dominant plant species in particular areas, creating a mosaic of frequently burned open areas and less frequently burned light forests through to wholly protected areas of dense rainforest (Gammage 2011). As grazers, kangaroos preferred the edges between forest and open meadows, and strategic burning could create areas where they would thrive, and could be readily hunted when needed, sometimes given the name 'living larders'.

The general lack of stored food gave periods of natural gluts of specific foods a cultural significance, as they provided an opportunity for large groups of people to come together to trade, arrange marriages, settle disputes and engage in ceremonies. One such time was the spring journey of Bogong moths from Queensland to the cooler alpine regions of southern New South Wales and eastern Victoria. After a winter of feeding, the moths' abdomens were 40 per cent fat and, as they rested from their travels, they were collected in nets, grilled and relished as a delicacy within cultures where fat was often in short supply (Farrer 2005). In the 1990s, the Mungabareena Ngan-Girra Festival of arts and culture was established in the NSW border town of Albury to be held each November as a continuation of the Bogong moth-based gatherings of the past.

As in all things, food in Indigenous Australian societies was regulated by the law sometimes rendered as 'the Dreaming'. Many groups had totemic animals that they did not eat. Food laws guided the sharing of large animals, such as kangaroo, and foods available to uninitiated men or women at various stages of fertility and pregnancy. Particular portions were assigned for elders and the very young. These rules ensured that everyone was adequately fed and no one had too much, and that the whole animal was consumed, with inedible elements being used to make tools, jewellery and clothing.

Over the whole continent, food resources were accessed through diverse strategies, as well as differing cultures around what should be eaten. Along the mainland coasts, people enjoyed a wealth of seafood collected from rocks, caught with shell hooks and lines twisted from plant fibres or animal hair, or speared in shallow water or from canoes. Beached whales were an opportunity for feasting. Along the north-western and north-eastern coasts, some groups caught small fish by trapping them behind stone weirs as tides receded. In south-western Victoria, canals were constructed to channel migrating eels to points where they could be trapped in nets or pots (Flood

1999). In the interior, fish were drugged by placing toxic plant materials in billabongs, leaving them floating on the surface where they could easily be collected. Indigenous people in Tasmania stopped eating scale fish about 4000 years ago, as the cooling climate put a premium on higher energy proteins such as seabirds and seals (Farrer 2005). With such diversity across the hundreds of language groups and ecosystems that made up Aboriginal Australia, any single account must be understood for the generalised overview it provides. However, all Aboriginal Australians had foodways based around deep knowledge of the plant and animal communities within which they lived. Their fresh, local and varied diet provided them not only with reliable nutrition in return for just a few hours work each day, but allowed them the leisure time to engage in rich cultural and spiritual lives.

The arrival of exotics: Colonial Australia

The food regime that came to coexist with and then to challenge Aboriginal ways of eating contrasted with it in many ways. While Indigenous people had eaten a wide variety of foods native to Australia, the British settler colonists largely restricted themselves to a narrow range of exotic plants and animals, with some local supplementation. Whereas food in Aboriginal society was shared according to law, the British saw food as private property to be allocated as the owner saw fit; thus, food served as the foundation of the economy, as well as power relations within colonial society.

When the invaders arrived in 1788, it was in large numbers. One thousand people disembarked at Sydney Cove. Although they made efforts to assess and consume local food resources including fish, crabs, oysters, birds and kangaroo, both culturally and practically they relied on the foods they had brought with them from Britain and ports called at en route. This was a convict colony in which the bulk of the residents would not work for themselves, but for the government (whether as convicts, marines or civil officers) and all were entitled to receive **rations** as part of their upkeep. Consisting initially of set amounts of salt beef or pork, flour or bread, dried peas, butter and rice (Oldham 1990), rations were a way of feeding based on logic and calculation, predetermined in composition, amount and form to ensure adequate nutrition at low cost and unaffected by the individual needs of the recipient, the locality or the seasons. Salted, dried and inherently stable, these staples could be carried long distances and stored for months on ships, in warehouses or in stores on rural properties before being eaten.

Rations were simplified to include just meat, flour, sugar and tea, and continued to be issued to civil servants and their families for several decades; to British convicts until the last of those who arrived on the final ship to Fremantle in 1868 served out their sentences; and for rural workers into the twentieth century. Contracts for work in the pastoral industry conventionally included rations of '10, 10, two and a quarter' (Symons 1984, p. 27):

- 10 pounds (4.5 kg) of meat
- 10 pounds of flour
- two pounds (900 g) of sugar
- a quarter of a pound (115 g) of tea doled out from casks and sacks in the station store.

Salt was supplied if the meat was fresh and some potatoes or cabbages rounded out the fare (Bannerman 1998, p. 12). Cheap and nourishing, but lacking any refinements, this became the very narrow, and ultimately solid, foundation for eating in colonial Australia.

For their part, many Aboriginal people expressed disgust on initially encountering these new foods. Bread was not recognised as food and the smell of salt pork was repulsive. Trying

to develop better relations, the British persisted with gifts of food, which were reciprocated by Aboriginal people and, especially as the settlers disrupted Aboriginal social organisation and country, many Aboriginal people became dependent on flour and sugar. Those who worked for landholders, often on their own country, were paid for their labour in clothing and rations, generally excluding meat, which it was assumed they could still access by hunting (Nettlebeck & Foster 2012). Tim Rowse (1998) argues that some Aboriginal people became very adept at manipulating this new structure, using access to the European food resources to bolster their own status within Indigenous hierarchies, but for most it meant a decline in physical wellbeing as the need for regular hunting and gathering disappeared and the range of foods eaten dwindled.

One continuous picnic?

This highly structured beginning to European Australian foodways has been examined by several historians. The major interpretation, by Symons (2007) and Beckett (1984), posits that convict rations set the basic form of Australian eating, which remained unchallenged until the post-World War II era. The title of Symons' 1984 book (republished in 2007), *One Continuous Picnic*, captured this very well, suggesting that Australians preferred foods that were pre-made, durable and could readily be consumed away from home, whether on a picnic, an exploring expedition, minding sheep in a paddock or digging for gold. Other characteristics such as local production and freshness were not a priority within this foodway. Indeed, the ideal was 'overcoming of food's perishability, the elimination of freshness' (Symons 2007, p. 19). In an often quoted example, Louisa Meredith reported in 1844 that while she had eaten preserved or cured cod and salmon from England in fashionable houses in Sydney, not once had fresh fish been presented (Meredith 1973). As a touring visitor, she found this odd, but there were reasons for such preferences in the colonies.

There were practical reasons to prefer hardy and durable foods. Subject to the effects of El Niño and La Niña weather patterns, many parts of Australia experience long hot summers and intermittent drought. Local production was limited to foods that could tolerate such conditions, or regions like the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area in the Riverina where irrigation schemes expanded options in the twentieth century. Especially prior to refrigeration—first developed in the 1850s, but only becoming common in homes a century later—meat had to be preserved or eaten when freshly killed, and vegetables were largely restricted to those that were long lasting, like potatoes, pumpkin, carrots and onions.

Culture also played a role. Susie Khamis suggested that the purchase of small luxuries, such as the imported salmon served to Meredith, 'stretched the settlers' fare beyond the crudely rudimentary, to include items of cultural significance' (2006, p. 67). That fish from 'Home' was significant is accepted, but Khamis perhaps underestimated the degree to which food cultures were also embedded in simple foods like salt pork and wheat flour and the ways in which they were eaten. There was a cachet attached to imported foods, whether it was the wheat to relieve soldiers from the need to eat locally grown maize as convicts did (Cushing 2007) or British-made preserves to enjoy with morning toast. By retaining the essence of British foodways, and in some cases consuming actual British food, Australian colonists maintained their own personal ties with the mother country and the friends and relations they had left behind. 'Eating British' was a way of demonstrating that no deterioration was taking place but, as the University of Sydney motto put it in 1850, *sidere mens eadem mutato*, which can be translated as 'Though the constellations change, the mind is unchanged'.

Paired with this impulse to retain old foodways was a willingness to experiment at the edges with what was local and new—as long as it was cheap. Barbara Santich (2011), Jacqui Newling

(2011) and others have conducted fine-grained research that shows the use of fresh foods to supplement or replace rations. Grace Karskens' work (2009) on the Sydney region demonstrates how fertile farmlands along the Hawkesbury–Nepean river system delivered fresh eggs, fruit and vegetables—based around the pork-maize-pumpkin complex—not only to the mainly ex-convict farmers but to Sydney, where the first official produce market was established in 1806 (Bannerman 1998). There was also extensive use of native birds and animals for fresh meat, including the Mount Pitt birds killed in their tens of thousands on Norfolk Island and forester kangaroos and Tasmanian emus purchased by the commissariat store in Hobart to serve as ration meat between 1804 and 1814 (Boyce 2008). Hunting and foraging remained important supplements to purchased foods for many who lived on the land, and to some in the cities and towns.

The physical impact of this diet of commercially produced staples supplemented by foraging and home production on those who ate it tended to be positive, demonstrating that while coarse and overly concentrated, the rations-derived diet made up in regularity what it lacked in variety (see Chapter 13 for a discussion of alcohol in Australia). In comparison with the Italian peasantry celebrated by Symons, Australian diners were less vulnerable to local crop failures, bad seasons or pest infestations. While there might have been hunger in individual homes, and a need to shift to less desirable foods in times of drought, there were no famines among the immigrant population. Australia has always been a food-rich continent and by the 1880s was an exporter of both wheat and meat, feeding hungry people elsewhere. The benefits of this food security were noted early on in the general physical wellbeing and rising heights of those born in the colonies. Even in the least prosperous of them, the stature of Australian-born Tasmanians convicted of crimes in the second half of the nineteenth century, most of whom would have had immigrant parents, rose by 3.75 cm (Inwood et al. 2015, pp. 197, 207).

Meat three times a day

The foodways initiated in the Sydney (1788) and Hobart (1803) districts were extended as settlers pushed into Aboriginal land in what became the colonies of Western Australia (1829), South Australia (1836), Victoria (1851) and Queensland (1859). The convict rationing system had set up a viable model for how colonising populations could be fed and its components remained at the heart of the colonial diet. The large proportion of meat in the diet was an aspect that was readily maintained as the export of wool became a mainstay of the economy. While the prize wool-producing breed, the Merino, was not regarded as a good meat producer, its flesh was eaten, as was mutton from sheep bred primarily for meat, such as the Southdown, and crosses intended for both purposes. Twopeny observed in 1883 that, not only was food more available overall but, 'The working-man's food here is also immeasurably better and cheaper. Mutton he gets almost for the asking, and up-country almost without it' (p. 63). Archaeological investigations at inner city Castleden Place in Melbourne found that during the latter half of the nineteenth century, mutton was the meat most eaten by the working class residents, followed by beef, with small amounts of poultry and rabbit (Simons & Maitri 2006). The cheapness of meat meant that in the 1880s, Australians ate, on average, 125 kg of meat per year, while Americans ate 68 kg, the British 53.5 kg and the Dutch 26 kg (Muskett 1889, p. 31). Much of this was sheep meat, making the mutton or lamp chop a 'cultural superfood' (Santich 2012, pp. 169–70), with central importance to the diet, an intimate link with the economic underpinning provided by the wool industry and a capacity to embody the wholesome comforts of home.

This preponderance of meat in the diet was a point of attractiveness about the Australian colonies and a clear demonstration of their capacity to provide residents with material wellbeing in

an apparently egalitarian setting. Colonists saw themselves, and were seen by the British on visits 'Home' and during imperial military adventures, as tall, capable and oriented to physical activity, characteristics many linked with their high protein diet. It was also significant that this meat was supplied from introduced species of animals, principally cattle and sheep. Pork, while eaten, was generally taken in small amounts as ham or bacon. Rabbits, which notoriously reached plague proportions within a decade of their successful introduction to Victoria in 1859, were trapped in country areas and sold in the city streets as a lesser meat, for those who could not afford more expensive cuts. Kangaroo and other native animals were accorded even lower status, threatening to associate those who consumed them with the maligned Indigenous Australians. 'Blacks' food' or 'bush tucker' in the later nineteenth century was of interest only to adventurous visitors, a few bush cooks and those who needed to supplement their diet outside the cash economy. Cheapness was valued, but not when it contradicted deeply held cultural norms.

Foods from other cultures

Up to the 1850s, the population of Australia was almost exclusively Indigenous, immigrant from the United Kingdom or children of those immigrants. The gold rushes, first to NSW and then to Victoria in the 1850s, Queensland from the late 1860s and Western Australia in the 1890s, drew a more diverse population from North America, Europe and China. Instead of the enrichment of foodways this might have been expected to produce, the largely male immigration living once again at the end of supply lines largely adhered to the model set by the rations diet. Tea, sugar and flour, accompanied by salt or freshly killed meat, remained central to the diet. Europeans had limited impact at this time, although the pre-gold rush population of Germans who settled in the Hahndorf and Barossa regions of South Australia maintained their patterns of eating sauerkraut, dumplings and bread puddings shared with their neighbours (Bannerman 1998).

The Chinese were the most numerous gold seekers after the British themselves, and the thousands who remained in Australia after the gold rush had an impact on the eating habits of the colonies. Although their own food was disparaged, so many found work as cooks on rural properties and in hotels that the trope of the Chinese cook became embedded in folklore and literature. A more widespread contribution was made through market gardening. Chinese men used their knowledge of irrigation to produce vegetables where others had not been able to, on the edges of the major cities and towns (Symons 2007, p. 85). Some are still protected under heritage orders in Sydney's Botany Bay area (NSW Government Office of Environment and Heritage 2015) and in several towns in Western Australia (Heritage Council of Western Australia 2015). Their produce was peddled door to door and the vendors also shared their own treats, such as candied ginger, with regular customers. Chinese knowledge and entrepreneurship brought greater diversity to Australian diets.

In terms of producing Chinese cuisine for an Australian market, this was a slower development. With most Chinese immigrants originating from Kwangtung Province in southern China, their food was based around vegetables, fish, poultry, pork and rice, in flavoursome sauces (Nichol 2008, p. 10). More open-minded and often impecunious diners, such as students and bohemians, developed a taste for Chinese food served in the restaurants of Melbourne's Little Bourke Street Chinatown from the 1880s. By the 1950s, many cities and some country towns had at least one Chinese restaurant serving Western and modified Chinese dishes which people could take away in their own saucepans, and recipes for Chinese meals were appearing in women's magazines and dedicated cookbooks (Bannerman 1998).

While the British had many concerns about the French in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, they deferred to them completely when it came to fine dining. Menus for formal occasions were often written in French and the dishes being served came out of that nation's *haute cuisine*, while the finest restaurants were run by French chefs. The existence of this more refined food in Australia had little impact on the general populace most of whom, when necessary, ate meals away from home in pubs or at lunch counters. Elements of other cuisines made some impression, often by way of Britain. Curries, for example, were popular in Australia by the middle of the nineteenth century not only because of long-term trade with India, but also because commercial curry powders were being embraced by British cooks (Bosworth 1988, p. 121). Once accepted, new tastes and methods of preparation could even be used to nullify the strangeness of Australian native foods. One bushman in Western Australia reported eating curried kangaroo for breakfast (Landor 1847), while in the 1890s pragmatic cookbook author Mina Rawson encouraged readers with the claim that there was no meat that could not be curried (cited in Santich 2011, p. 72).

Building on the foundation: Sauces, dainties and fresh produce

Meat and bread provided a solid foundation for Australian eating, but embellishments of a variety of types added interest and flavour. One approach was the use of the imagination, as in a cookbook attributed to philanthropist Caroline Chisholm, in which the basic ingredients were used in creative ways to produce Queen's Nightcap (stewed meat on a pancake), trout dumplings (beef stew with dumplings) and stewed goose (beef stew with a crust on top) (Symons 2007).

Another solution was the application of highly flavoured sauces and spreads. Given the general blandness of much of the meat and flour diet, flavour became an add-on before eating. Drippings, the fat and juices lost from meat in cooking, were retained by careful cooks and then used as a topping for bread. Commercial products were also favoured in this role. Some of the first businesses established in Australia were small shops selling spices, dried fruit, bottled sauces and other imported foods to those who could afford them, including convicts (Elliot 1995). A dollop of brown sauce or ketchup (advertised in the *Sydney Gazette* from 1804), a sprinkle of vinegar, a thick layer of tinned jam produced from Tasmanian fruit and Mauritanian sugar (Farrer 2005) or a drizzle of golden syrup provided economical means of achieving the flavour lift that was missing.

The most distinctive of these condiments is Vegemite, a yeast spread that encapsulates much about Australian eating. It had its origins in a typical colonial project: trying to copy an already successful British product, Marmite, made from spent yeast from breweries (White, 1994). The inventor, food chemist Cyril Callister, did not quite match the original, but in doing so created a variation which, through clever marketing, Australians came to believe was not only tasty, but healthy (despite providing 10 per cent of a day's recommended sodium intake in a 5 g serve). In 1924, Vegemite's producer, Fred Walker, joined forces with American processed cheese producer J.L. Kraft, leading to foreign ownership of this most Australian of products by 1950. While advertised as being a tasty addition to stews and soups, or enjoyable when made up into a hot beverage, the preferred presentation of Vegemite is thinly spread with butter on white bread. Not only the ubiquity of the jar of Vegemite in Australian cupboards or the capacity to eat it straight from the jar makes it typically Australian, but also its rapid journey from British origin to Australian adaptation to American ownership—although in this case, without any impact on the product itself.

As well as the addition of flavour to meat and bread dishes, another embellishment was to balance the inevitable meat component of each meal with an impressive array of baked goods. The basic ingredients for these dainties were present in rations, but they were refined by perishable elements such as cream, butter, eggs and fruit. For women in particular, dessert after dinner and special arrays of cakes, tarts and biscuits on Sunday became important opportunities for indulging tastes for sweet and creamy foods and displaying baking skills. On a larger scale, the annual agricultural shows that started in Parramatta in 1823 were initially intended to encourage men to improve their livestock and agricultural knowledge but also provided opportunities for women to exercise their skills and creativity and to compete openly over whose cakes and other dainties, as well as pickles and preserves, were best (Santich 2012). Such was the importance of such confections that the Queensland lamington, the Anzac biscuit and the pavlova have come to be viewed as iconic Australian foods to be presented to international visitors and served on holidays.

The fresh ingredients needed for baking sweets could be purchased or home grown. Markets were established in each city where growers from the surrounding area could sell their fresh produce. In the 1840s, the Sydney market offered grapes, peaches, apples, cucumbers, melons, a wide range of fish, rock-oysters and crayfish (Meredith 1973). In Melbourne, the first market was in front of the post office in the 1830s and it moved through several locations before the Victoria Market was established in 1878 (Simons & Maitri 2006). Hawkers brought food to the city streets both for home preparation, such as vegetables, fish or rabbits, and ready to eat, such as pies and oysters.

In terms of home production, Australian cities were renowned for their spreading form with freestanding houses on their own generous blocks, and even the small plots of land around inner city terraces could support edible produce. Sketching the back yard of his semi-detached North Adelaide house in the 1860s, Joseph Elliot detailed the presence of a garden and a fowl house near the outside lavatory and water cask (Elliott 1984). Goats abounded in Sydney's inner area, providing fresh milk for those who could not accommodate a cow (Just kidding 2014). In Melbourne in 1881, there were more poultry than people (282,000 poultry compared with 260,600 people), while in Perth, the 18,100 enumerated fowls were almost double the human population (Gaynor 2012). Chooks were kept for their eggs, with chicken being a rare treat reserved for special occasions such as Christmas and Easter. As late as 1960, Australian households were consuming just 5 kg of chicken a year. It took the efforts of commercial chicken producers to reduce the cost and reposition chicken as a healthy everyday meat to increase consumption until it made up a quarter of the annual 124 kg meat intake in 1978, with beef making up half and sheep meat a quarter of the total (Dixon 2002, pp. 4, 61).

The provision of reticulated water supplies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries enhanced the capacity for home food production, especially in less well-watered cities like Perth. However, at the same time, increasingly restrictive regulations were passed by local councils to minimise the smell, sounds and vermin associated with home food production. During World War II, official pressure was reversed as Australians were told to 'grow gardens for victory', to reduce the demand on commercial food production. In the post-war period, productive gardening received another fillip with the arrival of immigrants from farming backgrounds in southern Europe who naturally wished to continue to grow fruit and vegetables, especially vegetables like eggplants and zucchini that they could not readily purchase (Gaynor 2008). With condiments, home baking and fresh produce, Australians were able to maintain their home economies while also enjoying foods that suited their own tastes.

The rise of convenience

With ready access to home production and goods for purchase, and constantly exposed to new ideas about eating from recent arrivals and the media, urban Australians were well placed to adopt novel foods, employ new food technologies and incorporate established foods in new forms. Canning was the primary contribution of the nineteenth century, allowing fruit and vegetables to be eaten year round, far from where they were grown. Dry mixes such as self-raising flour, custard powder and instant gravy appeared in the early 1900s (Farrer 2005), but the most important twentieth-century introduction was the gradual uptake of the refrigerator with a freezer section from the 1920s, allowing greater use of perishable foods such as dairy, and the introduction of frozen vegetables, meat, desserts and readymade meals. Coinciding with the introduction of television in 1956, the American name 'TV dinners' was readily taken up to describe these frozen dishes—but they were relatively expensive and did not fit in the tiny freezer compartments of many fridges (Groves 2004). Their popularity grew only slowly as they were modified to allow for faster heating in microwave ovens by 2000, serving as a suitable accompaniment to sped up entertainments such as surfing the Internet and playing online games in the 'noughties'.

The first meal to be transformed by the creed of convenience was breakfast. This change was spearheaded by the tiny Seventh-day Adventist Church as a means of promoting their Sanitarium health foods and their belief in **vegetarianism**. Marketing their meat-free products in print advertisements, cookbooks, at camp meetings and through a chain of vegetarian cafes in capital and regional centres from 1900 they, along with other producers, persuaded Australians to adopt a quick and cheap modern breakfast of tea and cold pre-packaged cereal in the 1920s. Sanitarium Weet-bix remains Australia's highest-selling breakfast cereal. Tea continued as a staple, with Australians reigning as the beverage's greatest consumers at 3.6 kg of tea per year in 1928, with almost 60 per cent of the population drinking five or more cups of tea each day in 1950 (Khamis 2009, pp. 218, 221–22). Tea soon faced competition from instant coffee, developed by Nestlé in the late 1930s. Starting from a low base, coffee sales overtook tea by 1979 (Khamis 2009) and have continued on an upward trajectory based around the Italian espresso machine and the insulated take-away cup.

The rhetoric of convenience also overtook the provision of food. Until the 1960s, many Australians had basic foods including milk, bread and meat delivered to their doorsteps and patronised ham and beef shops and greengrocers in their neighbourhoods. Following the American example, the spreading suburbs became the home of self-serve supermarkets that offered much larger product ranges. Consumers came to accept that it was easier and cheaper to buy their groceries half an hour's drive away at a huge supermarket located in a shopping mall surrounded by car parks, successfully shifting the labour of home delivery from the vendor to the consumer. After making that long trip, or at the end of a working day, increasing numbers of people chose to pick up dinner rather than make it, dropping into any one of the multitude of fast-food chains that have colonised Australia since the first one, Kentucky Fried Chicken, opened in the Sydney suburb of Guildford in 1968 (Farrer 2005). The Australian Bureau of Statistics took account of the new ways of eating, adding 'snacks and take away foods' to its Consumer Price Index in 1974, and two years later, restaurant meals, at the same time as fresh fruit, vegetables other than potatoes and onions, and fresh and frozen fish, were added (ABS 2011).

Much time has been spent by Australian gastronomers in seeking an answer to whether there was or is a dish that can be said to be distinctively Australian. Assuming that such a dish existed, in the first century and a half of settler Australia, it would have revolved around beef or mutton and

bread or potatoes and other hardy vegetables such as pumpkin and onions. The dish suggested most often as a successor is 'spag bol'. This is not the Italian *tagliatelle al ragu Bolognese*, nor the American tinned spaghetti of the mid-twentieth century (Santich 2012) but the contemporary Australian version which, at its simplest (and at my house), consists of any cooked pasta, beef mince, bottled tomato-based sauce and a sprinkling of pre-grated Parmesan cheese. It lacks what Twopeny referred to as refinements—the chicken liver, pork mince, red wine and fresh herbs celebrity chef Maggie Beer suggests should be included (Beer 2012)—but it is an inexpensive, filling and healthy meal, enjoyed by most, able to be easily varied for the vegetarian or lactose-intolerant member of the family, on the table within half an hour of the cook arriving home, and suited to being eaten with one hand in front of a screen. Even the name reflects the Australian tendency to shorten, to make what seems foreign familiar—although this is also the term used for the dish in Britain, signalling the ongoing influence of the mother country.

Contemporary food trends

In the twenty-first century, two apparently contradictory trends have been occurring in Australian eating. The duopoly power of the two large supermarkets, Coles and Woolworths, has allowed them to position themselves as central institutions in the society, supporting a wide range of charities, offering some banking services, acting as a depot for goods bought online from other retailers, and guiding the celebration of major public holidays. Their promotional words and images fetishise freshness while in a typical store, less than a quarter of the grocery shelf space would be devoted to unprocessed meat, fruit and vegetables and dairy, with the rest filled with frozen, tinned, bottled, dried and boxed prepared foods. Manifesting what Symons identifies as the third stage in the industrialisation of food, many meals eaten by Australians are purchased in value-added form from industrial kitchens and require only reheating rather than the application of cooking skills (Symons 2007). Preferences for these foods are cultivated through multimedia advertising campaigns that make claims for their economy, convenience and tastiness. Through reliance on such foods, many Australians have lost confidence in their cooking ability and largely rely on a combination of fast food and packaged prepared foods, which are often eaten alone, on the move or while engaged in other activities. These trends contribute to rising levels of overweight, a condition that now affects over 60 per cent of Australian adults.

At the same time, and manifesting principally at the higher socioeconomic levels, there are a series of shifts also echoing developments in other parts of the Western world that tend to go against the overall trend in Australian eating. Encompassing the slow food movement, a concern with food miles, organic production, genetic modification, animal welfare and respect for the skill of food producers, this is a reaction against alienation from food production and processing. Related to this is a fascination with celebrity chefs who create a connection between consumers and food production, and often discuss their own relationships with suppliers. Adherents seek to reconnect by growing their own fruit and vegetables, keeping chickens for their eggs and purchasing locally grown or handmade foods at farmers' markets. Rejecting the economies of scale that come from industrial food production, these foods come with a higher price tag and are causing concern to some economists who interpret the shift to handmade and labour-consuming low-tech processes as causing a decline in labour productivity (Barnes, Soames, Li & Munoz 2013). This is a distinctive shift away from the general trend to seeking cheap foods, and recognition that a low price tag does not mean that a food costs less when all of its implications are considered.

With the emphasis on the local, it might be expected that there would be a resurgence of the interest in eating native plants and animals that occurred in the rush of nationalism surrounding the 1988 bicentenary of **colonisation**. Native ingredients such as bush tomatoes, finger limes and wattle seed are used as flavourings in 'bush tucker' product lines and restaurants, but cannot be said to be widely eaten. Debates over the consumption of kangaroo were conducted through the twentieth century as the animals were culled to protect forage and water resources for livestock. Despite its low cost, high protein, low fat content and palatable flavour, kangaroo meat has most often been used for pet food or for export to markets in Europe, Russia and, more recently, China. The 'kangatarian' ethical eating movement and the Kangaroo Industry Association of Australia have not been able to overcome cultural assumptions such as those revealed in a focus group in which a participant explained her objection to eating roo: 'these are native animals, people, and I believe that is a form of cannibalism' (Ampt & Olsen 2008). As Santich noted, even after more than 200 years, 'indigenous foods have virtually no relevance to most settler Australians' (Santich 2011, p. 73). In a countervailing trend, with high levels of migration from around the world but in particular from Asian countries, many Australians are continuing food preferences and traditions from cultures much older than those of the original settler colonists, although still young in comparison to Aboriginal foodways.

Conclusion

In reflecting on the history of food in Australia, several periodisations are possible. The simplest is a dichotomy between the long Indigenous tradition and the ways of eating that began to be established in 1788. Others break up the post-1788 period according to differing criteria, such as times of scarcity and plenty, the origins of dominant outside influences, how food production and distribution systems were organised, and the penetration of consumerist culture into the realm of food (Dixon 2002; Bannerman 1998; Khamis 2006, 2009). All of these factors had their impact and they worked synergistically, but operating at a national level of generalisation, they struggle to represent the everyday experience of Australian eaters. As Bannerman wrote, 'The truth is that there never was a single Australian food culture, and probably never will be' (Bannerman 1998, p. 85).

The foods most frequently celebrated as Australia's favourites—meat pies, sausage rolls, Tim Tams, Chiko Rolls, hamburgers with pickled beetroot, fish and chips—are all relatively cheap and put claims for flavour and texture ahead of quality. They are also all principally commercial products with marketing machines behind them and cannot be considered staples of the diet. Instead they are the public face of food. Delving into its more private manifestations within the home, the history of Australian food turns up parallels to these attention-seekers, which are consistent with the idea that Australians privileged economy and volume in their foods over freshness, variety or more refined characteristics. What specifically is eaten varies with life stage, class and ethnicity; with personality and outlook; and with location and season. Sustained by a well-developed system of food production and importation and a generally high standard of living, access to cheap and abundant food marks Australia off from other less lucky countries.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- Food historians have tried to identify what is distinctive about Australian foodways but have found it to be based around adaptation rather than innovation. Rather than seeking distinctiveness, Australian food can be understood as having been shaped by an emphasis on economy and volume, rather than quality or refinement.
- The foodways of Indigenous Australians were highly attuned to the specific environments in which they lived. By eating a wide variety of fresh, local foods, Aboriginal people were able to achieve a high level of nutrition for an investment of only several hours each day, leaving time for participation in a rich cultural and spiritual life.
- The colonists imported not only food preferences, but also specific foods from Britain and other colonies to sustain convicts and others as their favoured crops and livestock were established.
- The diet that grew out of the early years of colonisation established a high proportion of meat in the Australian diet, a feature in which Australians took great pride and which has persisted to the present.
- The meat and bread diet was unsatisfying for many and embellishments were added to it, including flavoursome condiments, baked goods and fresh fruit and vegetables.
- The dominant trend since the 1970s is to the consumption of a greater range of foods, inspired by a variety of national and ethnic cuisines, many of them fully or partially prepared at the time of purchase.

Sociological reflection

- Do you consider cost or quality first when making a food purchase?
- How would you describe the way you and your family eat now? Does it relate to how Australians have eaten in the past?
- If you were entertaining an overseas visitor with typical Australian foods, what would you offer them and why?
- Some have described contemporary Australian cuisine as 'Australasian' or 'Mod Oz' (Modern Australian). How would you describe Australian cuisine, and in what ways does it reflect both old and new social influences?

Discussion questions

- 1 How did Aboriginal ways of eating relate to the overall functioning of their society? Consider gender roles and the emphasis placed on ceremonial life.
- 2 What did colonisation mean for Aboriginal foodways?
- 3 Food in colonial Australia was a means of maintaining ties with the home culture. How does this relate to the experience of more recent immigrants?
- 4 Why did Australians consume so much meat in the colonial period? Why were they proud of this aspect of the national diet?
- 5 What impact did American food trends have on Australian eating in the twentieth century?
- 6 Given the two contradictory developments occurring in Australian eating in the twenty-first century, what do you see as the likely future of Australian food?

Further investigation

- 1 In what ways did the differences between traditional Aboriginal and British colonial foodways reflect the values of those two societies?
- 2 Why has there been such a focus within Australian food history on finding a distinctive Australian cuisine?

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

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- Australian Food and Drink (Australian Government website): www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-food-and-drink
- Australian Food History timeline: www.meandmybigmouth.com.au/
- Food Australia, Australian Institute of Food Science and Technology: <http://foodaust.com.au/>
- Locale: The Pacific Journal of Regional Food Studies*: <http://localejournal.org/>
- Research Centre for the History of Food and Drink (University of Adelaide website): www.arts.adelaide.edu.au/centrefooddrink/
- The Cook and the Curator blog, Historic Houses Trust of NSW: <http://blogs.hht.net.au/cook/>

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CHAPTER 8

CULINARY CULTURES OF EUROPE: FOOD, HISTORY, HEALTH AND IDENTITY

Stephen Mennell

OVERVIEW

- › What are culinary cultures?
- › How do culinary cultures develop?
- › What are some key trends affecting culinary cultures?

In 2005, the Council of Europe published a book entitled *Culinary Cultures of Europe: Identity, Diversity and Dialogue* (Goldstein & Merkle 2005), containing chapters about the food of nearly all the 46 member countries of the council. These chapters presented an aspect of each country's collective self-identity, and it is

clear that what people see themselves as eating is important to them. Most countries dwelt lovingly on the traditions of the past. Yet it is clear not only that culinary cultures change, but also that they are changing at an accelerating pace. This chapter explores some of the reasons why that is true.

KEY TERMS

class
fusion food
haute cuisine
social identity

Introduction

It used to be said that a society's taste in food was one of the most slowly changing, most conservative aspects of its culture. This may still be true at a deep level of underlying attitudes to eating and its pleasures. But in recent decades, right across the world we have seen rapid changes in what people eat: food seems to have become part of the fashion industry. Australia is a vivid case in point: old cookery books depict a boring cuisine of almost exclusively British origin. Today, in line with the ethnic diversity of the population, one can eat in restaurants purveying fare from just about every country on the planet.

Much the same is true in Europe. It was only in 1964 that I ate my first Indian meal, in an Indian restaurant in Leeds, when Indian cuisine was unknown in my nearby home town of Huddersfield in the north of England; now there is an Indian restaurant in most large villages, not to mention towns, and a politician recently said that chicken tikka masala (rather than roast beef) was now the British national dish. Such trends were one reason why the Council of Europe, an intergovernmental organisation based in Strasbourg, France, published *Culinary Cultures of Europe*.

One reason why the study of culinary cultures and their history is so fascinating—indeed, I would say intellectually important—is that changes in the food people eat and the way they cook and enjoy it appear to serve as a highly sensitive marker for much broader social, political and economic changes in societies. The sheer social and historic diversity of the member states of the Council of Europe permitted glimpses of how food mirrors transitions of many kinds through which European societies have passed, in both the distant and the recent past—transitions which, moreover, are typical of many other parts of the world beyond Europe. Some of the most significant are discussed here.

The formation of local peasant cuisines and their gradual emancipation from climate and locality

The bedrock of culinary culture in most countries is a tradition of peasant food, the food of farmers—who grew and reared and ate their own products, which they traded locally but generally over no great distance. Many countries, in their contributions to *Culinary Cultures of Europe*, celebrate traditions of this kind that can be traced back over several centuries. The main common features of peasant cuisines are freshness and simplicity, derived from their dependence on locally grown or gathered produce. Dependence on the locality also meant dependence on climate and season. In consequence, despite underlying structural similarities, peasant cuisines differ greatly from each other in ingredients. In Lithuania mushrooms were important, in Bulgaria fruit. The hard conditions of survival in northerly latitudes, evident for example, in Estonia, Iceland and Norway, contrast strongly with the abundance recollected by those who lived in warmer climes—in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Ukraine, for example. And the further north people lived, the more rigorously did the seasons impose constraints on the rhythms of eating. Where the winters were long and freezing, stock had to be slaughtered and the meat salted down; and where the summers were short and their days long, the hours of labour and of meals were all the more determined by the rhythms of farm work.

Peasant traditions are easily romanticised. Yet other things—including climate—being equal, the smaller the locality on which a particular cuisine was dependent the greater the potential monotony of the peasant diet. True, people who had not experienced the vast diversity of modern eating may not have felt their diet to be boring. But to later observers it may appear so, with the prominence of staples such as grains, bread, milk and root vegetables. Over much of Europe, meat was not abundant for ordinary people, although it became more so in the period following the Black Death, when a third or more of Europe's population died.¹ Afterwards, the pace of change in the countryside reverted to its normal slow pace and, at least across much of Western Europe, the peasant diet appears to have remained virtually unaltered for centuries (Bloch 1970). In rural France the *pot au feu* permanently simmering in the peasant kitchen for many people provided *soupe* for breakfast, lunch and dinner; and the same went, *pari passu*, for much of the rest of Europe.

The monotony, more or less, of the peasant diet is easily forgotten. The cookery books of each nation tend to celebrate the great peasant dishes of the past. These were usually the exciting high spots of a generally unexciting diet, the special dishes for special occasions. Many of the chapters in *Culinary Cultures of Europe* mention the traditional feasts that in the past marked the year in agrarian societies, and which often continue today even in very different societies. But occasions for feasting originally stood out against the background of many periods of fasting. Sometimes the fasting was given a veneer of religious justification, but such religious rationalisations mostly helped people feel better about the pressing need to eke out stocks of food through frequent seasons and, indeed, whole years of dearth. It is not that 'rich peasant traditions' did not exist, but that the wonderful masterpieces served at Christmas, harvest or weddings were not eaten all the time. Nor were they all part of the repertoire across a vast area. So, for example, it has been said that the French peasant cuisine was 'invented' in the early twentieth century by Curnonsky and his circle (Curnonsky & De Croze 1933; Curnonsky & Rouff 1921–26), whose work was sponsored by tyre manufacturers interested in promoting tourism among the new generation of car owners. What they actually did was to collect the gastronomic treasures of France in numerous volumes, with the consequence that these dishes became available more or less all the time and everywhere for those able to pay for them. It is perhaps a mark of France's distinctive place in the culinary history of Europe that these collectors of gastronomic folklore became quite so famous, but such initiatives were by no means confined to France. In Britain, for instance, Florence White (1932) explicitly modelled her English Folk Cookery Association on the more famous English Folk Song and Dance Association led by Cecil Sharp. It was in the same era that Béla Bartók² was collecting folk music in Hungary, and it seems probable that traditional recipes were being collected, even rescued, around the same time in many countries. We must not romanticise the past, nor imagine that a huge diversity of the best dishes were being eaten every day. Nor should we depict our forefathers as living in the Land of Cockayne. Indeed the prevalence in European folklore of *mythes de ripaille*—roughly translated as 'myths about having a good blowout'—is symptomatic of the dreams of people who frequently experienced the opposite in times of scarcity.

Yet, at the same time, the recipes have been collected, and the dishes continue to be cooked, because the tastes and smells of a country's traditional table are the royal route to a part of its collective memory that is accessible to everyone. In a famous essay, Roland Barthes showed long ago how powerfully historical and rural themes are deployed in creating a sense of nostalgia that is a key part of the enjoyment of food in France (Barthes 1961). For a country like Britain, too, where manufactured food forms a large part of what people eat every day, and where people eat out upon a diversity of cuisines that reflect the ethnic diversity of society today, the entry in *Culinary Cultures of Europe* shows how the traditional dishes of the past are still cherished

and celebrated. (The Poland chapter shows great realism in pointing out that its great traditional dishes may now be cooked more for visitors than for residents.)

One component of a definition of a peasant cuisine is its dependence on, its relatedness to, a 'locality.' But what is a 'locality'? Plainly it is an elastic concept. For one thing, self-sufficiency was always relative, and there would always have been some essential ingredients that had to be sought through trade beyond the local community. Salt is an example: the historic shortage of salt is mentioned in the case of Iceland, and Azerbaijan was the principal supplier of salt throughout the Caucasus region. Localities grow as trade grows, and as the distance over which trade takes place increases. The spreading web of trade in food in early modern Europe can be plotted quite precisely through the peaks and troughs of grain prices. As trade and transport improved, there was a diminution of the enormously high steeples of food prices when harvests failed in limited regions, and the risk of localised famine declined. The same spreading web of trade also tended to increase the diversity of ingredients, and thus of dishes, in a particular locality. Local differences do not necessarily disappear, of course—in Georgia, 'food remains an important marker of cultural differences' among the five main subgroups of its population. Some countries were always situated on major trade routes, and this had a bearing on what they ate: that was true of Estonia, while in Croatia both local traditions and the intermingling of traditions in the ethnic cockpit of the Balkans played their part. In its chapter Croatia introduced a brave note into the often-cosy world of food history: that the intermingling of food traditions results from war as well as from peaceful trade.

Lest cosiness also permeate a picture of inevitable progress from localised and restricted peasant cuisines, through the development of trade to the modern diversity of eating, it must be remembered that there have been bad times in which the trend was reversed. War again, most obviously, has occasioned reversions in the direction of self-sufficiency. Several of the new member countries of the Council of Europe also mention the hard times they experienced under the former communist regimes. In Poland, 'under authoritarian rule, tradition is ... used for political purposes, to compensate for privileges lost to the people. But cuisine usually loses in this process ...'. In the 1980s, as the communist economy began to collapse, Poles resorted to something that might be called 'emergency peasantisation', when town-dwellers went out into the countryside to strike deals, sometimes bartering, with farmers—returning home perhaps with the whole carcass of a pig that would be shared among a few families.

The stratification of cuisines: Courts, aristocrats and bourgeois

Peasant farmers constituted the great majority of the European population in the past—the more remote past in some parts of the continent than in others. Yet eating was always socially stratified. We know, for instance, that before the Black Death nutrition was very unequally distributed among members of the various estates—and that was especially true of meat, with the peasantry's diet dominated by vegetable and dairy products. The upper strata may have been less likely to go hungry in times of dearth, but it would appear that even the warrior aristocracy ate essentially the seasonal produce of their own land, and did not generally have it cooked by means much more elaborate than roasting and boiling. To generalise, when the social divisions between strata are very deep and the interdependence between them is very unequal—when the power that they have over each other is very asymmetrical—then the power and status of the upper strata is more

likely to find expression in quantity rather than quality, in periodical displays of indiscriminate heaps of food at ceremonial banquets, for instance, rather than through the quality and labour-intensiveness that are among the marks of a true *haute cuisine* (Mennell 1996).

It is true that the manuscript recipes from a very few major courts towards the end of the Middle Ages—the *Forme of Cury* (a manuscript from the late fourteenth-century court of King Richard II of England; see Pegge 1780) and *Taillevent* (a similar manuscript from the late-medieval court of France; see *Taillevent* c.1380), for example—show something more complicated, characterised by the use of spices and flavourings that could have reached these courts only via very long trade routes. But, significantly, there is an old debate about whether this late medieval *haute cuisine* for the very few represents a debased form, a remote echo, of the cuisine of ancient Rome, when the chains of social and economic interdependence were indeed longer and denser than they were for many centuries afterwards. In any case, this *haute cuisine* appears to have been confined to a few major European princely courts and—from relatively scanty documentary sources—does not seem to have changed rapidly at all in response to fashion, as later *hautes cuisines* were to do.

A large body of modern research on European food history suggests that the rate of change in 'taste' accelerates when the strata of society become more closely and more equally interdependent, and when social competition becomes more intense. Thus, as far as we can tell, courtly cuisine did not change very quickly when an only partially pacified warrior nobility's reference groups were other courts at a great distance. *Hautes cuisines*—which can be defined by their typical dishes requiring complex sequences of stages, considerable division of labour among kitchen staff, and thus by their costliness—have tended to emerge in court societies from Ancient Egypt onwards. That appears to be true to varying degrees of several of the national traditions that are now influential throughout the world: those of China and India, and from Europe, of France, Italy and Turkey.

The case of France is especially significant, because from the late seventeenth century onwards, and especially in the nineteenth century, French cuisine 'conquered the world', in the sense that it came to set the models and standards for upper-class eating throughout much of Europe and beyond, for instance in North America (Mennell 1996; Ferguson 2004). The rapid elaboration of French cookery was connected with the consolidation of the absolutist monarchy of the *ancien régime*, in the course of which the court aristocracy became a 'two-front stratum', defunctionalised and squeezed between the monarchy and the 'pressure from below' of an expanding merchant and professional bourgeois **class**.³ Their whole **social identity** became bound up with virtuoso display, in their manners, clothes, houses, pastimes and eating. Although some of the same trends were present in Britain, there were subtle differences. The development of royal absolutism in England was nipped in the bud a century and a half before the French Revolution, and English nobility and gentry retained more of their old social functions—including their ties and influence in the provinces where they still lived for much of the year on their country estates—so that virtuoso consumption became less essential to their social identity and the marks of rural life endured more clearly in their tastes.

In both Austria and Turkey there is a clear culinary legacy from the imperial courts and the nobility—Habsburg and Ottoman respectively. Courtly cuisine is of course always essentially an urban phenomenon, because the elaboration of a great variety of dishes requires a great variety of ingredients, which are brought together in the markets of the great cities, not in the countryside. In Turkey the great Spice Road brought ingredients from afar, but a courtly elite cuisine also affected the food of the peasants in the countryside by skimming off the finest produce: the best fish, for instance, found its way from the Black Sea directly to Istanbul. Where a great royal court was associated with an empire, its tastes in food could be a model over great distances. Azerbaijan,

Bulgaria and Serbia-Montenegro were all influenced in their culinary traditions by once having belonged to the Ottoman Empire. Greek and Turkish cuisines show broad similarities, although the two countries are also proud of their differences. In its contribution to *Culinary Cultures of Europe*, Austria takes a wry pride in contending that Wiener schnitzel is not distinctively Viennese at all, but derives from Byzantium via Italy; on the other hand, Austrian influence is seen in Croatia, Poland and again Serbia-Montenegro, and Habsburg influence is no doubt evident in other former provinces of the empire such as Slovenia, despite its not being explicitly stated. Spain, the home of Europe's other great Habsburg court, drew a large variety of new ingredients from its vast overseas empire—after all, how would a Spanish omelette be possible if potatoes had never been discovered in South America?—but courtly influence is not much stressed, either in the entry in *Culinary Cultures of Europe* or in Spanish cookery books. If the Spanish aristocracy did not have so great a modelling influence on Spanish cookery as did their counterparts in France on French cuisine, it may be because of the greater social distance between the nobility and the bourgeoisie, and the weakness of any pressure from below on the part of an aspirant upwardly mobile middle class in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Spain. In some countries—Norway and the Netherlands, for example—food has been shaped by the *absence* of a royal and aristocratic court society.⁴ Norwegians are proud of a good—but *not great*—cuisine, while the Dutch are characteristically modest about the plainness of their food.

Although courts historically laid the foundations of *grandes cuisines*, the pace of culinary change accelerated markedly when, for whatever reason, the competitive virtuoso consumption among courtiers was supplanted by the commercial competition that takes place among restaurateurs using product differentiation to attract customers. In the culinary history of Western Europe, we tend to point to the proliferation of restaurants in Paris after the French Revolution as a decisive step in this process. An important part of the story of how culinary innovations and fashions in taste spread from the high-class restaurants to the less prestigious establishments and into the domestic kitchen can broadly be described as the 'trickle down' model. Aron (1973) depicted in some detail the culinary ladder linking the high and the low in nineteenth-century Paris. Not every country was like France, however. Even though the London taverns served as models for the first Paris restaurants in the eighteenth century, Britain later fell far behind France in the abundance and variety of its eating places, and 'eating out' remained an exceptional experience for all but the fairly well-to-do until roughly the last four decades. Several other countries mention that the mass of the people have been attracted only quite recently to eat frequently in what is now the great variety of restaurants in all parts of Europe.

National culinary integration

In some countries, regional variations persist strongly within their borders, while in others there is an overall national style of cookery. In fact these are not necessarily incompatible: it is partly a matter of the focal length of the lens through which you look. There are always local variants on a national style where that exists. Not just in a large country like Germany, but in small countries like Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Slovakia there are many regional variants. In Croatia and Serbia-Montenegro can be seen the culinary influences of ethnic minorities at one of the cultural crossroads of Europe, something to celebrate in view of the difficult and complex history of the Balkans. In Germany there are Polish influences, such as *pirogi* (dumplings) in its north-eastern border areas, but there is also a more important *kleindeutsch* inheritance (from the mass of tiny principalities that composed Germany to its north until the second half of the nineteenth century).

Late national unification is probably correlated with the strength of distinctive regional dishes, which one can observe everywhere in Germany. The same is probably true of Italy, which like Germany was unified only in the second half of the nineteenth century. Most people would agree that both in Germany and Italy, the regional specialities belong within a broad national style.

National culinary styles do not necessarily change abruptly when one walks across an international border in Europe. Transitions are often more gradual, just as linguistic transitions used to be more gradual than they are today. In Strasbourg, home of the Council of Europe, one hears French; in Kehl, a stroll across the bridge over the Rhine, one hears German. True, if one listens carefully, one can still hear the Alsatian dialect, but it is less common than it was. But in the restaurant alternatively known as *Aux armes de Strasbourg* or *Stadtwappe*, the food shows both German and French traits. Elsewhere the culinary transitions are still more gradual, with strong similarities, for example, among the various Slavic countries. Poland has its eastern 'borderlands' with Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, associated with a 'joint supper', consumed by many peoples. For the Poles, culinary traditions played their part (along with Catholicism) in preserving the strong sense of national pride and identity through the tribulations of Polish history. Three times at the end of the eighteenth century the national territory was partitioned between the three neighbouring great powers of Prussia, Austria and Russia, a partition that endured until 1918, when the Polish state was resurrected, only to undergo radical changes in its boundaries, immense movements of population, and subsumption into the Soviet empire after World War II (Davis 1981).

One of the most encouraging conclusions from the story of Poland, and many other countries too, is that however much food and culinary tradition can serve as a badge of national pride and identity, they do not necessarily have to serve an exclusionary function. A history as complex as Poland's has promoted culinary diversity, and continuing influence from neighbouring countries—east as well as west—is welcomed.

The industrialisation of eating

In *Culinary Cultures of Europe*, Finland states the unvarnished truth that its people have today been transformed from food producers into food consumers. That is the outcome of the industrialisation of eating, which is now evident everywhere. It impinges even on traditional food production: Georgia, listing some of its local specialities, casually mentions 'beer locally made from barley ... in plastic bottles'. But industrialisation of food production is not a particularly new process. Its roots lie back in the nineteenth century, and the effects of industrial production of food are not easy to separate from the effects of industrialisation more generally. Sweden mentions the impact of canals, railways and later asphalt roads upon the country's food culture. In what is perhaps an implicit allusion to what Benedict Anderson (1983) called 'print capitalism' and to the role that it played in the construction of 'imagined communities', in Sweden, as part of the processes of nation building in the nineteenth century, novel culinary ideals were spread with the help of newspapers, and the food culture of the bourgeoisie became the model for the aspirations of the new working and middle classes. The new urban foods were what migrants from the countryside wanted to eat, too. A century later, industrialisation had a very similar effect in reducing the contrasts between the diets of the people of the lowlands and uplands in Slovakia. It is as well to remember that the industrialisation of eating has had beneficial effects, for—despite the low-quality industrial food found in eastern Europe under communism—it is too easy to dwell upon the aesthetic downside of mass-produced food. It is again necessary not to romanticise the

past. When judged by the finest culinary creations once consumed by a tiny privileged minority, the chilled and frozen foods from the supermarket and the hamburgers and pizzas from the chain eating places may look like decline. When viewed from the perspective of the often-monotonous diets of poor people in the past, such food may seem a veritable cornucopia.

Eating as a problem: The beginnings of dietary advice and food policy

A cornucopia gives rise to its own problems. In Turkey, health problems have arisen with the transformation of its traditional diet, which from a nutritional point of view had many virtues. Where food has become so much more diverse and abundant—and also more secure and regular—as it has across most of Europe, control of the appetite has become problematic in a way that it rarely was in the past. Farm labourers often wolfed down prodigious quantities of food at harvest suppers. Their way of life was extremely strenuous, and they often went hungry, so why worry when the opportunity came for a blow-out? Very often, being plump was a source of prestige, and that attitude has not entirely disappeared from Europe today: the Austria entry in *Culinary Cultures of Europe* somewhat gloatingly dwelt upon its people's perception of themselves as 'informed by unbridled gluttony, the preference for being *gourmand* rather than *gourmet*, and the partiality for large quantities of food of the fatty or sugar-laden variety', a point of view that would be regarded as politically incorrect in many other countries. Iceland could easily have gone in the same direction, had not poverty and taxation prevented it: instead it went down the route of very heavy consumption of sugar—something else that is not exactly in line with modern dietetic opinion. In fact, that route of adaptation was not unique to Iceland; it was common among working-class people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the age of bread and jam (Mintz 1985). From the same period in several countries—Britain, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and also the United States—came middle-class initiatives to provide cookery lessons for housewives, and cookery schools for domestic servants. While welfare was one motive, it is clear that another was *de haut en bas*—to 'improve', to 'refine' and to 'civilise' the 'lower orders'; in other words, the teachers' mixed motives often included the satisfaction of manifesting their own social superiority (Mennell 1996, pp. 226–8). Cookery lessons also found their way into the curriculum for schoolgirls. Interestingly, such initiatives were far less evident in France, where it seems to have been taken more for granted that an interest in food and some skill in its preparation would be encountered within the home.

It is significant that, again a little more than a century ago, what are now called 'eating disorders' first became a concern, mainly in the better-off ranks of society where food was never in short supply (Mennell 1987). It was then that anorexia nervosa was first described and named by clinicians, and that cookery books began to have sections on how to cope with obesity. The two disorders, apparently opposites, in fact have something in common in their aetiology—both represent the failure of a steady, even self-control over appetite capable of maintaining a normally healthy body weight. The fear of fatness is now widespread, both on the part of individuals and governments. People are, in many countries, on average becoming steadily plumper, yet the cultural ideal of the sexually attractive body is becoming steadily slimmer. So for individuals, being fat causes anxieties about attractiveness as well as healthiness. For governments, the increasing prevalence of fatness is a public health and even an economic problem. Campaigns to persuade people to take more exercise, as well as to eat more sensibly, are prevalent—although their effectiveness is debatable.⁵

Globalisation and multicultural eating

Today, the diversity of ethnic influences found in the cooking and taste of all the richer countries of the world, enmeshed as they are in worldwide food chains, makes it more difficult to speak of separate national culinary cultures. In one way we may even have reverted to a pattern reminiscent of the medieval world. The separate strata are now at a global level, with the rich countries looking towards each other to make sure that they are not too far out of step, while a huge gap divides them from the large part of the world's people who form the nutritional underclass. Those are people who often go hungry or, even when they are not hungry, live somewhat monotonously off the product of their own labours; they are (sadly) irrelevant to the culinary cultural consciousness of the West and of Europe.

One consequence of this pattern of global stratification is that we are living through a second great age of the migration of peoples,⁶ which dwarfs in scale those of the previous two millennia. There is nothing new in the principle of ethnic migrations and diasporas. Over much of Europe, but especially in Central and Eastern Europe, cuisine was significantly enriched by the traditions of the Jews. This is especially clear in Poland, to which the Jews were invited as an oppressed minority by the enlightened Casimir the Great,⁷ many centuries before Poland under the Nazis became a 'Jewish cemetery'. The Roma, or Gypsies as they are more familiarly known, are also represented in the lexicon of European cookery: many dishes are described as being *in der Zigeuner Art* (although whether real Roma would recognise them is another question—like all recipes, those of minorities change over time and are adapted by host communities).

But the scale of mass migration since the second half of the twentieth century is unprecedented; it has had, and is continuing to have, huge effects on how people eat in most of the countries of Europe. Of course, the impact of migration is centuries old; and ethnic diversity has no absolute beginning. In Sweden, the impact that its recent immigrants have had on Swedish food can be seen for instance in the difference between recipes for meatballs in 1938 and 1999. Yet old traditions are typically not overwhelmed by new ethnic influences; in Sweden, for new migrants 'eating Swedish' is one important means of assimilating into Swedish society. There are many puzzles concerning which new culinary influences are adopted and which old traditions stand their ground. It is curious that the Dutch dominated world trade for a century and a half in and after their Golden Age,⁸ yet their one contribution to world cuisine (they wryly note) was the doughnut. That is all the more puzzling when, having lost its empire and suffered surprisingly little collective trauma through its loss, the Netherlands now has a strikingly multicultural eating scene. There is much here that merits further investigation and reflection.

There is an overall trend towards 'diminishing contrasts, increasing varieties' (Mennell 1996, pp. 318–32). Economic inequality has not disappeared—indeed, in many Western societies it has increased over the last quarter of a century—but old-style class inequalities cross-cut with ethnicity to an extent inconceivable in Europe half a century ago. Above all, they cross-cut with many different kinds of status groups that are defined as much by their patterns of consumption and taste as by their disposable income. This has led to a culinary pluralism that is the counterpart of something that is more familiar in the arts: the loss of a single dominant style. Styles like the Baroque and Rococo enjoyed virtually unchallenged dominance in their age, more unchallenged indeed than the aristocratic upper classes with which they were associated. In a more problematic way, so did Romanticism dominate an age and spread across the range of the arts. During the last hundred years or more, however, this stylistic unity has been lost. There is a greater diversity of tastes coexisting and competing at one time—competing more equally, again like classes and interests in society.

There is a rapid succession of fashions in artistic styles. And the mixture of elements deriving from several styles is common: the label *kitsch*, often applied to incongruous mixtures of style in other aspects of culture, can also be used about the domain of food (Elias 1996 [1935]).

One such mixture is the modern so-called '**fusion food**'. In 1988 in the Netherlands I was served *kipfilet* (chicken breast) surmounted by a slice of brie, accompanied by sauerkraut mixed with mangoes and lychees. Similar mixtures are evident in Australia—I am tempted to caricature the Australian national dish as meat pies with lemongrass. Such a mixing of traditions is made possible not only by long chains of interdependence, but also by a loosening of the model-setting centres for taste that would previously have judged such a combination to be incongruous. But I would also add that the sheer pace of change itself probably means that incongruity appears and disappears before the arbiters of taste—such as they still are—have a chance to label it incongruous. We shall never again see the codification of high culinary taste in coherent systems such as those represented by, say, Carême, Escoffier⁹ or (to a lesser extent) the *nouvelle cuisiniers*¹⁰ of the 1960s (Mennell 1996), which is not to say that there will not be fashions that spread internationally and last for a longer or shorter period. One example of the last decade or so is the fashion adopted by many restaurants for the *tian*, in which the fish or meat is piled on top of vegetables and potatoes in the middle of the plate, surrounded by sauce.

The democratisation of eating

Three decades ago the Council of Europe sponsored an intense discussion of the rival merits of the notions of the 'democratisation of culture' on the one hand and 'cultural democracy' on the other (Mennell 1976). The first phrase was used to denote traditional attempts to spread knowledge and enjoyment of 'elite culture'—whether drama, music, literature or art—to the masses, those who by reason of socioeconomic condition or lack of education had not had access to it. In the wake of *les événements de mai* 1968 (the student protests of May 1968 in Paris) a certain loss of nerve was apparent. At any rate, there was no denying *le refus ouvrier* ('working class rejection'): the workers, or most of them, did not much care for Sophocles, Shakespeare or Schoenberg. The ideology of 'cultural democracy' was a response to that, and meant that equal value should be accorded to the 'cultural expression' of all social groups. Since it was unclear how 'cultural democracy' was to be distinguished from the mass culture provided by the mass media (which commercial interests justify by saying that they are giving people 'what they want', even though 'the people' may still have little knowledge of or access to anything different) one could be sceptical about whether this conceptual dichotomy represented real policy alternatives (Mennell 1979).

These issues play themselves out in curious ways in the specific field of food culture. The democratisation of eating has been underway for a long time. It can be seen two centuries ago, with the shifting of the locus of culinary innovation and leadership from the kitchens of great houses to the restaurants where cooks competed for the favour of the eating public. Also associated in France with the aftermath of the Revolution was the emergence of the knowledgeable gastronome, men like Grimod de la Reynière¹¹ and Brillat-Savarin,¹² who wrote the precursors of the restaurant guides—*Michelin*, *Gault Millau*,¹³ the *Good Food Guide*—and of the cookery columns in newspapers and magazines (Mennell 1996). At first glance they, and their successors, can appear to be snobbishly decreeing for the ignorant populace what their betters consider to be good and bad food. But in broader perspective they can also be seen to have democratised good eating, working along with cooks to educate the palates of diners, spreading knowledge over great distances through print and later the electronic media.

Still, the democratisation of eating does not involve only the trickle *down* of tastes and dishes that once may have been known only to the wealthy, privileged and well travelled. 'Trickle *up*' also occurs, when tastes and dishes that once belonged to the lower strata of society are adopted by higher strata. The activities of collectors of old recipes and promoters of the romantic image of peasant cuisines have already been mentioned. Also active in effecting the upward social mobility of simple farmers' fare, however, have been some of the most famous chefs. Elizabeth David (1964) described what she called the 'butterisation' of simple Provençal recipes by the great Escoffier himself; he might take a dish of artichokes and potatoes baked in olive oil and transform it by adding truffles (very expensive) and using this as the bed on which to serve a choice cut of lamb to his rich customers. That would represent long-range upward social mobility for the humble vegetarian dish from Provence, and probably—as in the social ascent of people—the upward social mobility of foods is more likely to be over a shorter rather than a longer range. Examples abound: cases include both the humble pizza and eating with the fingers in the street. Across much of Europe today, the eating scene is reminiscent of Peter Burke's (1978) description of popular culture in the late Middle Ages. Then, all ranks of society participated in popular culture, and it was only with printing and more widespread literacy that the upper classes withdrew into a more exclusive high culture. Today, one might argue that all ranks participate in the fast food and manufactured food cultures, even if only the better off come to sample elite cuisines and search for new ways of distinguishing themselves (Bourdieu 1979; Finkelstein 1989). The use they make of food and eating to symbolise their styles of life is now well recognised. Above all, however, interest in and the *enjoyment* of food—and, moreover, the *opportunity* to enjoy it—appears to be spread more widely through the ranks of society than it ever was before.

Conclusion

Can any conclusions and recommendations be drawn from a book like *Culinary Cultures of Europe* for governments, local authorities and people at large? Perhaps. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, it used to be a truism that people's tastes in food were among the most conservative aspects of cultures, the most resistant to change. And yet today it is probably the speed of change and the burgeoning diversity of eating across the world that most strikes the reader. The two statements may not be so incompatible as they appear at first glance. Undoubtedly, the development of food manufacturing, transport and distribution since World War II has filled the supermarket shelves with an abundance of new products and exotic flavours that must occasionally tempt even the most conservative shopper. Can we now imagine life without the supermarkets, even though they have spread widely only since about the 1960s? Can we remember that in northern Europe most people in the 1960s had never seen a pepper (capsicum) or aubergine (eggplant)? That mangos became a familiar fruit far more recently than that? Or, indeed, that bananas were almost unobtainable in parts of Eastern Europe in the 1980s? At the same time, it is too simple to say that the old conservatism has vanished. People in most countries still enjoy, celebrate and take pride in their traditional foods and recipes. But it does not prevent them from enjoying a change. This facet of modern European culinary culture may be seen as one manifestation of what has been called a 'quest for excitement' that is characteristic of modern society (Elias & Dunning 1986). People do not need just to 'relax' from the strains and stresses of work; they need the pleasurable arousal and excitement, and the pleasurable catharsis that follows, from playing a hard-fought game of tennis, watching a fast-moving game of soccer, reading a thriller or great literature, being in the audience at a good play or concert. Or eating out, perhaps sampling food from an unfamiliar country or culture.

It follows that sampling other people's foods is one of the simplest and most direct ways to promote multicultural understanding. It should not, however, be promoted heavy-handedly. There is a certain tension—albeit an often pleasurable and exciting tension—for most people between their attachment to the old ways of eating in their country and their interest in the new foods they encounter when travelling abroad, or in new ethnic restaurants or among newcomers in their own country. It would most likely be disastrous were officials to decree that 'Thou *shalt* enjoy rogan josh/moussaka/baklava/pirozhki/bryndza' (delete as appropriate). That would obviously provoke the reaction 'Why shouldn't we just carry on eating our fish and chips/Bratkartoffeln/lasagne/paella?' (or whatever). If adventurous eating is encouraged with a gentle touch from schooldays onwards, however, what more directly enjoyable way is there of coming to know, to understand, and to *like* other cultures?

Acknowledgment

This chapter is adapted from the conclusion ('Culinary Transitions in Europe: An Overview', pp. 469–88) that I wrote for Darra Goldstein and Kathrin Merkle (eds), 2005, *Culinary Cultures of Europe: Identity, Diversity and Dialogue*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe; and was written during research leave in 2006–07 at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, with the support of a Government of Ireland Senior Research Fellowship awarded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- The book *Culinary Cultures of Europe* contains chapters from 46 European countries, depicting for the most part what they are most proud of in their traditions of cooking and eating.
- Old self-sufficient 'peasant' traditions are easy to romanticise. When people had to rely on what they grew and reared in their own neighbourhoods, their diets were often very monotonous by modern standards. The 'great festival dishes', often celebrated today, were few and far between.
- In long-term perspective, cuisine has become less socially stratified. Styles of cookery that originated in the most elite circles—royal and noble courts—have trickled down over the centuries to influence what ordinary people eat. National styles emerged, but now an internationalisation of eating is evident, partly through the 'industrialisation of eating'.
- Eating as a social problem and as a matter of public policy—worries about anorexia on the one hand and obesity on the other—are recent developments.
- The present phase is one of the 'democratisation of eating', marked by 'trickle up' as well as 'trickle down', with people of all social strata participating in the popular culture of hamburgers, and so on.

Sociological reflection

- How would you describe your own country's culinary cuisine?
- What are some iconic examples of national dishes, ingredients and modes of cooking or consuming food that reflect your national culture?
- How much are your own food habits a reflection of regional, national or global influences?

Discussion questions

- 1 What are some of the main reasons that distinctive culinary cuisines developed?
- 2 What role did social stratification play in the development of culinary cuisines?
- 3 How have the processes of industrialisation and globalisation impacted upon culinary cuisines?
- 4 What are some examples of, and reasons for, the rise of fusion food in your country?
- 5 What are some contemporary examples of 'diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties' in the culinary cuisine of your country?
- 6 In what ways has eating become 'democratised' in your country?

Further investigation

- 1 The increasing availability of national cuisines across the globe reflects the rise of cosmopolitanism and cultural tolerance. Discuss.
- 2 Food habits are not simply a matter of personal taste, but reflect regional, national and global influences. Discuss.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

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Websites

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- Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture: www.gastronomica.org/
- Research Centre for the History of Food and Drink, University of Adelaide, Australia: www.arts.adelaide.edu.au/centrefooddrink/

Films and documentaries

- Babette's Feast* (1987): Nordisk Film/Danish Film Institute, 109 minutes with English subtitles.
- Chocolat* (2000): France, film directed by Lasse Hallstrom, 121 minutes.
- Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* (1994): Taiwan, 123 minutes with English subtitles.
- Like Water for Chocolate* (1993): Mexico, 113 minutes with English subtitles.
- The Wedding Banquet* (1993): Taiwan, 111 minutes with English subtitles.

NOTES

- 1 The Black Death was the most devastating pandemic in human history, spreading from south-western Asia to Europe by the late 1340s, killing an estimated minimum of 75 million people worldwide.
- 2 Béla Bartók (1881–1945), Hungarian composer and collector of Eastern European folk music, one of the founders of the field of ethnomusicology.
- 3 ‘Two-front stratum’ is a concept from Georg Simmel’s *Soziologie* (1908); the idea was developed in Norbert Elias’s idea of ‘pressure from below’, in *The Civilising Process* (2000).
- 4 Strictly speaking, there was a court society around the Stadhouder—who became King only after 1815—at Den Haag (with a subsidiary branch at Leeuwarden), but the political and economic power, and thus most of the cultural model-setting power, rested with the mercantile Regenten elite in the commercial towns of the Randstad (Amsterdam, Haarlem, Rotterdam and Utrecht).
- 5 For more than 30 years, the Council of Europe has promoted exercise under its slogan of ‘Sport for All’; it is less easy to think of such a straightforward and effective slogan for promoting sensible eating. The message would have to cut two ways: too many people in the world are still going hungry, while others are eating far too much.
- 6 The term ‘age of the great migrations of peoples’ was originally applied to the movements across the Eurasian landmass during the first millennium AD.
- 7 Casimir III, King of Poland 1333–70.
- 8 The seventeenth century, in which Dutch trade, science and art were among the most acclaimed in the world.
- 9 Antonin Carême (1784–1833) and Georges Auguste Escoffier (1846–1935) were the most famous French chefs of their respective ages, and both of them codified French cuisine in major cookery books that had great influence on upper-class eating throughout the Western world.
- 10 The term *nouvelle cuisine* was applied to a new style of French cuisine that was simpler and lighter, and dispensed with the heavy sauces of the Escoffier era. It was developed in the 1960s and 1970s by such French cooks as Jean and Pierre Troisgros, Paul Bocuse and Michel Guerard.
- 11 Alexandre Balthazar Grimod de la Reynière (1758–1838), author of the *Almanach des Gourmands*, a pioneering gastronomic guide to Paris, which appeared in annual editions for about a decade from 1803 onwards.
- 12 Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755–1826), author of *Physiologie du Goût* (1826).
- 13 *Gault Millau* is one of the most famous contemporary restaurant guides in France, taking its name from its editors, Henri Gault and Christian Millau, who are credited with inventing the term *nouvelle cuisine*.

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CHAPTER 9

HUMANS, FOOD AND OTHER ANIMALS

Deidre Wicks

OVERVIEW

- › Why are large numbers of people voluntarily removing meat from their diets?
- › What are some of the processes that operate to separate 'meat' from the living animal from which it came?
- › What concepts derived from sociology can enhance our understanding of vegetarianism?

This chapter reviews the recent sociological literature on vegetarianism. The focus is on the voluntary rejection of meat, which is explored in relation to theories of oppression and liberation, cultural denial, ecology, aesthetics and health. Vegetarianism is sociologically significant because it links the 'natural' (hunger, food and eating) with the 'social' (what we eat, how, when and why). It also links the 'personal' (choice, belief and preference) with institutions and wider social structures (the food industry and state policy). The chapter examines

Elias's notion of the civilising process and Giddens' concept of 'life politics' as useful ways for understanding vegetarianism in late modernity. It concludes by exploring the contradictory forces at work that are influencing the survival and possible growth of vegetarianism into the future.

KEY TERMS

anti-vivisection
 biological determinism
 carnism
 civilising process
 emancipatory politics
 epidemiology
 globalisation
 intersectionality
 life politics
 modernity
 pacifism
 socialism
 speciesism
 unproblematised
 vegetarianism

Introduction

Eating is a highly personal act. At the same time, for most people, it is a social act. When we eat, how we eat and, more particularly, what we eat are, for those of us not experiencing genuine scarcity, decisions that are driven by complex motives. While these motives include the 'natural' or the biological—such as hunger—they also include social factors, such as taste, manners, expectations and obligations. In this way, the act of eating becomes imbued with social meaning. The connections between nature, culture, eating and the meaning of food become even more complex when we examine the choice to include certain foods, such as meat, in the diet, or to exclude them. For this very reason, such an examination ought to hold great interest for students of human behaviour and of social movements and social change.

For the purposes of this chapter, we can divide people who do not eat meat into two categories. First, there are those who are forced to exclude meat from their diet. These include people compelled to take this course of action for either economic or environmental reasons, or a combination of both. Second, there are those who voluntarily exclude meat. This group can itself be divided into people who exclude meat for religious reasons and those who do so for a variety of other reasons, such as philosophical and ethical, political or health motives. It is this second group with which we will be primarily concerned in this chapter, not because they are the most important but because they hold the most interest sociologically. These people are at the nexus of the natural and the social, the private and the public. In what follows, I will examine the key issues that underlie the decision of a growing number of people to voluntarily forgo a nourishing and pleasure-giving food. I will then attempt to interpret these decisions within a framework of recent sociological theory.

Vegetarianism and the social sciences

Despite the potential for rich social observation and analysis, there has been little research and writing on **vegetarianism** from the perspective of the social sciences, although, as we shall see, there have recently been some very useful exceptions. It is fair to say that sociologists are uncomfortable with a theoretical focus on 'the natural' or 'the biological' for analysis of social issues, social patterns of behaviour or social change. There are good reasons for this. In a very real sense, sociology is constructed around opposition to the notion that the social can be reduced to our biological origins and destiny (**biological determinism**). Over several decades, sociologists have successfully challenged biologically determinist accounts and rationalisations of inequality in the areas of class, gender and ethnicity. Clearly these challenges have been confined neither to the pages of books nor to debates within universities, but have had profound effects on social attitudes and social policy worldwide.

Yet while behaviour and attitudes concerning discrimination based on class, gender and ethnicity are regarded as socially constructed and therefore socially amenable to change, the issue of what we eat—and therefore our relationship with other living creatures—has remained strangely **unproblematised** and therefore implicitly regarded as natural. When searching for reasons for this blind spot in social analysis, it is impossible to ignore the bedrock of Judaeo-Christian teachings, which conveniently mesh with a sociological view of humans as having distinct and unique characteristics that mark them out as superior to all other living creatures. In so doing, sociologists have reinforced the tendency to deny the *animal* in humans as well as the *social* in animals (Noske 1997). Social scientists have, on the whole, been content to leave the

study of animals to the natural scientists and to criticise their subject–object approach only if it is applied to humans (1997, p. 78). Whatever the reasons for the past neglect, social scientists are now turning their attentions to the area of food in general and diet choice in particular for research and analysis. Two recent and very useful contributions to the general area of the sociology of human/animal relations, which also contain specific material on the sociology of eating animals, provide readers with material from both Great Britain and Australia (Peggs 2012; Taylor 2013).

Historical overview

While vegetarianism is a relatively modern phenomenon, it is informed and underpinned by a collection of rich and varied historical antecedents. Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil (1997) provide a useful account of the historical and cultural background of meat-rejection, as does Tristram Stuart (2008). Suffice to say that one of the earliest coherent philosophies of meat rejection was put forward by the Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras (born approximately 580 BC). The Pythagorean doctrine was based on the belief of the transmigration of souls, which implied a kindred relationship and a common fate for all living creatures. The document also embodied what would now be called environmental or ecological concerns (Beardsworth & Keil 1997, p. 220). This theme, concerning the connection and relatedness of all creatures (including humans), has surfaced many times throughout the history of Western thought and has been a constant in many Eastern religions, as well as the belief systems of many indigenous peoples.

Another historical theme that has emerged at various times and places has been concerned with the connection between the rejection of meat and the health of individuals and societies. In Italy in 1558, in England in the seventeenth century, and in Germany, Britain and the United States in the nineteenth century, various theorists have posited the connection between vegetarianism and a long and healthy life (Spencer 1995, p. 274). These theories were enhanced by the 'conversion' of prominent individuals, such as the co-founder of Methodism, John Wesley, and literary figures such as Percy Bysshe Shelley, Leo Tolstoy and George Bernard Shaw. Spencer (1995) makes the important point that, as well as the emphasis on health, the vegetarian movement has historically maintained long-standing links with movements such as ethical **socialism**, animal rights, **anti-vivisection** and **pacifism**. There were also many links with the anti-slavery movement (Phillips 2003). Links with other, kindred social movements are still apparent within modern vegetarianism.

What is a vegetarian?

Before studying the extent of modern vegetarianism and the reasons for its voluntary adoption, we must first be clear on what we mean by vegetarianism, which is a surprisingly 'broader church' than is commonly thought. Technically speaking, a vegetarian is a person who eats no flesh. There are further subcategories, such as lacto-vegetarians and ovo-vegetarians, who eat no flesh but who eat some of the products of animals—in this case milk and eggs respectively. A vegan, on the other hand, not only refuses flesh, but also abstains from eating (and sometimes wearing) all animal products. Vegans argue that animal products cannot be separated from animal mistreatment. They point, for instance, to the connection between eating eggs and the unnatural, restricted lives of hens in battery cages and between drinking milk and the breeding and slaughter of 'veal' calves that are necessary to keep dairy cows in milk (Singer 1975, pp. 179–80; Marcus 2001, pp. 128–32). For this reason, many vegans also refuse to wear or use products based on animal material—for

example, soap, wool and leather, all of which are implicated in animal suffering and exploitation (Francione 2008). Indeed Francione argues that veganism is much more than a matter of diet, lifestyle, or consumer choice; it is 'a personal commitment to nonviolence and the abolition of exploitation' (2008, p. 16).

Among vegetarians and vegans there is an ongoing debate in which vegans sometimes accuse vegetarians of being morally inconsistent because they eat or use animal products that are directly connected to meat production. On the other hand, some vegetarians find veganism overly restrictive, and view vegetarianism as a more practical way of reducing animal suffering (Ruby 2012, p. 147).

How many vegetarians are there?

Notwithstanding problems of definition, there have been several attempts to calculate the extent of vegetarianism across a number of countries. Overall, around 1 billion people are estimated to be either vegetarian or almost vegetarian (Gold 2004, p. 66). These figures would also include those who adopt a vegetarian diet for religious reasons. The trends, however, are complex. Overall, the global demand for meat is growing, particularly in China and India, which could see an 80 per cent boom in the meat sector by 2022 due to a growing middle class. At the same time, meat consumption in the industrialised west has stagnated (Willett 2014). Indeed, there has been a growth of vegetarianism, especially among young, educated consumers (Cooney 2014, p. 19).

For instance, in the UK, while the vast majority of people continue to eat meat, the number of vegetarians has more than doubled over the last 10 years (quoted in Peggs 2012, p. 101). Recent studies show that there are now 1.8 million vegetarians in the UK, accounting for 3 per cent of the population. In addition, a further 5 per cent were classified as 'partly vegetarian' (GfK Social Research 2009). From 2009, people in the UK are also identified with the labels 'meat avoiders' (10 per cent) and 'meat reducers' (23 per cent) according to one survey (Rohrer 2009).

In the United States there has been a 9 per cent drop in meat consumption from 2007 to 2012 due to dietary changes based on ethical and health concerns (Willett 2014). Even so, close to 10 billion animals are killed for food in the USA annually. According to Cooney (2014), vegetarians number in the millions in the United States. Although polls vary, there is general agreement that around 3 per cent self-report that they never eat red meat, poultry or fish. A third of these, 1 per cent, state they never eat eggs or dairy. If these numbers are accurate, and they are consistent with earlier studies (*Time Magazine* quoted in Pollan 2006, p. 313), the number of vegans and vegetarians in the USA can be calculated at between 9 and 10 million. This does not include the millions of semi-vegetarians who have cut back on the amount of meat they eat. This means that a very large and ever-increasing number of people are making a conscious effort to remove animal products from their diet—or at least to restrict them.

The latest findings from Roy Morgan Research reveal that between 2012 and 2016 the number of Australian adults whose diet is all or almost all vegetarian has risen from 1.7 million people (or 9.7 per cent of the population) to almost 2.1 million (11.2 per cent of the population) (Roy Morgan Research 2016). Another indicator of this trend is that the online booking service Dimmi has recorded a 76 per cent increase in searches for vegan and vegetarian restaurants from 2015–16 (Lam 2016). These figures, like those for the UK and the US, point to the fact that vegetarianism in the West is no longer the territory of a few 'cranks', but has become something approaching a mass movement, with millions of adherents worldwide.

Why do people become vegetarian or vegan?

There are many reasons for the voluntary abstinence from meat, and the discipline of sociology has provided concepts and theories, as well as in-depth studies that help us to more fully understand this phenomenon. The decision to stop eating meat is inevitably tied up with philosophical questions such as: Who am I? Why am I here? What is my place in relation to others on the planet? These are the important, difficult questions that organised religion and secular philosophy have attempted to answer since the beginning of human time. For those of us with a Judaeo-Christian heritage, they are tied up with interpretations from the Old Testament concerning the place of humans in relation to other species. The pivotal passage comes from Genesis, where we are told:

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:24–8)

The Jewish and Christian religions have, on the whole, chosen to interpret 'dominion' as the right to have power over, to control and to use all other species for the benefit of the human species. These religious traditions are so pervasive in the West that they constitute the bedrock of morality for the majority of people, including those who do not ostensibly adhere to organised religions. We are brought up to believe that eating meat is not wrong or, more commonly, that we are not even required to question whether it is right or wrong. This is not to say that individuals and sects of Jews and Christians have not questioned the morality of the killing and eating of animals, but they have usually been treated as outsiders at best and, at worst, as heretics (Singer 1975; Spencer 1995; Patterson 2002). These individuals and sects have often come to another interpretation of 'dominion', one that emphasises the responsibilities of care and nurture that inhere to humans in relation to other species on the planet. This interpretation has had a profound influence on the animal rights movement, as well as on the environmental and ecological movements more generally.

Sociological theories of power, oppression and liberation

There have also been attempts to develop philosophies of animal rights within secular traditions. Probably the best known is 'animal liberation', a philosophy and a social and political movement developed and championed by the Australian philosopher Peter Singer. Though a philosophy, the concept of animal liberation developed by Singer owes a debt to the liberation sociology of the 1960s, when concepts such as racism and sexism were developed, analysed and applied to situations of race and gender oppression. These are concepts that permit an understanding of inequality that does not rely on the supposed inferior characteristics of a particular social group, but that focuses on the ability of the dominant group to accrue unequal benefits by using their power to define the 'other' as inferior and to institutionalise these attitudes in social institutions and practices. Fundamental to this process is an assumption that the interests of the dominant group are more important than the interests of the oppressed group. This understanding of the operation of power paved the way for theories and strategies of liberation for oppressed groups. Singer invokes the analogy of the oppression of women and people of colour and asks us to see attitudes to non-humans as a form of prejudice and an abuse of power no less objectionable than racism or sexism. The key point for Singer when determining the issue of 'rights' is not the degree

of intelligence, wealth, beauty or status held by any living creature but rather the degree to which it is capable of suffering (Singer 2000, p. 35). Like the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham before him, Singer argues that the capacity of animals to experience suffering and pleasure implies that they have their own interests that ought not to be violated. When humans allow the interests of their own species to justify causing pain and suffering to another species, the pattern is identical to that of racism and sexism: Singer calls this **speciesism**.

In his book *Animal Liberation* (1975), and later in his co-authored book *The Ethics of What We Eat* (Singer & Mason 2006), Singer details the shocking litany of mistreatment inflicted on animals through animal experimentation and meat production and slaughter, particularly those associated with modern, intensive farming methods. *Animal Liberation* was one of the first public exposés of, for instance, the fact that chickens, 'battery hens', spend their entire lives in cages no larger than the area of an A4 page and that the lights in the battery sheds are left on over a 24-hour period so that their bodies are tricked into producing two eggs instead of one. While this practice of packing hens into tiny cages has spread more extensively throughout the world, Australians are increasingly opting to pay a premium and buy free-range eggs. Indeed, 65 per cent of Australians choose this option, notwithstanding labelling uncertainty about the definition of free-range (Patch & Day 2015). It was hoped that a new national standard for labelling free-range eggs, legally enforceable under Australian consumer law from 2017, would dispel this uncertainty. However, as Christine Parker and her colleagues argue (Parker et al. 2016), issues such as 'meaningful and regular access to an outdoor range' and an outdoor 'stocking density' 'could perpetuate confusion and controversy for consumers' (p. 1).

Singer makes the point that chickens raised for meat or 'broilers' endure a different kind of misery (Singer & Mason 2006). The question, which provides the *raison d'être* for the industry is: 'What is the least amount of floor space necessary per bird to produce the greatest return on investment?' (2006, p. 21). These chickens have been selectively bred over decades so that they now achieve maximum growth in the shortest amount of time. By the end of their short lives these birds are huge and their bone growth has been outpaced by the growth of their muscles and fat. Overcrowding is a problem and many lame birds are unable to reach food or water and so are crushed or die of hunger or thirst. Mortality rates (the number of chickens that die before they are six weeks old) level out at around 6 per cent, which is 48 million per annum in the UK alone (Gold 2004, p. 48).

Birds who squat in the litter to relieve the pressure on their legs frequently contract burns on their hocks and breasts due to the high concentrations of ammonia present in their excrement-filled litter. These abnormal levels of ammonia also cause sore eyes, blindness and chronic respiratory disease. At the end of six weeks, the birds are caught, crammed into cages and then driven to the slaughterhouse, a journey that can take many hours. A typical killing line now moves at 90 birds a minute and speeds can be as high as 120 birds a minute (Singer & Mason 2006, p. 24). At such speeds some birds miss either the electrified water bath or having their throat cut and so go into the scalding tank fully conscious. Documents obtained under the US Freedom of Information Act (1966) indicate that this could be the fate of up to 3 million birds a year in the USA alone (2006, p. 24).

Singer and Mason point to research that demonstrates, contrary to popular opinion that pigs are 'stupid', that pigs are affectionate and inquisitive animals (2006, p. 41). They are easily trained and learn quickly to perform the kinds of tasks normally associated with dogs. While it would be regarded as cruel and unacceptable to keep a dog locked up for life in a cage that is too narrow to turn around in or to walk more than one or two steps backwards or forwards in, these are the

conditions in which breeding sows live out their short lives. (Breeding sows are the pigs that give birth to piglets that are fattened for pork, ham and bacon.) They are kept indoors on concrete floors through repeated pregnancies, either tethered or in 'sow stalls' where they are unable to lie down comfortably, turn around, take more than one step forwards or backwards or nuzzle their young when they are born.

Sow stalls have now been banned in the UK, Luxembourg and Sweden and were banned within all 27 Member States of the European Union (EU) in 2013, although some States were still not complying one year later. In 2014, Canada voted to phase out sow stalls and to bring in group housing for pregnant sows from July 2014 (Compassion in World Farming [CIWF] 2014). In the United States, there are partial bans in California, Arizona and Florida. The major US pork producers have pledged to transition to a better way of raising pigs. Smithfield Foods (the world's largest pork producer) and Hormel Foods are going crate-free, and Cargill has removed crates from all of its facilities (Humane Society of the United States 2014). New Zealand pledged to ban sow stalls from 2015 (Flag Post 2014). Yet, while the rest of the developed world has begun the process of ethically re-evaluating and phasing out this cruel practice, in 2007 Australia decided to extend the practice of confining breeding sows in these stalls for another 10 years. After this 10-year period, Australian pig farmers will have to reduce the maximum amount of time they keep sows in stalls from 16 weeks to six weeks. Under the new code, stall length will be increased by 20 centimetres and will remain 60 centimetres wide (Lee 2007).

After giving birth to the litter, piglets are taken away at three to four weeks. Such early weaning allows the sows to produce five litters in two years. At that point they are usually sent to slaughter for processed meat. The piglets—which are bred for rapid growth—are then fattened for around six months. While conditions vary, bare, cold, overcrowded concrete or slatted pens are the norm. These conditions frustrate pigs' instinctive digging behaviour and cause lameness. Overcrowded conditions lead to fighting and tail biting, so teeth clipping and tail docking are carried out routinely, without anaesthetic. The same transport and slaughter problems described in relation to chickens also apply to pigs. Globally, 1.2 billion pigs are slaughtered for meat every year (Gold 2004, p. 50).

It was the uncovering of conditions such as these that led Singer to describe such treatment as speciesism. It can be argued that no creature would willingly subject itself to such treatment; therefore, the relationship must be seen as one which involves oppression and exploitation. This led Singer to the conclusion that for reasons of intellectual and theoretical consistency alone we ought to become vegetarian.

Other writers have emphasised different aspects of oppression and power. Michael Parenti observes, 'the most insidious oppressions are those that so insinuate themselves into the fabric of our lives and into the recesses of our minds that we don't even realize they are acting upon us' (quoted in Nibert 2013, p. 1). Through an historical exploration of domestication and pastoralism, Nibert unpicks the connections between animal oppression, capitalism and human violence. He concludes that in the face of violence against growing numbers of domesticated animals and the history of dispossession of indigenous people, the morally responsible position is to practise and promote global veganism (2013, p. 271).

Melanie Joy (2010) approaches the same issue from a very different angle. She looks at the oppression of farm animals from the perspective of the belief system that allows the unquestioning destruction of some animals, while other animals with the same qualities are loved and pampered. She argues that we don't see meat-eating as we do vegetarianism, as a choice based on values and assumptions about other animals, about ourselves and about the world we live in and share.

We see meat-eating as given, as the 'natural' thing to do, the way things have always been and will always be. She argues further that we eat animals without thinking about what we are doing because the belief system that underlies the behaviour is invisible. Joy makes this belief system explicit and calls it **carism** (2010, p. 29).

Gender and ethnicity

When it comes to gender, there are some interesting data relating to vegetarianism. To start with, women eat a lot less meat than men. In the United States for instance, men eat over 50 per cent more meat per person (Cooney 2014, p. 51). Women also report less liking for meat and consider meatless meals to be more pleasant than do men (Ruby 2012, p. 148). Vegetarian women tend to be more concerned with animal welfare than are vegetarian men—who tend to be more interested in their own health—and this sentiment is also present among non-vegetarians, so that women are more likely to report concerns with issues of animal welfare and environmental protection, and to view a vegetarian diet in positive terms (2012, p. 148).

Women are also much more likely to be vegetarian. They outnumber male vegetarians all over the industrialised world, with studies documenting at least a two to one majority in the United States, Canada, the UK, the Netherlands and Australia. A study conducted across 11 different Eurasian countries found that women outnumbered male vegetarians by a ratio of three to one (Cooney 2014, p. 51). Women are also less likely to believe that humans were made to eat meat, to believe that a healthy diet must include meat and to view the world in crude Darwinian terms (2014, p. 52). At the same time, it is important to remember that these are averages, and that there are many vegetarian-friendly men and pro-meat women.

How do we explain these differences? Apart from the differences in values referred to earlier, meat-eating is seen as a masculine activity, as we can see from the various studies quoted in Cooney (2014, p. 55). One study demonstrated that people who endorsed masculine values, whether male or female, were more likely to eat beef, pork and chicken and less likely to eat vegetarian meals. These values included the beliefs that men should not show pain, and that they should be emotionally restrained, athletic and dominant (Rothberger 2012).

In the light of these facts, a deeper level of sociological analysis is provided by Carol Adams' *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (2010), which makes the connection between the objectification and oppression of women and the treatment of animals. Adams develops her argument through the aid of a concept she terms the 'absent referent' (2010, p. 13). Adams explains that through the act of butchering, animals become absent referents by the fact that in name and body they are made absent as animals so that meat can exist. It is not possible to eat meat without the death of an animal. Live animals are therefore the absent referents in the concept of meat. Humans do not regard meat-eating as contact with an animal, because it has been renamed as contact with *food* (original italics; Adams in Donovan & Adams 2007, p. 23).

As well as their literal absence as live animals they are also absent in language. When people eat animals they change the way they talk about them. For instance, they do not use the term baby animal but rather, lamb or veal (Adams 2010, p. 97). After they have been butchered, new names are used to disguise the fact that these were once animals. Cows become beef, steak and mince; pigs become rashers, bacon, ham, lardoons; lamb becomes cutlets, chops, crown roast. Adams develops a unified theory that incorporates sexual violence against women and the butchering of animals through an analysis of the social and political processes of objectification, fragmentation and consumption (2010, p. 73). Adams ends by providing the building blocks for a feminist-vegetarian critical theory (2010, p. 216).

Another contribution to our quest for a sociological understanding of vegetarianism that also lies within the tradition of power/oppression/liberation is the work of Charles Patterson (2002), whose project is to understand and elucidate the connection between racism and the treatment of non-human animals. Patterson makes the key point that the construction of a great divide between humans and animals provided a standard by which to judge other people: 'If the essence of humanity was defined as consisting of a specific quality or set of qualities, such as reason, intelligible language, religion, culture, or manners, it followed that anyone who did not fully possess those qualities was "subhuman"' (2002, p. 25). This then opened up the possibility of those judged as less than human being turned into slaves, beasts of burden, internees in 'hospitals', prisons, vermin to be eradicated, specimens to be experimented on, or food to be eaten.

Patterson then goes on to describe in disturbing detail the way that the practice of vilifying people by designating them as animals serves as a prelude to their persecution, exploitation and murder (2002, pp. 27–50). Equally illuminating is his exposition on the origins of the technology of institutionalised violence against animals and the mass slaughter of Jews in concentration camps. He traces a direct line between the design of assembly-line killing at the Chicago slaughterhouse to Henry Ford's application of the same principles in the industrial manufacture of automobiles and to Nazi Germany's assembly-line mass murder of Jews at the death camps (2002, p. 71). Ford himself acknowledged that the inspiration for assembly-line production came from a visit to a Chicago slaughterhouse as a young man (Ford, quoted in Patterson 2002, p. 72). While Patterson provides the most comprehensive and detailed analysis of the interconnections between animal and human mistreatment, he is not the only one to do so. Indeed, he quotes Theodor Adorno, one of the founders of modern critical sociology, who noted: 'Auschwitz begins wherever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they're only animals' (quoted in Patterson 2002, p. 51).

Within the broad sociological tradition outlined above, the recent emergence of Critical Animal Studies (CAS) offers a radical approach that centralises and problematises the issue of power at the centre of human–human and human–animal relations. It is an approach that points to the interconnectedness of oppressions which have at their heart the ability to define certain powerless groups as 'other'. As such, it seeks liberation for all oppressed groups, not only animals (Taylor 2013, p. 158). Central to the approach is the concept of **intersectionality**, which has become one of the main ways that scholars attempt to analyse identity and oppression across categories such as race, gender, class, age and disability. CAS scholars and activists are documenting the ways that distinctions of gender, race and class are often maintained through the use of human/animal distinctions—that is, the ways that all animals and some humans are designated as 'other' and not fully human and can therefore be exempted from the rights accruing to humans. Mark Roberts (2008) clarifies the goal when he states: 'To this I add the possibility of conceiving a continuum, a "unified field" as it were, of all species that in the end will be fully inclusive and thus render the largely specious, self-serving, exclusive arguments of the animalizers both empty and pointless' (2008, p. xi).

'Sociology of denial'

Through their analyses of the interconnectedness of abuses of power through speciesism, sexism and racism, sociologists have provided us with ways to understand why individuals have made conscious decisions to become vegetarian. The question is: given the evidence presented above, why are there so few vegetarians? A recent development in the *sociology of denial*, which looks specifically at the process used by individuals and groups to 'not see' the pain and terror experienced by others, assists in answering this question (Cohen 2001).

While written with a sole focus on human atrocities and suffering, the concepts presented in Cohen's book are equally applicable to the way we deny and ignore the daily realities of animal suffering when live animals are turned into meat (Wicks 2011). Cohen defines denial as 'the maintenance of social worlds in which an undesirable situation (event, condition, phenomenon) is unrecognised, ignored or made to seem normal' (Cohen 2001, p. 51). Eviatar Zerubavel (2006) has argued that the most public form of denial is *silence* and that a sociological approach allows us to see silence and denial as social processes that are collective endeavours and which involve a collaborative effort (Zerubavel 2006, p. 47).

Cohen looks at different types or levels of denial that he names as personal, official and cultural. Cultural denial, which is of most interest to us in this context, is neither wholly private nor officially organised by the state. According to Cohen, whole societies may slip into collective denial without either public sanctions or overt methods of control. Without being told what to think, societies arrive at unwritten agreements about what can be known, remembered and said (Cohen 2001, p. 11). Denial and 'normalisation' reflect both personal and collective states where suffering is not acknowledged. Normalisation happens through routinisation, tolerance, accommodation, collusion and cover-up. Cohen uses the example of domestic violence against women to illustrate the social process of cultural denial and the journey towards acknowledgment through political and social action (2001, p. 51).

Without conscious negotiation, people know which facts are better not noticed and what trouble spots to avoid. For instance, people do not consciously repress references to slaughterhouses when they are guests at a barbecue or dinner party where meat is being served. There is, however, an unspoken, indeed unconscious agreement that such references would be bad manners or bad taste. This is why the mere presence of a vegetarian at a dinner table can make people uncomfortable. Their presence raises into consciousness all those ideas and images so carefully 'not known' and 'not seen'.

In relation to slaughterhouses, Timothy Pachirat (2011) has described the way that animal death is denied even in the slaughterhouse itself with carefully constructed separations between the technologies of killing: stunning, throat-cutting and butchering. We know that the slaughterhouse is involved in the normalisation of violence to animals on a massive scale (Taylor 2013, p. 94). And yet, not only is the slaughterhouse segregated and hidden from society, but the work of killing is hidden even from those who directly participate in it (Pachirat 2011, p. 9). In his ethnographic study in a slaughterhouse where an animal is killed every 12 seconds, the author found that: 'Distance and concealment shield, sequester, and neutralize the work of killing even, or especially, where it might be expected to be least hidden' (2011, p. 9).

Sociology of attention

In subsequent writing, Zerubavel (2015) has broadened his opus to develop a sociology of attention. It is possible to see attention as the other side of denial. In this fascinating study, he makes the point that what we can access through our sense organs and thus potentially see, hear, taste or smell, is always more than what we actually notice. Visibility does not simply rely on physical factors, such as an object's size, or distance from the viewer, but is also dependent on the degree to which the viewer attends to it (2015, p. 2). The fact that we notice a few out of many visual stimuli reveals the exclusionary nature of attention. As a process of selection, it also implies exclusion. In the same way, the act of noticing also presupposes the act of *ignoring* (2015, p. 6, original italics).

Zerubavel examines research that shows that what people notice and don't notice depends on their gender, country of origin and the sub-cultures they inhabit. He points out that what people

notice, and consider worthy of notice also changes over time (2015, pp. 53–59). This means that we notice and ignore things as both individuals and as social beings. His work reveals the remarkable extent to which we reduce much of what we can potentially experience, both perceptually and conceptually to mere 'background' that we casually ignore. He further points out that attitudinal communities do more than offer suggestions as to what they might find worthy of attention. In fact, they also generate norms that direct people as to what they should attend to and what should be ignored and left in the background (2015, p. 59). This implies that attentional norms also tell us what would be considered wrong to attend to and so embody notions of attentional deviance. In this way, people are not meant to notice that various cuts of meat are actually pieces of once living animals or that milk comes into existence only through the birth of a calf that must silently 'disappear' so that we can take the milk for ourselves. To notice these things can be considered 'tactless,' 'rude' or 'smug'.

The implications of this work for an enhanced understanding of the way animals become 'mere background' should be clear. In particular, these concepts throw light on the persistent and ongoing ignorance of people concerning the conditions of life for factory-farmed animals. Selective information from the marketing departments of the meat and dairy industries meets an ever-willing audience of consumers who want to continue to consume meat and dairy and who would rather not know the truth.

At the same time, the edifice of cultural ignorance and denial surrounding meat-eating, while still pervasive, is less secure and monolithic than it once was due to the efforts of animal rights activists, who have increased awareness and changed the behaviour of enough individuals to make vegetarianism a social movement. The work of animal rights activists has drawn attention to forms of cruelty that have either been hidden from view or 'normalised', promoting an alternative discourse that eventually leads to new laws based on revised concepts of what is normal and acceptable.

'The civilising process'

Norbert Elias's opus, *The Civilizing Process*, holds two particular points of interest in the context of vegetarianism. The first is his theoretical exposition of historical change, which is based on linking the long-term structural development of societies with changes in people's behaviour. Related to this is a detailed, historical analysis of changes in personal habits to do with such 'natural' functions as eating, washing, spitting, urinating and defecating (Elias 2000, first published in English in 1978). While these might appear trivial behaviours on which to focus, it is precisely the unavoidable necessity of the tasks that makes any changes in the way they are performed visible as social changes. It is Elias's detailed study of changing daily habits in the preparation and consumption of food that is of immediate interest for our sociological understanding of vegetarianism.

Elias argues that segregation, removing out of sight, and concealment are the major methods of the civilising process. Elias reveals that there is a discernable pattern to the way in which practices that once occurred in public began over time to cause feelings of moral or physical disgust, and have, as a consequence, been hidden from sight. This process has resulted in activities such as urination, vomiting and defecation being removed from the public sphere and located in the private sphere. Clearly, the act of killing animals has been hidden from the view of the public. Abattoirs and slaughterhouses are situated at the edge of towns and are notable for walls, fences, checkpoints and geographic zones of isolation and confinement. Pachirat describes the slaughterhouse as 'a place that is no place, physically hidden from sight by walls and socially

veiled by the delegation of dirty, dangerous and demeaning work to others tasked with carrying out the killing, skinning and dismembering of living animals' (2011, p. 4). Elias's work helps us understand this removal of public markets and 'shambles' in cities to outlying 'non places' in regional areas.

In relation to meat-eating, the civilising process has entailed the removal of the obvious signs of the living and dead animal from public view (Elias 2000, p. 102). Elias states that this direction is quite clear. Where once the carving of a dead animal on the table would be experienced as pleasurable, developments led to another standard by which reminders that the meat dish is connected to the killing are avoided 'to the utmost'. This also affects the size of carving knives, which have shrunk 'all the less to recall the instrument that deals the death stroke' (2000, p. 102). We can observe this process in more recent history when, from the 1960s onwards, butchers carved the animal carcass at the back of the shop and began to remove pigs' and calves' heads from the window. There was a discernible move towards buying meat cut, sealed and packaged and a shift towards buying it in a supermarket rather than from a more confronting (and more honest) butcher's shop (Spencer 1995, p. 327).

Elias describes those for whom the sight of butchers' shops 'with the bodies of dead animals' is distasteful and others who refuse to eat meat altogether. Clearly these sentiments are out of rhythm with the majority view, indeed Elias calls them 'forward thrusts in the threshold of repugnance that go beyond the standard of civilized society in the twentieth century, and are therefore considered 'abnormal' (Elias 2000, p. 102). He argues that while their contemporaries may consider vegetarians abnormal, they are in fact at the vanguard of a larger social movement of the type that has produced social change in the past (2000, p. 102).

Elias's work raises important issues and questions for our topic. The first concerns his ruminations on vegetarianism (although he doesn't use the word itself) as a growing social movement. We have seen that the numbers of vegetarians and vegans is growing, but this must be seen in the context of the power and influence of the meat and dairy industries that have the benefit of huge profits, generous government subsidies, and marketing departments with big budgets who are able to portray meat and dairy consumption as healthy and natural and governments who represent the interests of the meat and livestock and dairy industries as the national interest (DeMello 2012, pp. 136–145; Torres 2007; Nibert 2013).

It is also possible to see the way that Elias's work on segregation, removing from sight and concealment, meshes with Cohen's work on denial and Zerubavel's work on both silence and attention. If certain activities and realities are hidden from view and out of our sphere of attention, it is easier, as an individual and as a society, to remain in denial about them. The role of governments is not always subtle in this matter. In the United States and recently in Australia, state governments of both major parties have sought to introduce 'ag-gag' legislation, which would seek to apply massive penalties to those who go 'undercover' to provide evidence and to make hidden cruelty public (O'Sullivan, 2015). Ag-gag laws are designed to ensure that animal activists are unable to inform the community, through the media, about socially invisible animal suffering.

The final and related issue concerns the nature of 'civilisation'. Pachirat makes the point that rather than being a ready-made product suitable for export and inculcation, civilisation is a long, historical process and is still being constructed. We need urgently to understand and explore what it means for a 'civilised society' to have a central characteristic of development and progress that depends on the silence and concealment of morally and physically repugnant practices, rather than their elimination or transformation (Pachirat 2011, p. 11).

Environmental sociology

Meat production is an inefficient and energy-intensive process, especially when intensive farming methods are involved. Grain that could be used to feed people is instead fed to cattle, pigs and fowl, and in the process of converting grain to meat, a large amount of food energy is wasted.

The environmental impact of animal-based food

There are two dimensions to the environmental consequences of intensive meat production. These entail the effects on both human and non-human life forms. In terms of human consequences, it is clear that the high meat consumption within affluent countries has an adverse impact on people in developing countries. This is illustrated by the fact that the EU is the largest buyer of animal feed in the world, and 60 per cent of this imported grain comes from developing countries (European Commission data). Globally, 36 per cent of the world's crop calories are fed to animals (Cassidy et al. 2013). For every 100 calories that we feed to animals in the form of human-edible crops, we receive on average just 17–30 calories in the form of meat and milk (Compassion in World Farming [CIWF] 2015).

Developing countries grow the cereals as cash crops (for desperately needed foreign exchange) when they could instead grow crops for food to halt malnutrition among their own people (Spencer 1995, p. 341). Mike Archer (2011) has challenged these assumptions, arguing that instead of citing a simple conversion rate of feed into meat, we should be comparing the amount of land required to grow meat with the land needed to grow plant products of the same nutritional value. He also examines the numbers of small animals killed through ploughing and harvesting (Archer 2011). The responses refuting his arguments have been comprehensive and convincing (see Moriarty 2012). The world's livestock sector is growing at an unprecedented rate with annual meat production set to increase from 218 million tonnes in 1997–99 to 376 million tonnes by 2030 (World Health Organization [WHO] 2015a).

Global warming

The environmental impact of animal-based food has effects across many areas. Perhaps the most significant is global warming. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 5th Assessment Report (IPCC 2014) states that without additional mitigation efforts beyond those in place today, warming by the end of the 21st century will lead to high to very high risk of severe, widespread and irreversible impacts globally. The report argues that substantial cuts in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions can substantially reduce risks of climate change by limiting warming in the second half of the 21st century and beyond (2014, *Long Summary for Policy Makers*, pp. 33–35). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the livestock sector is responsible for 18 per cent of global greenhouse emissions (FAO 2015). Some studies place the figure as high as 35 per cent, where the higher figure includes the effects of deforestation and other land use changes (United Nations Environment Program [UNEP] 2012).

The environmental impact of beef dwarfs that of other meat, which has led one researcher to say that eating less red meat would be a better way for people to cut carbon emissions than giving up their cars. The heavy impact on the environment has been known for some time but recent research shows a new scale and scope of damage (Eshel et al. 2014). This new study is

based on nationwide US data rather than farm-level studies, and captures a total picture of the effects of different animals on land and water and the amount of nitrogen fertiliser. The study confirms the heavy impact of meat production on the environment but found that the environmental impact of beef dwarfs that of other meat. Meat from cattle requires 28 times more land than pork or chicken. When compared to staples like potatoes, wheat and rice, the impact of beef per calorie is extreme, requiring 160 times more land and producing 11 times more greenhouse gasses.

Another large study of British people's daily eating habits shows that meat-eaters' diets cause double the climate-warming emissions of vegan diets (Scarborough et al. 2014). The study was conducted by University of Oxford scientists and found that meat-rich diets, defined as more than 100 g per day, resulted in 7.2 kg of carbon dioxide emissions. By comparison, both vegetarian and fish diets caused about 3.8 kg of CO² per day, while vegan diets produced only 2.9 kg. The research analysed the food eaten by 30,000 meat-eaters, 16,000 vegetarians, 8000 fish-eaters and 2000 vegans. The authors of this study conclude that their analysis shows a positive relationship between dietary emissions and the amount of animal-based products in a standard 2000 kilocalorie diet. They conclude that: 'the work demonstrates that reducing the intake of meat and other animal-based products can make a valuable contribution to climate change mitigation' (2014, p. 188).

Environmental degradation

As well as a significant contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, the livestock sector is a major source of environmental degradation in other areas. In terms of global water depletion, it is the largest single sectoral source of water pollution. It is also a big user of water. The EPA in Victoria, Australia, calculated that it takes 1350 litres of water to produce a kilogram of wheat compared with 100,000 litres to produce a kilogram of beef (EPA 2008). In a major study that measured the water footprint of soy and equivalent animal products, the study found that soy milk and soy burger have a much smaller water footprint than their equivalent animal products. The water footprint of the soy milk analysed was 28 per cent of the water footprint of the global average cow milk. The water footprint of the soy burger was 7 per cent of the water footprint of the average beef burger, averaged across the world (Ertug et al. 2012, p. 401).

A similar picture emerges in relation to land degradation and biodiversity. A researcher from the FAO stated at a recent symposium that extensive livestock production (grazing) plays a critical role in land degradation, climate change, water and biodiversity loss. For example, grazing occupies 26 per cent of the Earth's land surface, and feed crop production requires about a third of all arable land. The expansion of livestock grazing is also a leading cause of deforestation, especially in Latin America. In the Amazon basin, around 70 per cent of previously forested land is used as pasture, while feedcrops cover a large part of the remainder (Science Daily 2007).

In Australia, 6878 square kilometres of native vegetation are cleared every year, much of it for pasture. On these figures, Australia now ranks number five in the world in land-clearing rates. New studies have found that many of the bushland vegetation communities that are being cleared are already among the most rare and threatened types of bush within NSW and Queensland (The Wilderness Society 2015).

Having looked at the effect of meat production on the animals involved and on the land and water, let us now turn to the other 'animal in the room'—ourselves.

Health sociology

Health sociology is concerned with the study of social patterns of health and illness (Germov 2014). **Epidemiological** surveys in public health allow for the analysis of disease patterns and the risk factors associated with the development and distribution of specific diseases. The information gathered from these large-scale studies is then disseminated, first to other researchers and academics, and then to the general public through the mass media. This constant flow of information regarding health risks has made many people highly conscious of the links between eating behaviour and potential illness, resulting in many people changing their diets to minimise the risk of various chronic and acute diseases. Concern for health is one of the main two reasons people give for becoming vegetarian. Indeed, health is the most important reason given by semi-vegetarians for reducing their meat consumption. This is significant because semi-vegetarians are responsible for the majority portion of the drop in per capita US meat consumption 2006–2012. This means that most of the fall in consumption was brought about by people eating less meat to improve their health (Cooney 2014, p. 147).

In a representative national 2002 US survey of 400 actual vegetarians, 50 per cent gave the main reason for becoming vegetarian as health (quoted in Cooney 2014, p. 66). The previously quoted Australian Roy Morgan survey (2013) showed a high level of health awareness among vegetarians (2013). As well as this positive motivation, modern food manufacture, especially intensive farming, has made people fearful of the safety of the food produced. Fears about food revolve around issues concerning contamination from additives—chemicals, antibiotics and hormones—as well as those concerned with bacterial contamination. There is evidence to indicate that both of these motivations are valid.

There is now available a large body of evidence indicating that vegetarians enjoy lower rates of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and hypertension (Forbes & Stanton, 2015). A US study of over 70,000 individuals found a 12 per cent reduction in premature death for vegetarians, and we also have evidence from studies of healthy long-living populations that they consume only modest amounts of red meat (Orlich et al. 2013, pp. 1230–1238).

The European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition (EPIC) is one of the largest cohort studies in the world, with more than half a million participants recruited across 10 European countries and followed for almost 15 years (WHO 2015b). This study investigates the relationship between diet, cancer and other chronic diseases and has found that overall, vegetarians were healthier than meat-eaters. For instance, the UK arm of the EPIC study reported the risk of ischemic heart disease was 32 per cent lower among the vegetarians. This was based on a large study of 44,561 men and women over 11.6 years. Significantly, the findings were not influenced by factors such as the gender, age, body mass index (BMI) or smoking status of the participants (Crowe et al. 2013).

Cancer and red and processed meat

In October 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the cancer agency of the WHO, released a report in which it evaluated the carcinogenicity of the consumption of red meat and processed meat. After a thorough review of the accumulated scientific literature, a working group of 22 experts from 10 countries classified the consumption of red meat as *probably carcinogenic to humans* based on *limited evidence* that the consumption of red meat causes cancer in humans and *strong mechanistic evidence* supporting a carcinogenic effect.

The association was observed mainly for colorectal cancer, but associations were also seen for pancreatic cancer and prostate cancer. Processed meat was classified as *carcinogenic to humans*, based on *sufficient evidence* in humans that the consumption of processed meat causes colorectal cancer (WHO 2015c, all italics original). The report states that 50 g of processed meat a day—less than two slices of bacon—increases the risk of developing colorectal cancer by 18 per cent. The report was undertaken because of the number of epidemiological studies suggesting that small increases in the risk of several cancers may be associated with high consumption of red meat or processed meat. While these risks may be small, they could be important for public health given that meat consumption is growing in low- and middle-income countries (2015c).

The reaction to this report has been interesting. Predictably, given the huge profits of the beef industry (2.8 billion pounds in the UK) there was scepticism and scorn from the industry. The North American Meat Institute said the report defied 'both common sense and dozens of studies showing no correlation between meat and cancer' (Macrae & Wright 2015). In Australia, the Minister for Agriculture, Barnaby Joyce, stated that 'it is a farce to compare sausages with cigarettes'. He went on to say 'I don't think that we should get too excited that if you have a sausage you're going to die of bowel cancer' (ABC Rural 2015), which, of course, was not what the thoroughly researched and precisely worded report had said at all.

Food safety

Public fears over contamination of meat have grown as more information concerning practices associated with intense 'factory farming' have filtered into public awareness. The high population density of these intensive farms results in animals sharing both normal flora as well as pathogens, which can be conducive to rapid dissemination of infectious agents. For this reason, animals may be routinely treated with antibiotics. The problem of overuse of drugs on farms is now a global problem. In particular, antibiotics are given to animals both to combat infections but also as growth promoters, which is a side effect of their intended use (Gold 2004). The WHO warns that the misuse of antimicrobial medicines and new resistance mechanisms are 'making the latest generation of antibiotics virtually ineffective' (WHO 2015d). In the EU alone, 25,000 people die each year from antibiotic resistance (EurActiv.com 2014). The potential danger to human health from widespread antibiotic use in animals being raised for food is significant, as pathogenic-resistant organisms propagated in these animals are able to enter the food supply (Landers et al. 2012, p. 3). Bacteria found in livestock are frequently present in fresh meat products and can serve as reservoirs for resistant genes that could be transferred to pathogenic organisms in humans.

In the United States, estimates vary that between 50 per cent and 90 per cent of antibiotics sold are being fed to animals (Landers 2012, p. 28). More specifically, 88 per cent of pigs in the United States receive antibiotics in their feed for disease prevention and growth promotion (2012, p. 25). In the United States more than 2 million people become ill every year with antibiotic resistant infections and at least 23,000 of these people die (Lappé & Collins 2015). In the EU, the use of antibiotics as growth promoters was banned in 2006. However, it is likely that they are still heavily used therapeutically in the pig and poultry sectors. (Thorsen, 2014).

Australia imports about 700 tonnes of antibiotics annually. More than half goes into stockfeed, about 8 per cent is for veterinary use, leaving one-third for human use (ABC 1999; Cawood 2014). Antibiotic use in Australia is well regulated but, at the same time, Australia is increasingly importing fresh food from countries where antibiotics are used widely in both animals and humans.

Australia has no coordinated national program to monitor antibiotic resistance in livestock or companion animal pathogens (Trott 2012).

Another area of concern in relation to drug use in farm animals concerns the use of growth-promoting hormones. While these have been banned by the EU since 1988, US beef and dairy cattle are still routinely implanted with sex hormones in order to promote rapid weight gain. The United States is making every attempt to overturn this EU ban, including taking a legal case under the World Trade Organization's (WTO) *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade*. The WTO ruled in favour of the United States and ordered that the EU should pay US\$150 million per annum compensation for the USA's loss of profit. These challenges are ongoing and demonstrate how current free trade rules make it difficult to restrict imports on grounds of health, compassion or sustainability (Gold 2004, p. 46). A spokesperson for Meat and Livestock Australia stated that the use of hormones was widespread in some sections of the Australian beef industry, but claimed that the products were 'totally safe' for human consumption (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2007). They are, according to Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (2011), used on about 40 per cent of Australian cattle.

Health sociologists have long pointed to the way industrialised methods of food production are placing a heavy burden on both the public health and the public purse. It has been estimated that 10,000 Britons suffer from food poisoning each week, while 100 people die from it each year. More than 95 per cent of these cases originate in animal or poultry products (Spencer 1995, p. 335). In the UK, there are more than 500,000 cases of food poisoning a year from known pathogens. This figure would more than double if it included food poisoning cases from unknown pathogens. Poultry meat was the food linked to the most cases of food poisoning, with an estimated 244,000 cases every year (Food Standards Agency 2014).

In Australia, food poisoning results in around 5.4 million cases a year, including 129 deaths. It has an estimated annual cost of \$1.25 billion (Australasian Science 2012). In Australia, outbreaks of food poisoning occur regularly, and while a wide variety of foods can be involved, such as with the Nanna's Frozen Berry scare, it is animal products that carry the most risk. One of the most recent outbreaks occurred at the Langham Hotel in Melbourne, where a large number of people attended the Chocolate High Tea over several days in July 2015. The food poisoning, which was severe, was caused by salmonella bacteria. The only people to escape the illness were vegetarians and vegans, which has led to speculation that the chicken- or egg-based products were the likely source (Herald Sun 2015).

Every day in the United States, approximately 200,000 people are made sick by a foodborne disease, 900 are hospitalised and 14 die (Schlosser 2001, p. 195). Each year 48 million people get foodborne illnesses (The Atlantic 2015). Over the past decade, scientists have discovered more than a dozen new foodborne pathogens; however, the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that more than three-quarters of food-related illnesses and deaths in the US are caused by pathogens not yet identified (CDC 2011). Eric Schlosser argues that it is the rise of huge feedlots, slaughterhouses and hamburger grinders that have provided the means for pathogens to become widely distributed into the nation's food supply. He contends that the meat-packing system that arose to supply the fast-food chains—a system moulded to provide massive amounts of uniform ground beef—has proved to be an extremely efficient system for spreading disease. Schlosser makes the further point that the enormous power of the giant meat-packing firms, sustained by their close ties and large donations to the Republican Party, has allowed them to successfully oppose any further regulation of their food safety practices (Schlosser 2001, p. 196). There is little doubt that the dissemination of facts like those above have had an effect on the growing numbers of people who have decided to remove meat from their diet.

Life politics and emancipatory politics

Do the trends discussed in this chapter indicate a real and long-lasting shift in eating behaviour? There are times in history when whole groups en masse begin to embrace an attitude and forms of behaviour that are significantly different from what has been considered the social norm. One social theorist who is interested in this phenomenon and who has clearly been influenced by Norbert Elias is Anthony Giddens, whose work has explored changes in the ways that people think and act in their daily lives within the period that he calls 'high' or 'late modernism'—the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This work also has some useful insights and concepts for understanding the emergence of vegetarianism in the late modern age (Giddens 1991). In particular, Giddens is interested in the emergence of what he calls **life politics**, which is a politics of lifestyle in the sense that it involves a politics of life decisions or life choices (1991, p. 215). The decisions that are involved in life politics concern those questions that philosophical thought has always been concerned with: Who am I? What am I here for? How should I live? In the deepest sense, the decisions involved in life politics affect self-identity itself (1991, p. 215). Giddens, however, sees this as a reflexive process, one in which self-identity is constructed out of the debates and contestations that derive from the dynamic between the ongoing formation of identity and the changing context of external life circumstances.

Before making connections between life politics and the growth of vegetarianism, it is important to grasp another concept related to the idea of life politics. Giddens argues that in order for people to be in a position to make life choices, they must have attained a certain level of autonomy of action (1991, p. 214). People are only able to make choices when they are in a material and political position to make them. Giddens goes on to argue that the ability to make such choices is unique to the period of high **modernity** and it is built on the political orientations and achievements of the modern period—orientations in which **emancipatory politics** were of central concern. Giddens defines emancipatory politics as 'a generic outlook concerned above all with liberating individuals and groups from constraints which adversely affect their life chances' (1991, p. 210). He goes on to say that emancipatory politics is concerned to reduce or eliminate exploitation, inequality and oppression. In all cases, the objective is either to 'release under-privileged groups from their unhappy condition, or to eliminate the relative differences between them' (1991, p. 211). The aim of liberating people from exploitation is predicated on the adoption of moral values, and indeed these values are often expressed within a framework of justice ('social justice', for example). It is possible, then, according to Giddens, to see emancipatory politics as a politics concerned with the conditions that liberate us in order to make choices. So, while emancipatory politics is a politics of life chances, life politics is a politics of choice (1991, p. 214).

It is possible to see the adoption of a vegetarian diet as a choice that is part of the life politics of late modernity. It is also possible to regard it as a choice that involves the application and extension of the emancipatory politics of the modern period beyond the human species. In the modern period, the concepts of oppression and emancipation extended to apply to all humans, regardless of race or gender. It may be that the conditions of late modernity are conducive to the extension of the concept of emancipation to the animal world. This, of course, is precisely what philosophers such as Singer (1975) have been attempting to achieve. What Giddens shows is that this attempt can be seen in a social and political context as part of a great social movement—in fact, a 'remoralising' of social life. This gives us a sociological framework for understanding the growing awareness of animal rights and the voluntary adoption, by growing numbers of people,

of a meatless diet for reasons connected with animal welfare. If Giddens is correct when he states that 'the concerns of life politics presage future changes of a far-reaching sort: essentially, the development of forms of social order "on the other side" of modernity itself', then it may well be that the growing numbers of voluntary vegetarians are indicative of a real change in social attitudes and behaviour towards animals (Giddens 1991, p. 214).

Conclusion: The future of vegetarianism

While Giddens provides us with a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of life politics—which, I suggest, includes for many the choice to abstain from meat—it by no means enables us to predict the future of vegetarianism as a social movement in Western developed countries. While the data are too fragmentary to generate any predictive certainty (Cooney 2014), there are indications that voluntary vegetarianism is on the increase. It is also true to say, however, that late modernity produces contradictory pressures on individuals and groups. On the one hand, late modernity has produced a level of personal autonomy for many in the developed world, particularly the educated middle class. Yet, on the other hand, for many of these same people, late modernity has also provided more rushed and busy lives with little time for the promised leisure and pleasure. In this environment, life choices may become pragmatic, based more on expediency and survival than on principle. It may be that a remoralising of social life and a heightened sensitivity to personal and political issues results in an 'I should but ...' attitude, with associated guilt and neurosis becoming a defining feature of the construction of the self in late modernity.

At a less individual and personal level, social, economic and environmental pressures regarding meat consumption are also contradictory. On the one hand, there are the increasing numbers of people in Western societies who, for health or ethical reasons, are eating less meat. On the other hand, the trend for meat production from industrialised systems, which grew more than six times as fast as from grazing systems in the period 1983–93, continues to accelerate. The developed world's model of food production—rapid growth in meat consumption fuelled by grain- and soy-fed animals—is already being imitated in the developing world (Garces 2002). Demand for grain to feed livestock in developing nations is projected to double in the period 1993–2020. Taking one example among many, China's consumption of meat products rose by 85 per cent between 1995 and 2001 and is forecast to be responsible for 40 per cent of the total world increase up to 2020. This development has helped to transform China from a net exporter of grain to the second-largest importer in the world (Gold 2004, p. 28).

It is clear that the twenty-first century will be marked by economic pressures towards increased productivity and an expanded market share for meat-based products. This strategy must inevitably entail a continuation and expansion of intensive farming methods. At the same time, the growth of ecological and animal rights movements, concerns about health and a move towards the 'remoralising' of private and public life, will mean that these economic strategies will come under great pressure from social movements within the political arena.

At the start of this chapter it was noted that vegetarianism was at the nexus of the natural and the social. It is now apparent that the issues of meat-eating and vegetarianism are also positioned at the nexus of **globalisation** and a politics based on personal ethics and ecological awareness. As well as having an ancient and multicultural heritage, vegetarianism can now be seen to represent one of the key moral, political and ecological issues of the late modern period.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- Vegetarianism is not just a contemporary social movement, but is one with an ancient history encompassing many different cultures.
- Definitions of what constitutes a vegetarian vary widely.
- Sociology has provided many useful theories and concepts that contribute to an understanding of vegetarianism. Of particular note are theories of oppression and liberation and the concept of speciesism; sociology of denial; the civilising process; and life politics.
- There is evidence indicating that the numbers of voluntary vegetarians is increasing world-wide at the same time as the amount of meat being consumed is increasing.

Sociological reflection

- What are your reasons for being or not being vegetarian?
- Do you agree with Singer's idea of animal rights and the notion of speciesism?
- Does Cohen's notion of the sociology of denial help to explain why more people are not vegetarian?

Discussion questions

- 1 What distinguishes a vegan from a vegetarian? What are their main points of difference?
- 2 What might be some reasons for the long period of neglect of meat-eating and vegetarianism within sociology?
- 3 What has aesthetics to do with diet in general, and with the rejection of meat in particular?
- 4 Discuss some of the social processes involved in cultural denial. How does this process work to reinforce meat-eating in Western societies?
- 5 Discuss some of the health or environmental reasons put forward to support a vegetarian diet.
- 6 Relate the ideas of Giddens concerning life politics and emancipatory politics to the issue of meat rejection.

Further investigation

- 1 Turning animals into meat has become hazardous for human and non-human lifeforms. Discuss this statement in relation to the impact of meat production on the environment.
- 2 How do the theoretical approaches of Stanley Cohen and Eviatar Zerubavel contribute to an understanding of the growth of vegetarianism in modern Western countries?

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

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 Animal Protection Institute: voiceless.org.au
 Compassion in World Farming: www.ciwf.org.uk/
 Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret. Facts and Sources: www.cowspiracy.com
 Ethical Consumer: www.ethicalconsumer.org/
 International Vegetarian Union (IVU): www.ivu.org/
 Vegan.com: www.vegan.com
 Vegetarian.com: www.vegetarian.com
 Vegetarian Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group: <http://vndpg.org/>

Films and documentaries

- Food, Inc.* 2009, a Robert Kenner Film. Available on DVD and Blu-ray.
- Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret* 2014, a Kip Andersen and Keegan Kuhn film.

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CHAPTER 10

FOOD AND AGEING

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OVERVIEW

- › Why are older people at risk of hunger and poor nutrition?
- › How do social isolation and stress affect older people's nutrition?
- › How do social relationships reduce the risk of hunger and poor nutrition among older people?

Older people are a group at high risk of food insecurity, hunger and poor nutrition. They are particularly vulnerable because they generally have fewer socioeconomic resources than younger people and are more prone to isolation, disability and stress. These problems tend to be even more prevalent among older people who are members of ethnic minorities. In addition, many countries, including the United States, have recently reduced funding for food-assistance programs such as food stamps and congregate meals. Private charities have been unable to compensate for these cutbacks. Many older people, however, are able to compensate for their lack of resources and physical isolation through their social

networks. Older people who live alone may find mealtime companionship among their friends and neighbours. In addition, relatives and neighbours provide many disabled older people with shopping and cooking assistance.

KEY TERMS

activities of daily living
ageism
body image
disabilities
food insecurity
life chances
nutritional risk
postmodern society
role
social capital
social control
social isolation
social network
social support
socioeconomic status (SES)
status
stigma
stressors

Introduction

Older people are an important group for sociological study for a number of reasons. First, older people represent one of the fastest-growing segments of the population of most developed countries. In the United States, the number of people aged 65 or older constituted 13 per cent of the population in 2012; it has been predicted that, by 2050, over 21 per cent of the population will be in this age group, thanks to better diets, as well as better health and health-care (Ortman et al. 2014). The proportion of people aged 85 or above is expected to increase at an even faster rate during this same period. The growth of the older population and their increasing needs will have an impact on every aspect of society.

Second, because of filial obligations supported by laws, traditions and social norms, older people are a group whose needs continue to be the responsibility of both families and the state. However, as older people live longer, and as financial and time constraints place a greater burden on families and government programs, it will become more and more difficult to meet these obligations.

Third, age is a social category and is related to **role** and **status**, two of sociology's most fundamental concepts. Role refers to the behavioural expectations of an individual associated with their position in society. Typical roles include patient, physician, grandmother and daughter. Age determines a role, 'independent of capacities and preferences' of the incumbent (Moen 1996, p. 171). Status represents the prestige or respect accorded to individuals occupying social positions. The respect that an individual receives for performing a role is somewhat independent of actual performance; simply occupying the position itself accords a certain amount of prestige. 'Age', 'ageing' and 'elderly' are all words with supposed biological meanings, yet each represents a socially defined category. In fact, much of what passes as biological wisdom in defining 'older people' has more to do with socially generated beliefs and norms. In addition, because age is a social category, it contains an evaluative component. The terms 'age', 'ageing', and 'elderly' are all associated with negative expectations about abilities and quality of life, among other things (Palmore 1990). Ageing is viewed as a process of declining status; it is seen as biologically driven downward mobility. This is, in part, true. Many older people experience a decline in their health as they age, and many face declining incomes in the form of retirement reimbursements. But ageing also has a negative status because of its relationship to what is currently one of the most desirable statuses in Western society: youth. There is considerable evidence that older people encounter **ageism**, or prejudice and discrimination based on age.

Because of the increasing size of the elderly population and the difficult economic circumstances that many older people face, sociologists and nutritionists have turned their attention to older people's food habits, nutritional status and health. Several important themes have emerged from their studies. The first is that of **socioeconomic status (SES)**. It is widely believed that inadequate resources are the reason for **food insecurity** and risk of malnutrition (McIntosh 1996; Weddle et al. 1996). A second theme is **social isolation**. Isolation from others is thought to deprive an individual of help, companionship and motivation for self-care. The third theme represents the opposite of isolation: social integration and **social support**. A multiplicity of ties to others not only increases contact with other human beings, but also ensures companionship and access to resources such as transportation and help with cooking. Some believe that the nature of an older person's **social network** has greater consequence for them than the help that network provides; others have argued that the greatest impact of help from others lies in how it is perceived by its recipients.

The fourth, and most recent, theme to emerge in the sociology of nutrition is that of stressful life events. All human beings experience change, and some of these changes are upsetting and disrupting (Thoits 1995). Older people are not immune to such events, and they are more likely to experience events such as the death of a loved one. Such **stressors** have a negative impact on health, including nutritional status. The debate here centres on whether some stressors have a more deleterious effect than others, and whether some individuals are better equipped than others to deal with negative life changes. Some old people are able to cope due to the help of their social support network. Such aid comes into play for another kind of crisis that confronts many older people: reduced functional capacity.

Disability, its effects, and the social responses to it represent a fifth theme in the literature. As people age, the probability of contracting one or more chronic illnesses increases (Verbrugge 1990). A number of such illnesses have symptoms that limit mobility or some other aspect of body functioning (Manton 1989). Some older people are able to cope with these threats to independence through their own efforts. 'Self-care' involves those changes that individuals choose to make as a means of improving health and dealing with symptoms of illness—for example, dietary and exercise modifications. Certain limitations, however, may make it more difficult for some individuals to engage in self-care. In such cases, the social network's services become vitally important.

Sixth, sociologists have renewed their interest in the body as a reflection of various socially defined attributes of worth. These values play a major role in determining individuals' perceptions of themselves. Sociologists refer to this self-perception as 'the self'. **Body image**, or body self, has increased in importance in the formation of the self. Anthony Giddens (1991) and others have argued that individuals have found it increasingly difficult to affect their political and economic environments and so have turned to the self and the body as things upon which they can have an impact. Much of this concern is directed at manipulating body weight in an attempt to achieve physiologically improbable goals.

Finally, it should be noted that sociological approaches to food and nutrition tend to take a 'social problems' orientation. Concern centres on the social causes and consequences of food insecurity, hunger, malnutrition, overnutrition and so on.

This chapter reviews the literature that has developed around the themes mentioned earlier, beginning with the notion that food and nutrition problems can be conceived of as social problems.

Ageing and associated food and nutrition problems

A number of nutritional problems confront older people, and they are usually presented in biological terms. While these nutritional problems have clear biological causes and consequences, unless social and economic factors are also considered, our understanding of older people's nutrition is incomplete.

Requirements for nutrients and energy vary over the life span in relation to body composition and size, growth and repair of tissue, and energy use. Older people have lower energy requirements because of lower lean body mass and perform decreased physical activity, while decreased efficiency in metabolism of some nutrients, such as vitamin D, vitamin B12 and protein, result in increased needs (Holick 2014; Allen 2010; Wall 2015). With fewer calories needed, choice of high-nutrient foods is essential for older adults. Poor dietary intake is associated with development

of nutritional deficiency, but most research targets the relationship of diet to chronic disease to promote healthy aging. Consequently, adoption of a dietary pattern—such as the Mediterranean diet or Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH)—is being recommended for elderly individuals. In addition to providing nutrients that may be inadequate in the diet, these dietary patterns have been observed to improve the health status of elderly adults, such as reducing cognitive decline or risk of dementia (van de Rest 2015). Less than optimal dietary intake by the elderly is partly a result of decreased or fixed income that is the norm for the majority of older adults, but it also may result from uncertainty about what to eat. Research about nutrition by its nature can be confusing to consumers. For example, for decades dietary cholesterol was considered to be something that should be reduced in order to prevent heart disease, as stated by governmental agencies, scientists and advertisers. However, subsequent research showed this not to be the case, with the result that the evidence now states that dietary cholesterol has little to do with cardiovascular disease. This is understandably confusing for consumers, particularly for older adults who, having reluctantly stopped eating eggs as a high cholesterol food, then hear the revised message that eggs are good to include in the diet of most people (Fernandez 2012). An additional issue for the elderly is a foodborne illness; the elderly are not necessarily less knowledgeable about safe food handling practices than younger people, but because their immune systems are often weakened by the presence of a chronic illness, the effects of a foodborne illness may be greater (Remig 2009).

Loosely associated with the declining ability of some older people to meet their nutritional needs are the problems of hunger and food insecurity. In the United States, the definitions of these terms are less rooted in biology than in norms. 'Hunger' is defined and measured in terms of the inability to buy all the food one would like, or of sending one's children to bed hungry. For some, hunger is an acute, emergency situation, the result of a temporary shortfall in resources. For others, hunger is chronic. Some older people, for example, have reported that they commonly run short of money to purchase food. While there is no evidence that such food insufficiency increases the likelihood of chronic disease, there is evidence that it increases the likelihood of infections such as pneumonia.

Food insecurity is a broader concern, affecting all those who believe that hunger is just around the corner. (For a detailed discussion on food insecurity, see Chapter 4). The food-insecure are those who anticipate deprivation, or the inability to achieve a diet that they consider adequate. Currently, nearly 10 per cent of elderly households in the United States are considered to be food-insecure (United States Department of Agriculture 2014). Once again, inadequate resources appear to be the driving force behind food insecurity. Low income, costly medical bills, lack of transportation, and the absence of nearby grocery stores have been associated with food insecurity in the elderly (Rowley 2000). Furthermore, several studies of food-insecure elderly people indicate that such people are more likely to experience poorer quality diets, be underweight and be anaemic (Rose & Oliveria 1997; American Dietetic Association 2002). We suggest that, while those who concern themselves with hunger and food insecurity probably have negative biological consequences in mind, it is, once again, a normative interpretation that has led people to define these conditions as biological problems. Hunger and food insecurity are thought to be the result of the inequitable distribution of resources and the denial of inalienable rights. According to this position, all people, including older people, have a 'right to food', which is said to incorporate 'the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living' and 'the right to be free from hunger' (Alston 1994, p. 209).

Declining ability may also result from changes in body size. Being overweight and being underweight both carry associated health problems, which can make it more difficult for older

people to perform their various roles. In addition, there is strong evidence that body weight affects the probability of death. Older people who are obese (BMI \geq 30.0) have an increased risk of chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and some forms of cancer (Houston et al. 2009). Because involuntary weight loss is associated with adverse outcomes in the elderly, voluntary weight loss should be approached in a way that minimises loss of muscle and bone and thus risk (Houston et al. 2009; Johnson, Dwyer et al. 2011).

Weight is a highly salient social marker, partly because of the association of slimness with youth but also because what is defined socially as excessive body weight connotes a negative social status. To begin with, the weight itself is considered unattractive. In addition, overweight is perceived to be a marker of more deep-seated undesirable traits, such as greed, dishonesty, and lack of ambition and self-control, and people who are obese experience social stigmatisation (see Chapter 15).

Chronic illnesses and medications affect appetite, the sense of taste, the absorption of nutrients and the need for nutrients. There are social issues here as well, regarding the decline in social relationships that occurs when an individual becomes disabled and the effect that this decline and disability has on the individual's ability to shop, prepare meals and eat. Furthermore, there is some evidence that older people are overmedicated because they are too passive when confronting medical authority.

Access to resources

Socioeconomic status (SES)

A person's socioeconomic status (SES) depends on their wealth, prestige and power; differential access to these things leads to differences in lifestyle and **life chances** (Gerth & Mills 1946). Those with greater wealth and status enjoy better life chances than those with less of these, simply because they can afford better health practices and health-care. Greater resources also permit expanded lifestyle choice in such areas as dwellings, food purchases, clothing and vacations. An individual's SES is usually conceptualised and measured by that individual's education, occupation and income. Education and occupation are primary determinants of income, and they are themselves sources of prestige. Gender, ethnicity and age also influence a person's status. Each of these characteristics affects access to wealth, prestige and power, and each is associated with distinct aspects of lifestyle and life chances.

In the United States, old age was commonly associated, until recently, with poverty—as many as 25 per cent of older people were classified as poor (Crystal 1996, p. 394). Increases in social security benefits and other changes have halved this proportion. But great inequities remain among retired people in the United States, with former white-collar workers generally in a better financial position than former blue-collar workers. Furthermore, 36 per cent of the elderly fall below 200 per cent of the poverty level, often resulting in a failure to meet basic needs (O'Brien et al. 2010). People in this group tend to lack health insurance, but are not considered poor enough to qualify for means-tested programs like Medicaid or food stamps. James Ziliak and Craig Gundersen (2015) report that while only 10 per cent of the poor are older people, 15 per cent were at risk of hunger. Feeding America (Weinfield et al. 2014), a national food provision charity, estimated 17 per cent of its at-risk recipients were elderly persons.

As previously mentioned, malnutrition exists among poor older people (Weddle et al. 1996). Low SES is related to low levels of nutrition knowledge, poorer eating habits, inadequate diets and poorer nutritional status (Dean et al. 2011; Johnson, Sharkey et al. 2011; Wham & Bowden 2011).

Ethnicity and class

Ethnicity is a social status that has implications for the distribution of resources. Social scientists argue that the combination of low income and ethnicity constitutes 'double jeopardy'. Others have used this same argument to claim that older people who are members of minorities experience double jeopardy, and it is a relatively short logical leap to argue that poor older people from minority groups are subject to triple jeopardy. In the United States, poverty rates have remained highest among older black and Hispanic people, with 19 per cent and 20 per cent living in poverty, respectively (O'Brien et al. 2010). The effects of double and triple jeopardy are reflected in older people's nutritional status (Sharkey & Shoenberg 2002). Morgan Getty and her colleagues (2014), for example, found rural black people to be at greater **nutritional risk** than rural white people.

Class conflict

Social class is no mere marker of the distribution of resources. Because resources are scarce, struggles ensue over their distribution, usually along class lines. Food and medical care are two such resources that politicians frequently consider redistributing according to social categories, such as those of children, older people, women and war veterans. In an era of declining social-welfare funding, struggles over food-stamp eligibility and access to subsidised medical care once again reflect class, generational and ethnic group interests, among other interests.

In the past, after a great deal of political struggle, a number of programs to benefit older people were established in the United States. Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meals were designed to provide one meal per day containing at least one-third of the recommended daily allowances of most nutrients. Critics have sparked considerable debate over the efficacy of these programs, and some have even questioned their fairness.

Debates aside, budget cuts and decentralisation have left many US states unable to fund feeding programs to meet current needs. Seventy per cent of Meals on Wheels programs report that they now maintain lengthy waiting lists (Delaney 2013). Many food-pantry and soup-kitchen participants report that they use such food charities because they are unable to access government programs such as food stamps.

Ageism and stigma

Social statuses contain evaluative as well as cognitive components: not only do we hold certain beliefs about people with particular statuses, but we also make judgments regarding the worth of people holding those statuses. Age is a social status, and various age groups reflect differentially valued statuses. Groups accorded negative status and negative evaluations frequently encounter prejudice and discrimination. When it comes to race and gender, these are referred to as 'racism' and 'sexism' respectively. 'Ageism' is their counterpart when it comes to negative evaluations of old age. At present, youth is generally regarded as more valuable in Western societies, and so young people are accorded more status than older people. Old age is perhaps one of the most undesirable statuses to inhabit with numerous negative evaluations attached to this status. As with many negatively evaluated statuses, the basis of the negative evaluations is socially determined.

The stereotypes associated with ageism are similar to those associated with racism and sexism in that they question the abilities of the status-holder relative to the abilities of others (Chasteen & Cary 2015). Those holding negatively evaluated statuses are usually judged, in a biological sense, as having lesser physical and mental abilities, and this negative evaluation is

thus considered to be both natural and immutable. Many believe that because some older people have physical or mental limitations, all older people are so limited (Chasteen & Cary 2015). These assumptions lead to denigration of older people's capabilities and worth. It is assumed that older people are unable to care for themselves. Such negative evaluations hinder older people's ability to obtain employment and result in intergenerational struggles over the allocation of resources (Roscinio et al. 2007).

Much of the debate over the extent to which current and future resources should be devoted to retirement benefits and to subsidised access to food and medical care has reflected a continuing debate over the worth of older persons. This debate is cast in either equality or equity terms. Equality arguments have endorsed the sharing of resources based on need (Poppendieck 1998). Equity arguments, by contrast, have advocated the sharing of resources based on the size of the contribution each individual makes to society or has made at some time in the past (Gokhale & Kotlikoff 1998).

The unequal distribution of resources is brought about by social as well as economic and political factors. Those persons eligible for aid, including older people, often refuse it because of the **stigma** associated with poverty and welfare. Simply put, those who are less well-to-do are less admired than those who are better off. In the United States, where poverty is viewed as being the result of irresponsible behaviour rather than unequal resource distribution, the working poor are accorded more respect than the non-working poor. The poor who get by on charity or welfare receive the least respect. The public associates a wide range of negative characteristics with welfare recipients, culminating in the pejorative label 'the undeserving poor'. Those who provide benefits such as food stamps hold many of these stereotypes, as do a number of those who work for private charities such as food pantries and soup kitchens (Poppendieck 1998).

Social resources

Social networks

A person's social network consists of his or her friends, relatives, spouses, children, co-workers, neighbours, fellow members of voluntary organisations, fellow church members and so on. These tend to be the individuals with whom a person has the most contact or from whom the person receives the most support or help (Berkman & Glass 2000; Brissette et al. 2000; McIntosh, Sykes & Kubena 2002). 'Social support' refers to both instrumental aid (goods and services) and expressive aid (emotional support and companionship). Social support also includes efficacious **social control**: network members may attempt to persuade or cajole an individual to engage in desirable behaviour, such as reducing dietary fat (Brissette et al. 2000).

People who receive social support become ill less frequently and recover more quickly and successfully when they do become ill. The most striking effect of social support appears to be the lessening of the risk of death. Numerous studies have found that those with social support are likely to live longer than those who lack it (Seeman et al. 1993; Yasuda et al. 1997). Together with our colleagues we have found a connection between social support and nutritional health (Kim et al. 2008; McIntosh, Kubena & Landmann 1989; McIntosh, Shifflett & Picou 1989; Sharkey, Johnson & Dean 2012; Conklin et al. 2015).

Social support results in part from the very structure of the social network. There is considerable debate between social-support researchers, however, about the degree to which network characteristics are more important than the aid received or the recipients' subjective evaluations of that aid. Network structure characteristics include the network's size (the number

of people in it) and its density (the degree to which network members know and interact with one another). Networks that contain a small number of people who are well acquainted with one another provide greater intimacy and emotional support. At the same time, some studies suggest that larger networks generate more support (Faber & Wasserman 2002). In our study of 424 free-living Houston elderly, we found that those older people with large social networks tended to receive more social support, although men received greater benefits from greater network size than did women. Older men with large networks got more advice about food and cooking, more help with grocery shopping and cooking, and more mealtime companionship than men with smaller networks, and their iron status was better than that of men with smaller networks. Older women with denser networks tended to have more company during meals. Other researchers have found that larger, denser networks are not necessarily beneficial for the elderly when it comes to making healthy changes in their diets. Such networks may block these efforts through social control (Silverman et al. 2002).

Related to social support is **social capital** in that social capital consists of other people (or organisations) and resources that individuals can draw upon as needed. However, this perspective argues that in order to reach out to others, trust must exist. One study found that the elderly were slightly less trusting of government (Twenge, Campbell & Carter 2014) but more trusting of people than younger adults were (Pew Research Center 2014). Wesley Dean and Joseph Sharkey (2011) found that elderly who believed that people and organisations in their communities were less trustworthy were more likely to be food insecure.

Social support and nutrition

Certain kinds of social support appear to be associated with nutritional health, particularly that of older people. Instrumental aid, such as transportation for grocery shopping, help with meal preparation, companionship during meals, loans of food, and advice about cooking, diets and food, has the potential to maintain or improve the nutritional health of individuals. It is precisely this sort of help that older people frequently need. In Houston, older people with a greater number of companions in their networks were found to have better appetites and more muscle mass (McIntosh, Kubena & Landmann 1989). Those who received help with shopping, cooking and housekeeping were at lower nutritional risk (fewer impediments to eating a healthy diet) than those who received little or no such help.

Social isolation and loneliness

Living alone (social isolation) represents a clear trend among older people. In 1960, about 20 per cent of older people in the USA lived alone, but by 2011 that proportion had increased to greater than 29 per cent (Administration on Aging 2012). Thirty-seven per cent of elderly women lived alone; this is partly the result of the mortality differential between males and females—women, on average, live longer than men. Our own data on older people in Houston indicate that 12 per cent of the men and 50 per cent of the women lived alone, and that the propensity to live alone increased with age, especially for women (McIntosh, Kubena & Landmann 1989). Others note, however, that many older people live close to one of their children, and approximately 40 per cent keep in daily phone contact with one of their offspring (Moody 1994). Because many older people live alone, they are frequently thought to be at risk of loneliness and poor nutrition (Locher et al. 2005). There are documented health consequences of living alone. Those older people who live alone because of the recent death of their spouse, for example, have an increased risk of mortality (Rogers 1996).

Nutrition researchers have argued that without the social contact that typically comes with shared living arrangements, the motivation to cook food or to eat regular meals may be reduced. In New York, older men skipped more meals if they lived alone (Frongillo et al. 1992). Kimberly Quigley, Hermann and Warde (2008) found that older people who lived alone tended to eat alone; others have found that elderly people who lived alone tend to be at nutritional risk—for example, by skipping meals (Getty et al. 2014; Hanna & Collins 2015). Dellmar Walker and Roy Beauchene (1991) found among older people in Georgia, United States, that the greater the loneliness experienced, the poorer the diet in terms of iron, protein, phosphorous, riboflavin, niacin and ascorbic acid (vitamin C). Finally, old people who report being lonely also report forgetting to eat and experiencing loss of appetite (Wylie 2000).

Disability and functioning

All human beings are susceptible to impairments caused by chronic illness, injury or accident; impairments involve bodily abnormalities that may limit movement of limbs or cause generalised muscular weakness (Jette 1996). These impairments can limit the ability of a person to perform social roles and are often referred to as 'disabilities'. Older people are more prone to chronic illnesses than people in other age groups, and thus their rates of impairment are higher. Furthermore, as they grow older, greater percentages of older people experience these limitations. Some impairments result in functional limitations or restrictions in performing what are considered to be everyday activities. In the United States, 24 per cent of people aged 65–74 and 42 per cent of those over 75 have one or more disabilities that limit **activities of daily living**, leading to difficulties in shopping for groceries, preparing meals and eating food (Adams et al. 2013). Some elderly people report having to sit down while cooking, while others have trouble manipulating cooking utensils (Wylie 2000).

Disabilities increase the risk of poor nutritional status, and some of the tools devised to measure nutritional risk include measures of disability, such as difficulty chewing or swallowing. Certain foods may be avoided as a result of such difficulties, as a study by Mary-ellen Quinn and colleagues (1997) demonstrated. Other studies have found a relationship between inadequate diet and level of disability (Walker & Beauchene 1991). Our Houston study found that older people who had difficulties in using their upper bodies or difficulties in walking tended to have more body fat and less muscle mass. Such people also tended to be less physically active and have less adequate diets (McIntosh, Rubena & Landmann 1989). Elderly people with dentures tend to eat more fats, sweets and snacks (Vitolins et al. 2002; Savoca et al. 2011).

There is considerable debate over whether disability leads to an increase or decrease in social support (Popenoe 1988; Bengston 2001). One study found that elderly rural dwellers needed help with both cooking and grocery shopping and nearly 33 per cent received no help with these activities (Hermann et al. 2012). Furthermore, as the burden of providing help grows, the caregiver is in danger of experiencing resentment and burnout. Others argue that disabilities actually mobilise social networks into action, increasing the level of support supplied (Kivett et al. 2000). Our own Houston data confirm the latter hypothesis with the greater the level of disability, the more help the older person received with grocery shopping, cooking and other activities of daily living, regardless of gender (McIntosh et al. 1988). People with disabilities were less likely to experience the nutritional problems mentioned above when they had social support from others. For example, although those with limited mobility were less likely to eat breakfast and more likely to have lower muscle mass but more body fat, these negative effects

were offset, to a degree, by their having more friends in their social network and receiving help with activities of daily living (McIntosh et al. 1988). Finally, the elderly tend to experience fewer obesity-related physical disabilities if they have adequate confidant support (Surtees et al. 2004).

Stress, strain and health

Human beings experience a great number of changes in their lives—marriage, having children, getting and losing jobs, retirement, illness and so on (Thoits 1995). A number of these changes are welcomed; others are not. The unwelcome changes are thought to be 'stressors'. Stressors are threats, demands or constraints on individuals that 'tax or exceed their resources for managing them' (Burke 1996, p. 146). One kind of stressor is a 'life event', a discrete, observable event that leads to a major change in life. Divorce, job loss and the death of a spouse are examples of such potentially life-shattering changes.

There is a well-established link between poor health and stressors (House et al. 1988). Various forms of illness—such as coronary heart disease, hypertension, cancer and depression—have been found to be associated with various stressful events, such as job loss, marital conflict and the death of a spouse or close friend (Marmot & Theorell 1988). Definitions of 'stress' often emphasise disequilibrium in the organism, which results from exposure to stressors. William Krehl (1964, p. 4) has described nutrition as 'the sum of all the processes by which an organism ingests, digests, absorbs, transports, and utilizes food substances'. Therefore, anything that disrupts nutrient ingestion, digestion, absorption, transportation or utilisation by the body is a potential stressor.

Research suggests that stressful life events do indeed interfere with nutrition. In our study of older Virginians (McIntosh, Shifflett & Picou 1989), we found that financial worries led to depressed appetite, which in turn was associated with lower intake of energy and protein. Similarly Kevin Laugero and colleagues (2011) found that stress led to a lower intake of fruits, vegetables and protein and a higher intake of salty snacks. We found, in Houston, that financial problems had a negative effect on body fat, muscle mass, iron status, and the frequency of eating breakfast among older women. Older men had higher body fat and snacked more if they had recently experienced family troubles.

Social identity and age

All human beings develop a sense of identity, persona or self. Much of this sense of self derives from social interactions with others. Individuals, however, have some control over the perceptions of others and actively attempt to influence those perceptions. While there is disagreement over the degree to which an individual can 'manage the impressions of others', it is clear that, within limits, this management is achievable.

Western societies, particularly the United States, place a high value on youthfulness. Mass-media programming and advertising have perhaps exacerbated this emphasis by mostly featuring young actors, presenters and models (Turrow 1997). But as the older proportion of the population has grown and its economic fortunes have improved, producers and advertisers have discovered a vast, insufficiently tapped market in older people, especially the so-called 'young-old' (those under 70 years of age). The marketing approach to older people has been to stress that older people are still as capable, in many ways, as the young. According to Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth (1995), this has had a positive effect in that it has helped reduce the perception

of older people as less capable human beings. However, it must be pointed out that producers have attempted to market their products in terms of identity manipulation—that is, they have developed products to help older people disguise their age.

Sociologists have increasingly been taking the body's social dimensions seriously. Chris Shilling (1994), for example, has put forward the notion that bodies are judged unequally; thus differentials in body size and shape constitute a form of inequality. Linda Jackson's (1992) review of extant research indicates that body appearance has a significant impact on how others judge an individual. Pierre Bourdieu (1979/1984) has hypothesised that bodies reflect social class in that they represent the owner's relationship to the worlds of necessities and taste. Among the lower classes, a heavy body represents a diet high in fat but low in cost. Bourdieu refers to this as the diet of necessity. Taste makes necessity a virtue. Bodies also reflect 'bodily orientation'. Members of the working class take a more instrumental approach to their body in that they make direct use of their body's capacities in making their living. The implication for eating is that heavy foods in large quantities are desirable because of their perceived contribution to strength. The dominant classes, according to Bourdieu (1979/1984), prefer slender bodies and are willing to defer gratification to achieve them.

In old age, working-class individuals may experience a decline in both income and bodily function. A middle-class individual may worry about being replaced by a person with a younger body. Upper-class individuals may view middle and old age as a time to enjoy the fruits of their labour and may expect to have not only the money but also the physical capacity to do so.

The body in **postmodern society** is said to have become more malleable, in the sense that it can be manipulated in a person's quest for a new or altered identity. Surgery, diets, exercise and drugs have all been called upon in attempts to make the body appear more youthful (see Chapter 15). Older people are equally inclined to make such attempts (Biggs 1997), but like younger adults may not recognise they have reached an unhealthy weight (Yaemsiri, Slining & Agarwal 2011). Older people are slightly less likely to participate in exercise programs, but after differences in disability levels are accounted for, their participation levels are higher than those of many other age groups. Older women have been found to worry about weight gain for appearance as well as health reasons and some are willing to express their dissatisfaction with their body size (Barreto, Fernandez & Guihard-Costa 2011). But for these women, 'health tends to be a valid justification for being concerned with one's weight, while an appearance orientation is deemed to be indicative of vanity' (Clarke 2002). Featherstone and Hepworth (1995) argue that with increasing age, the physical constraints on the ability to alter appearance grow. As they put it, the body becomes an unchanging mask that its occupant can no longer escape.

Conclusion

While much is known about the effects of SES on nutrition, research is just beginning on how social networks help older people maintain a healthy diet and avoid nutritional risk. Similarly, the negative effects of both stressors and disabilities on older people's nutrition are not fully understood. Finally, older people's efforts to manage their identities through diet and exercise remain an important, but relatively unexplored, area of sociological research.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- While older people's energy needs tend to be lower than those of people from other age groups, their need for nutrients is as high or higher.
- Older people's nutrition can be compromised by chronic illness, disabilities and interactions between drugs and nutrients.
- Older people are at greater risk of serious consequences from foodborne illnesses than younger people.
- Older people's nutrition is also negatively affected by poverty, stressful life events and social isolation.
- Social networks supply aid of various kinds, such as transportation to buy groceries, help with meal preparation and companionship during meals. Both network structure and the help that networks provide have a positive impact on older people's nutrition. Social support helps people overcome the constraints imposed by living alone, functional limitations and stressful events.
- Older people perceive their weight, as do others in modern society, as a means through which they can re-create their selves. Consumer culture has some influence on the choices that older people and others make when selecting 'selves' to pursue. As they age, however, their ability to control their appearance declines.

Sociological reflection

- If you have grandparents, have you thought about the quality of their diets and their nutritional health?
- Do your grandparents frequently eat alone or skip meals?
- What kind of social support do your grandparents receive, if any? Are there key aspects of support missing from your grandparents' lives? Could your immediate family (or you) do something to fill this gap?
- Have your grandparents recently experienced stressful life events such as a decline in their economic circumstances? Do you think these experiences might have had an effect on their eating habits?

Discussion questions

- 1 What are the main nutritional problems faced by older people?
- 2 What are the sources of low socioeconomic status and isolation among older people?
- 3 How do stress and disabilities affect older people's nutrition?
- 4 How does social support help older people overcome such problems as lack of resources, isolation, disability and stress?
- 5 Why are older people concerned with their physical appearance, and what do they do to maintain that appearance?

Further investigation

- 1 Compare and contrast the effects of social and economic resources on the nutritional health of the elderly. How might the absence of both social and economic resources interact to make an elderly person's situation worse?
- 2 Discuss the normative/moral issues connected to the status of elderly people in society and how the normative order contributes to the nutritional health of the elderly.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

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- Kosberg, J.I. & Kayne, L. 1997, *Elderly Men: Special Problems and Professional Challenges*, Springer, New York.
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- Sokolovsky, J. 1997, *The Cultural Context of Aging: Worldwide Perspectives*, Bergin & Garvey, Westport.

Articles

- Peters, G.R. & Rappaport, L.R. 1988, 'Food, Nutrition, and Aging: Behavioral Perspectives', *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 32, no. 1, special issue, pp. 1–88.

Journals

- Ageing and Society*
- Agriculture, Food, and Human Values*
- Appetite*
- Food, Culture and Society*
- The Gerontologist*
- Journal of Aging and Health*
- Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* (formerly known as the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*)
- Journal of Gerontology*
- Journal of Health and Social Behavior*
- Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*
- Journal of Nutrition for the Elderly*

Websites

- Association for the Study of Food and Society: www.food-culture.org/
- New England Research Institutes: www.neriscience.com/

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CHAPTER 11

FOOD, CLASS AND IDENTITY

John Germov and Lauren Williams

OVERVIEW

- › How is social class related to food habits?
- › Are class differences in food habits diminishing?
- › Do working-class food habits result in nutrition-related health problems?

Class-based food consumption provides a classic example of the social appetite. Food is one of the most basic necessities of life and its inequitable distribution may be as old as human society itself. Public anxiety about diet-related health in developed countries has renewed the interest in class-based differences in food habits. As this chapter shows, class differences in nutritional intake and food choice have diminished in a number of countries. Nevertheless, class patterns in food consumption persist, fuelling a public discourse that blames the 'poor diets of the poor' for working-class health problems. Yet the relationship between class, food and health is much more complex, particularly given the connections between food habits and class identity. Concerns by nutrition experts about working-class diets may have more to do with social differentiation than

with nutrition-related health inequality. Drawing on a range of social research, this chapter examines the relationship between class and food. In particular, insights gained from Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus' and 'cultural capital', and recent work on individualisation and cosmopolitanism, are discussed.

KEY TERMS

class
 conspicuous consumption
 cosmopolitanism
 culinary capital
 cultural capital
 cultural omnivorousness
 food insecurity
 fusion food
 globalisation
 habitus
 life chances
 life choices
 McDonaldisation
 reflexive modernity
 social differentiation
 socioeconomic status (SES)
 socioeconomic position (SEP)
 structure/agency debate

Introduction

Class has long been associated with food consumption, exemplified by the alleged 'good taste' and 'good manners' of the upper classes compared to the working class. Such pejorative views with moralistic overtones are still evident today. Hallmarks of the class–food nexus exist in exclusive and expensive restaurants, gourmet food and wine, glossy food magazines and TV shows that exalt novel ingredients and cuisines, and laud celebrity chefs, with an emphasis on the artistry of cooking and the etiquette of eating. The privileges that money brings to the upper classes have often been displayed through their consumption practices—and food habits have been one of the social markers used to reinforce class distinctions—which Thorstein Veblen (1899/1975) referred to as **conspicuous consumption**.

Increased understanding of the link between diet and health has been accompanied by popular and scientific assumptions that the 'poor diets of the poor' are partially responsible for the persistence of health inequalities between classes. The diet of the working class is often viewed as uniformly 'unhealthy', while the upper classes are often assumed to be consistently 'healthier'—yet the available evidence does not support such an oversimplified view of class-based food habits. Moreover, a number of commentators suggest that the influence of class on people's lifestyles, including food consumption, is diminishing. This chapter seeks to clarify the association between class and food in contemporary developed societies (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of food security in developed countries). In doing so, it assesses the extent to which class-based food habits impact on health outcomes or reflect the prejudices of privilege (see Box 11.1).

BOX 11.1 CONCEPTUALISING CLASS

Class is a central topic of research and debate in sociology. Due to the differences in theoretical perspectives and research methodologies used by sociologists, the terminology used to signify social inequality varies. For example, it is common to find the terms **class** and **socioeconomic status (SES)** or **socioeconomic position (SEP)** used interchangeably, although they are quite different concepts.

Class refers to a system of social inequality based on an unequal distribution of wealth, status and power. Classes, such as the working, middle and upper classes, refer to real groups of people who share common class-based values, interests and lifestyles. The concept of SES/SEP refers to a statistical grouping of people into high, medium and low groups according to certain criteria (usually a composite index of income, occupation and education). In fact, much of the empirical study of class uses the concept of SES because it is perceived as less controversial and easier to operationalise. It is common for education, income or occupation to be used as an individual surrogate indicator of SES/SEP, and while each overlaps to an extent, they represent 'a different underlying social process and hence they are not interchangeable; they do not serve as adequate proxies for one another' (Turrell et al. 2003, p. 191).

SES/SEP figures can indicate levels of social inequality, but it should be remembered that they are abstract categorisations used for statistical analysis (Connell 1977). For example, very few people identify themselves as a member of a middle SES group! Therefore, SES/SEP should not be automatically substituted for class, because class is meant to refer to actual groups of people with identifiable class-based identities (see Connell 1977; 1983; Crompton 1998).

While some authors have proclaimed 'class is dead', or at least less influential today than it was in the past (Pakulski & Waters 1996), it is important to note that class is not the only basis of **social differentiation** or social inequality. Social research has found a range of demographic factors other than class as useful for explaining social differences, such as gender, ethnicity, age and the presence of children in the household.

A brief history of class and food

'Please, sir, I want some more.'

Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (1837–39)

The famous line from *Oliver Twist* evokes images of a bygone era of rigid class structures, poverty and **food insecurity**. Until the Industrial Revolution, subsistence economies and limited means of transportation and storage left European populations susceptible to famine. As Stephen Mennell (1996) notes, food scarcity meant that even the wealthy ate frugally, although they could afford to eat considerably more than the poor, who subsisted mostly on cereals, pulses, potatoes, some milk, and very small quantities of meat (mostly pork, which was considered of low status and was less expensive). Social status in times of food scarcity was often conveyed by a person's girth—that is, a large body was a sign of wealth and of the ability to overconsume when food was available (Mennell 1996). At this time, the 'fat ideal' was the symbol of beauty, as represented in the famous paintings of voluptuous women by Renoir and Bertolucci, among others. Only the very wealthy could afford to host feasts and banquets, the 'gastro-orgies' of endless dishes and hearty servings that, though rare, reflected the chasm in living standards between the rich and poor (Mennell 1996).

The working class had poor access to food in terms of both quantity and quality. As Friedrich Engels noted in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845/1958, p. 103), 'the working-people, to whom a couple of farthings are important ... cannot afford to inquire too closely into the quality of their purchase ... to their share fall all the adulterated, poisoned provisions'. For example, in the 1800s it was a widespread practice to adulterate milk by watering it down by at least 25 per cent, and then adding flour for thickening, chalk for whitening, the juice of boiled carrots for sweetening, and even lamb brains for froth. Bread was commonly whitened with chalk, while clay and sawdust were often used to add weight to a loaf (Atkins 1991; Murcott 1999). The adulteration of food was commonplace in Australia as well, so much so that some of the earliest public health laws in the world were introduced to address this problem—for example, the *Adulteration of Bread Act 1838* (NSW) and the *Act to Prevent the Adulteration of Articles of Food and Drink 1863* (Vic.) (Commonwealth of Australia 2001). In Britain, enormous differences between the diets of the working class and upper classes persisted well into the early twentieth century, and the poorest 10 per cent of the population 'barely subsisted' on a diet of tea, butter, bread, potatoes and a small amount of meat (Nelson 1993). By the twentieth century, food scarcity was rare in Australia and the United States, and those who had employment could afford meat regularly (Symons 1982; Levenstein 1988). Nonetheless, the continued existence of food aid programs such as food stamps, soup kitchens, food banks and food cooperatives is evidence of the persistence of food insecurity in developed countries (Riches 1997; 2003).

Theorising food and class: Habitus, cultural capital and identity

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) has had a considerable influence on sociological studies of class and food, particularly through his book *Distinction*. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1979/1984) examined how the upper classes used particular lifestyles and taste preferences as modes of distinction to symbolically express their domination over the working class. In studying the consumption practices of the French, Bourdieu argued that distinct class-related 'tastes' in art, film, literature, fashion and food were the major means through which class differences were produced and

reproduced. According to Bourdieu, in terms of food consumption the working class had 'a taste for the heavy, the fat and the coarse', while the upper classes preferred 'the light, the refined and the delicate' (1979/1984, p. 185). In an age of food abundance, the upper classes were concerned with health and refinement, eating exotic ingredients and 'foreign foods' and valuing the artistry, aesthetics and novelty of food and its preparation. The working class was distinctly different, and in 'the face of the new ethic of sobriety for the sake of slimmess ... industrial workers maintain an ethic of convivial indulgence' (p. 179). Thus food habits serve as clear social markers of class identity.

The upper and middle classes use food consumption, among other things, as a symbolic way of differentiating themselves from the working class through an appreciation of etiquette, modest serves and aesthetic factors, as reflected in common notions of 'good' and 'bad' taste. Bourdieu sought to explain how such class distinctions were formed and reproduced through the concepts of **habitus** and **cultural capital**. 'Habitus', an expansion of the notion of habit, refers to 'a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions' (p. 170). In particular, Bourdieu conceptualised it as the internalised and taken-for-granted personal dispositions we all possess—such as our accent, gestures and preferences in food, fashion and entertainment—which convey status and class background. 'Cultural capital' refers to a particular set of values and knowledge, possessed by the upper classes, upon which social hierarchies are formed. The term 'capital' is applied to signify the similarity to an economic asset, whereby *cultural capital*, like economic capital, can confer privilege and high social status (see Bennett et al. 2009).

Bourdieu's conceptual schema attempts to transcend the **structure/agency debate** by presupposing that 'social reality exists both inside and outside of individuals, both in our minds and in things' (Swartz 1997, p. 96). Thus people act according to their class dispositions (habitus), which ultimately leads to the reproduction of class lifestyles (Swartz 1997). Class-based food habits become a routine part of daily life and are not necessarily the result of conscious decisions, but rather an expression of the underlying class logic of a person's habitus. In this way, Bourdieu binds **life choices** with **life chances** so that personal experiences of particular living and working conditions shape beliefs about diet, health and illness (Williams 1995). By adding a cultural dimension to class analysis, he identified the importance of consumption practices in the production and reproduction of social differentiation.

Bourdieu's insights provide a theoretical explanation about why class-based food habits persist. As he states, 'Tastes in food also depend on the idea each class has of the body and of the effects of food on the body, that is, on its strength, health and beauty ... some of which may be important for one class and ignored by another, and which the different classes may rank in very different ways' (1979/1984, p. 190). Those who have more cultural capital—that is, those groups who are better able to create notions of 'good taste'—can legitimate forms of consumption to which they have more access. They are able to define their bodies, their lifestyles and their preferred food habits as superior (Williams 1995). Thus Indian and Thai takeaway are better than McDonald's hamburgers and fish and chips from the corner store; what is more, they are chosen by better-educated and better-paid people. Yet class-based food habits are not fixed or immutable, and their gradual emulation by lower classes results in a continuous reinvention of class distinction; witnessed by the working class now commonly consuming multicultural cuisines such as Indian, Thai, Mexican, Chinese and Italian. A study of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital in the dietary patterns of women in Tijuana found that economic capital allowed the consumption of a 'globalised' dietary pattern, and when cultural capital was added, 'healthier' food patterns were evident (Bojorquez et al. 2015).

Class-based differences in food habits do not necessarily lead to problematic nutritional intake among the working class. As we shall see later in this chapter, the available evidence suggests that the nutritional intakes of the working class differ little from the upper classes. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the working class do not experience food insecurity due to a lack of access to highly valued foods, the preferred amount of food, or consistent amounts of food. A study from the United Kingdom of low-income families found food budgets were often elastic, so that when money was scarce (due to unexpected bills), the quality and quantity of food was often sacrificed (Dobson et al. 1994). In such situations, food shopping was done more frequently to avoid a build-up of food supplies that may be consumed too quickly and cause a food shortage later in the week. There was a general lack of experimentation with novel ingredients and meals, because experimentation carried the risk of wastage if family members found new foods unpalatable (see Charles & Kerr 1988; DeVault 1991). They found that families hid their food poverty by avoiding having guests for dinner or specially saving for such events and, in the case of children being visited by their friends, mothers saved money so they could provide brand-name snacks. In one instance, a mother reported filling an empty Coca-Cola bottle with low-cost cola to serve her son's friends, to 'save face' and effectively hide their food poverty (Dobson et al. 1994; Beardsworth & Keil 1997, pp. 93–4).

While Bourdieu's ideas are insightful, they should not be adopted uncritically. The ideas presented in *Distinction* were based on a study of French society at a particular time; the data was collected in the 1960s. Bourdieu himself acknowledged that all theorising is culturally and historically contingent. Therefore, the extent to which his ideas apply today, particularly in countries such as Australia, the United States, Canada and the UK, requires empirical investigation. Despite his attempt to provide an explanation that integrated structure and agency, Bourdieu appears to accord habitus a particularly deterministic quality that belies the internal differentiation among the working class, not to mention the influence of other identity-forming characteristics, such as ethnicity and gender (Mennell 1996; Swartz 1997). Indeed, a number of authors suggest that class is diminishing in importance; it may well be that a person's habitus today reflects a much wider range of dispositions than in the past.

Are class-based food habits diminishing?

In *All Manners of Food*, Mennell (1996) suggests that **globalisation** and industrialisation processes have precipitated a decline in class-based food habits. Since the mid-1800s, the mass production of food has continued unabated; canned food, in particular, played a significant role early on in making food relatively cheap and widely accessible (Levenstein 1988; Burnett 1989). Food shortages and rationing during the Depression and World War II further lessened class differences in food habits (Hollingsworth 1985; Braybon & Summerfield 1987). This period is sometimes seen as a time when dietary restrictions made affluent diets 'healthier', and contributed to lower rates of some diseases (such as cardiovascular disease). It is at least as plausible that the diets of the poorest sections of the population were improved by wartime organisation of the food supply, which ensured that what was available was distributed with reasonable equity. While those with more resources always had more options, the homogenising influence on diets across classes was considerable (Mennell 1996).

Post-war affluence in developed countries had a further homogenising influence on food habits, with post-war migration and international trade resulting in the exchange of foods

between cultures, as foods from the United States and Europe began to be widely introduced into countries such as Australia. By the 1990s, the standardising influence exerted by the food industry was such that George Ritzer (1993) developed the concept of **McDonaldisation** to describe it. According to Mennell, 'If commercial interests make people's tastes more standardised than they conceivably could be in the past, they impose far less strict limits than did the physical constraints to which most people's diet was subject ... the main trend has been towards *diminishing contrasts* and *increasing varieties* in food habits and culinary taste' (1996, pp. 321–2, italics in original). However, Alan Warde (1997) suggests that Mennell 'overestimates the extent of class decline and the erosion of social differentiation' (p. 29), suggesting that what 'best explains Mennell's description of the 20th century is commodification' (p. 171).

In an age of plenty, significant class-based differences in food consumption become difficult to sustain. The mass production of food has increased the consumption choices available to people through greater numbers of food products and outlets, and greater access to cuisines from across the globe. These developments have paralleled an increased cultural knowledge of food that some have termed '**culinary capital**' (Naccarato & Lebesco 2012)—a form of cultural capital whereby food habits reflect detailed knowledge about the provenance, quality, artisanal techniques, and health impact of food and its preparation. Some authors maintain that a new form of **cosmopolitanism** has emerged (Beck 2000), referring to the worldwide hybridisation of cultures, tastes and cuisines, which has left class distinctions as somewhat antiquated and peripheral to people's everyday lives. Globalisation, particularly via the media, international trade and travel, has resulted in a cosmopolitanisation of food (Tomlinson 1999). People have greater access to, and openness towards, cultures other than their own and, particularly in terms of food, are able to incorporate multicultural aspects into their lifestyle. Cosmopolitanism does not imply an overarching trend towards uniformity and homogeneity, but rather a plurality of lifestyles—irrespective of class, people now partake in multiple ethnic cuisines and **fusion food**.

The work of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck suggests that such developments are characteristic of the contemporary age, which they describe as **reflexive modernity** (Beck et al. 1994). According to Giddens, our exposure to information and other cultures makes us open to reflection and change, so that 'lifestyle choice is increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity and daily activity' (1991, p. 5). Processes of individualisation have undermined collective identities and lifestyles (Bottero 2004), so that class-based food habits now function via a hierarchy of tastes that are influenced by a range of contextual social factors. A number of studies have documented the complexity of influences on food habits, whereby class or SES differences are mediated by other social factors such as gender, age, education, occupation and presence of children in the household (Tomlinson & Warde 1993; Gerhardy et al. 1995; Devine et al. 2003). Such findings show the complexity of attempting to measure and identify class-related food habits and lend credence to the 'diminishing contrasts' thesis. A further argument for declining class differences, in parallel with the influences of cosmopolitanism, reflexive modernity, and diminishing contrasts, is the cultural omnivore thesis (see Box 11.2).

The curious case of class-based food habits, nutrition and health

It is well established that people of lower SES have higher prevalence of chronic disease—such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes mellitus—and obesity, than those of higher SES (WHO 2011). Michael Marmot and others have argued that this is due to inequality, which is the basis

of the class system, rather than for purely financial reasons (Marmot 2004; Wilkinson & Pickett 2009). Since these diseases have a dietary component in their development, it is important to study diet according to social class to see if it can explain the class gradient in health outcomes.

BOX 11.2 THE CULTURAL OMNIVORE THESIS: A NEW FORM OF DISTINCTION?

The cultural omnivore thesis contends that a growing proportion of consumers in Western societies exhibit a wider breadth of cultural tastes compared to previous generations, reflecting the diminishing of social class differentiation. The debate over this thesis remains contested, although a number of studies suggest that the notion of the cultural omnivore is more diverse and far less cohesive than some commentators have posited. Those consumers that do appear to practise **cultural omnivorousness** tend to be from the highly educated middle and upper classes. Being a cultural omnivore takes an investment in skills, knowledge and judgment that can be used to create a particular identity based on socially valued and differentiated consumption choices that, in effect, reinforce social distinction. Cultural omnivores have the knowledge and economic means to consume from a wider range of foods, drinks, cuisines and restaurants, all of which can serve to function as a form of distinction (see Peterson & Kern 1996; Warde et al. 2007; Bennett et al. 2009; Kahma et al. 2016; Lizardo & Skiles 2016).

Empirical studies from developed countries have documented class differences in food habits (Crotty et al. 1992; Prattala et al. 1992; Nelson 1993; Popkin et al. 1996; Turrell 1996; James et al. 1997; Dobson et al. 1997; Hulshof et al. 2003; Turrell et al. 2003; Turrell et al. 2004; Inglis et al. 2005; Turrell & Kavanagh 2006; Lallukka et al. 2007; Roos et al. 2007; Darmon & Drewnowski 2008; Pechey et al. 2015; Skuland 2015; Kahma et al. 2016). Using a range of surrogate indicators of class, such as area-based measures, income, education and occupation, these studies generally find that the food habits of higher SES groups tend to be closer to dietary recommendations, but that 'differences were more evident on the food level than on the nutrient level' (Hulshof et al. 2003, p. 135).

One of the most common findings on social class and food choice is that those of higher SES/SEP are more likely to eat more fruit and vegetables (and therefore receive more vitamins and minerals) than those of lower SES/SEP (Darmon & Drewnowski 2008). A UK study of 361 men and 371 women exploring motivations for eating particular foods according to income, education and occupation group found fruit consumption (but not cheese or cake) to be socially patterned, reinforcing previous findings (Pechey et al. 2015). People of lower SES and male gender liked fruit less, while higher SES participants were more likely to report their food choices to be motivated by health and weight control, and less likely to be motivated by price. Higher consumption of fruit and vegetables affect overall diet quality, and there is some evidence that consumption of vitamins, minerals and dietary fibre are higher in those of higher SES (Darmon & Drewnowski 2008).

In Australia, the pioneering work of Pat Crotty and colleagues (1992) highlighted the need to adopt a nuanced approach to the study of low-income diets, given their finding of negligible differences between low-income and affluent Australians. While these findings were supported by Gavin Turrell's study (1996), he additionally found that those on low incomes who were also welfare recipients had distinctly different food habits than those in other SES groups. Turrell notes that welfare recipients are often under-represented in studies examining SES and food, suggesting that this may disguise important dietary differences within low SES groups. This study also examined the proposition that healthy food was more expensive, which some commentators have assumed is an explanation for the 'poor diets of the poor'. However, in Australia at least,

cost and access to fresh fruit and vegetables, and meat, does not appear to be a major barrier to a healthy diet (Turrell 1996; Worsley et al. 2003; Turrell et al. 2004). Despite this, a subsequent Australian study found that low SES participants cited the cost of healthy food as a barrier to healthy eating, suggesting that subjective perceptions regarding healthy food do not tally with the objective cost (Turrell & Havanagh 2006). Once again, this highlights the importance of cultural practices among different class groups first noted by Bourdieu. A number of studies have found that low SES suburbs tend to have higher concentrations of fast-food outlets, suggesting an 'obesogenic' effect in the way that local environments can impact on food habits and possibly health outcomes (Cummins et al. 2005; Macdonald et al. 2007).

A qualitative study of food habits and shopping patterns among low-income earners in Britain (Hitchman et al. 2002) found a tendency to purchase highly processed, low-cost, energy-dense foods that provided 'cheap calories' (p. 22), with food choices highly influenced by special offers and promotional discounts, and possession of instrumental views of food in terms of energy and satiety. A preference for energy-dense (and processed) foods by low SES groups may be a rational response to managing a limited budget (see Giskes et al. 2002; Drewnowski & Specter 2004). This may particularly be the case in limiting loss due to spoilage, especially if refrigeration is not available.

This theory was tested in an experimental psychology study by Boyka Bratanova and colleagues (2016). The researchers showed that participants allocated to a simulated experience of poverty increased subsequent energy intake when presented with plates of savoury, then sweet, snacks, in comparison with those who had a simulated experience of wealth. Participants also reported enjoying the taste of high calorie food more and expressed a stronger intention to buy the snacks in the future if they were allocated to the simulated condition of poverty. The researchers concluded that perception of scarcity (due to limited financial resources) triggered a survival instinct, resulting in increased caloric (energy) intake (Bratanova et al. 2016).

The most comprehensive study to date on dietary intake and income is the *Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey* (LIDNS), produced by the Food Standards Agency in the UK. Using a nationally representative sample of 3728 people, it provides significant data on the food habits, nutritional status and health of the low-income population (the bottom 15 per cent). The study collected information via face-to-face interviews, a self-completed survey and four 24-hour diet recalls per person, as well as collecting physical measurements on weight, height, waist and hip circumference, mid-upper arm circumference, blood pressure and a blood sample. The study took place between November 2003 and January 2005, with results published in 2007 (Nelson et al. 2007a; 2007b).

The study found that the overall nutritional intakes for people on a low income were similar to the general population (Nelson et al. 2007a). The study notes that: 'Contrary to expectations fewer differences were seen between the low income and the general population in terms of mean nutrient intake as a percentage of the Estimated Average Requirement (EAR) or Reference Nutrient Intake (RNI) and percentage of food energy from nutrients.' However, there were differences in the types of foods consumed. When compared to the general population, adults aged 19–64 in the low-income group:

- consumed less breakfast cereals, wholemeal bread, fruit and vegetables, and low fat milk
- ate more fat spreads and oils, non-diet soft drinks, meat (beef, veal, lamb and pork) and processed meats, table sugar and whole milk
- drank less alcohol overall (lower mean daily intakes and fewer consumers), but had higher mean daily intakes among those who did consume alcohol

- had lower levels of physical activity and significantly higher rates of smoking (45 per cent and 40 per cent of adult men and women respectively) (Nelson et al. 2007a; 2007b).

Interestingly, mean daily energy intakes were similar between the low income and general population (with low income men having slightly lower energy intakes) and there were negligible differences in the intakes of carbohydrate, protein and total fat. A striking finding of the UK study was the high level of food insecurity reported, with:

- 29 per cent of the low-income group reporting that access to food had been limited (due to lack of money, storage or transport) at some time during the previous 12 months
- 22 per cent reporting they had missed or reduced meals
- 5 per cent reporting they had experienced times when they had not eaten at all for a day due to a lack of money to purchase food (Nelson et al. 2007b, p. 339).

There are parallels between the UK study and the data from the *1995 Australian National Nutrition Survey* (NNS) (ABS 1997). A major analysis of the 1995 Australian NNS data using an index of relative disadvantage for geographical areas, the Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA), has allowed a comparison of the diets of those in the most disadvantaged quintile (quintile 1, the poorest 20 per cent of the population with lowest income) with the diets of those in the remaining four quintiles (Wood et al. 2000a; 2000b). Note that while new national dietary data was collected in 2014–15, at the time of writing it had not been analysed according to SES; however, the overall levels of food insecurity were similar despite the 20-year gap. There were 2052 people in quintile 1 and 9203 people in quintiles 2–5 from the population-based sample. The main findings are summarised in Table 11.1.

TABLE 11.1 1995 Australian NNS results: Comparison of most disadvantaged areas (quintile 1) with all other areas (quintiles 2–5)

MEASURE	QUINTILE 1 (MOST DISADVANTAGED) N = 2052	QUINTILE 2–5 N = 9203
Median intake of all food and beverages	2541 grams per day	2672 grams per day
Reported running out of food over past 12 months	8.9%	4.1%
Eat cereals and cereal products	93.0%	95.1%
Consume milk products/dishes	91.7%	94.0%
Eat seed and nut products/dishes	10.0%	12.8%
Use fats and oils	74.2%	76.2%
Usually eat less than two serves of fruit a day	49.7%	45.2%
Use whole milk	41.9%	37.6%
Trim fat off meat	69.6%	73.8%
Consume alcohol	27.0%	34.3%
Median consumption of alcoholic beverages	571 grams per day	393 grams per day

Source: Wood et al. (2000a)

In the most disadvantaged quintile, people were found to have a lower median intake of all food and beverages (2541 g for quintile 1 versus 2672 g for the upper four quintiles). Furthermore, 8.9 per cent of people in quintile 1 reported 'running out of food and having no money to buy more at some time during the last 12 months,' compared to 4.1 per cent for the other quintiles, indicating that food insecurity is a significant problem in Australia (affecting around 5 per cent of the total Australian population) (Wood et al. 2000a, p. 8). People living in the most disadvantaged areas tended to consume slightly lesser amounts of cereals, milk products, seed and nut products, fats and oils, and fruit and vegetables. They were also less likely to trim fat off meat or use low-fat milk. While fewer people in quintile 1 consumed alcohol overall, those who did consume had a median alcohol intake considerably higher than people in higher quintiles. It is important to note that like many studies, the NNS data under-represents the most disadvantaged members of society because of the use of a broad geographic indicator of SES. Nonetheless, the results from both the UK and Australian national surveys suggest that food insecurity—poverty rather than class—may be a better indicator of nutritional inequality.

Conclusion

The literature on developed countries suggests that class-based food habits and nutrient intakes, however measured, have diminished without disappearing altogether. To what extent the remaining differences explain health differentials remains the subject of conjecture. While there is strong evidence of class-based differences in types of food eaten, there appear to be fewer differences in nutrient intake. The key exception is those who experience food insecurity due to extreme poverty who do have differences in nutrient intakes. Following Bourdieu's insights, a sociological analysis of class-based food habits exposes the role of symbolic consumption as a key feature of social differentiation.

Acknowledgment

In the second edition, this chapter was co-authored with Pat Crotty, who also wrote the original chapter in the first edition. Some of the material from the previous editions is reproduced here with permission. We are in debt to Pat for her work on the previous editions and for her influence on our thinking on this topic. We are also grateful to Ishtar Sladdin for assistance with updating this chapter.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- In developed countries, there is mounting evidence that differentials in diet between the upper and working classes are diminishing and that those that persist are not great.
- The common assumption that the 'poor diets of the poor' (that is, the food habits of the working class) are responsible for health inequalities is ill informed.
- The Australian data suggest there are likely to be subgroups within the population that experience poverty and have diets very different from those of other groups due to food insecurity, and this is where nutrition interventions may need to be targeted.
- There may be differences in food habits that are not class-related but are related to other socio-demographic factors, such as region, age, ethnicity, gender and presence of children in the household; these factors may have good explanatory power for understanding food habits.
- The idea of creating distinction helps us to improve on simplistic interpretations of the links between food habits, health and class; the available data suggest that the relationships are more complex than is usually assumed.

Sociological reflection

- Describe some class differences in food consumption in your community.
- Which of your food habits reflect habitus, and which social class do they represent?
- The working class generally experiences higher-than-average rates of diet-related illness and death. What are some of the reasons for this?
- Do you see any evidence to support the rise of cultural omnivores and the decline of class-based food habits?

Discussion questions

- 1 What are some examples of class-based food habits in your community?
- 2 What are some other forms of food consumption by which class distinctions or social differentiation can be observed?
- 3 What are the implications for public policy if those households most likely to benefit from improved diets are those least able to respond to current dietary guidelines?
- 4 People who use the services of welfare agencies are probably the most at risk of having limited food choices, insufficient food and nutritionally inadequate diets. What groups in society might be represented in this category?
- 5 How might life chances and life choices converge to produce healthy food habits and diets among low-income groups?
- 6 How can Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus help to explain class differences in food consumption? In light of the arguments of Mennell and the cultural omnivore thesis, are Bourdieu's ideas relevant to your society?

Further investigation

- 1 The higher morbidity and mortality rates of the working class are due to the 'poor diets of the poor'. Discuss.
- 2 Class differences in food consumption are diminishing as a result of food abundance and cosmopolitanism. Discuss.
- 3 One of the major differences in expenditure on food between the working class and the upper classes is the amount of money spent on food eaten away from home. Discuss.
- 4 The rise of cultural omnivores represents a new form of class distinction in food habits. Discuss.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

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Websites

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS): www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Home. Provides reports on food, diet and health.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW): www.aihw.gov.au/. Provides access to reports that summarise the relationship between health and social factors.
- Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey (LIDNS): www.food.gov.uk/science/dietarysurveys/lidnsbranch/. Research commissioned by the UK Food Standards Agency.
- Sustain (UK): www.sustainweb.org/ Contains information on a range of food campaigns for the promotion of sustainable food production and healthy eating.
- World Health Organization (WHO): www.who.int/en/. Provides access to reports, research and policy statements.

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CHAPTER 12

THE CHANGING GLOBAL TASTE FOR WINE: AN HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Julie McIntyre and John Germov

OVERVIEW

- › How has the social meaning of wine drinking changed over time?
- › What are the historical and social features of wine globalisation for producers and consumers?
- › How can an historical sociological framework inform understanding of the interplay between the production, promotion and consumption of wine?

Historians and sociologists have responded more slowly than other fields in the humanities and social sciences to inquire into the twentieth-century democratisation of wine and its turn-of-the-century globalisation. Research in history and sociology is crucial to understanding the role of wine in human societies and why, and how, this has changed over time. This

chapter reviews the state of current research, discusses where historians and sociologists have focused their wine studies research to date and predicts possible future directions.

KEY TERMS

agency
civilising process
cultural capital
cultural consecration
figurations
globalisation
habitus
historical capital
historical sociology
informalisation
neoliberalism
terroir
wine complex

Introduction: The social life of wine

Wine is 'perhaps the most historically charged and culturally symbolic' of Western alcoholic drinks (Phillips 2009, p. xvi). Wine drinking is not just an ordinary activity of daily life, but an extraordinary one. While we have a fundamental biological drive for food, wine is a matter of choice—of taste—and often denotes a *cultured* as well as *cultural* identity. Unlike other forms of alcohol, wine has rarely been associated with public concerns about overconsumption and associated violence in the English-speaking world. Drinking wine is, more than any other alcoholic beverage, linked to civility and restraint (McIntyre 2011a).

Throughout its history, wine has been a widely traded commodity and a value-laden drink, linked with both religious rituals and legal regulations, as well as with pleasure and sociality, which make it an inherently fascinating topic of study. Wine has social, cultural, economic, symbolic and political dimensions. This chapter seeks to understand the social dimensions of wine production, distribution and consumption—what we term the **wine complex**—which operates at regional, national and global levels (McIntyre & Germov 2013).

Although the feverish global boom of wine growing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has eased from an economic perspective, the making, selling and drinking of wine and related industries—such as wine tourism—reinvigorated the Old World wine industry, created substantial new wine communities in the southern hemisphere and extended the world wine vineyard to China and India, where wine consumption continues to rise. In the past decade, a new contemporary historical and social phenomenon has arisen: wine is grown, sold and consumed in more countries—and by a greater diversity of people—than at any other period in history. Multidisciplinary research has been required to develop studies of the cause and effect of wine identity in a range of national contexts. This chapter reviews wine studies scholarship, focusing on historical and sociological contributions, and shows that wine can provide significant insight into current social values and behaviour.

The rise of wine studies: An historical sociological framework

The study of wine lends itself to the well-established intellectual tradition of **historical sociology**. As its name suggests, historical sociology blends the approaches of the two disciplines to explore how complex social processes shape the development of societies across time and place (Tilly 2001) or, as Mills once famously stated, it 'enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society' (1959, p. 6). While there are many streams of thought within this intellectual genre, the work of Norbert Elias (2000) is particularly pertinent. Elias's approach, commonly termed 'figurational sociology', examines the impact of social interaction across a broad spread of history to understand under what conditions particular social forms arise (Mennell 1992; van Krieken 1998), such as the rapid global rise of wine-drinking in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. In wine studies, a historical sociological approach combines knowledge of past production, distribution and consumption of wine, and how these have changed over time, with techniques and theories to understand the meaning of social norms in periods of continuity and change in the past and the present.

Until recently, historians and sociologists paid little sustained attention to wine. This is because although the history of European wine is long (McGovern et al. 1996), it has not been

deep in global terms. The production, distribution and consumption of wine has been considered relevant to only some nations. The recent rise in historical and sociological scholarship on wine is due to divergences in the scales of inquiry, and the posing of questions relating to 'the local' and 'the global' that inform or even bypass the national. This has been coupled with the rise in popularity of wine in new national contexts, its democratisation since the 1980s, especially in countries such as Australia (see Kirkby 2006), and rapid wine **globalisation** from the late 1990s (Anderson 2004; see Box 12.1).

BOX 12.1 CHANGING WINE DRINKING HABITS

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) collates official statistics on a range of economic and social indicators.

OECD data shows that average consumption of all alcoholic beverages has fallen in many countries. In the Old World wine-producing countries of Italy, France and Spain, as well as in the Slovak Republic and Germany, per capita alcohol consumption fell by one-third or more between 1980 and 2010. In seeking to explain this trend, the OECD noted that it may be the result of a reduction in alcohol advertising following a 1989 directive of the Council of the European Communities.

In Australia since the 1960s, beer consumption has fallen and wine consumption has increased. Fifty years ago, by volume, Australians drank twenty times more beer than wine. The difference is now four times more beer than wine. This change in Australian drinking habits reflects a trend in OECD figures, showing that in parts of the world where overall consumption is lower, traditional beer-drinking countries are turning to wine.

Sources: OECD (2011); ABS (2011)

There was a steady rise in wine studies scholarship in the humanities and social sciences from the 1950s to the 1990s, followed by a deepening and widening of interest from the early 2000s. This body of research reveals changing 'wine worlds' and 'wine-ways' as a window into human relations. The principal concerns of this research have varied according to disciplinary lenses for research. For instance in the 1970s, anthropologists began to consider European as well as non-European cultures in their research. An early example of this included work on the French tradition of giving wine to children, which attracted censure from non-French social scientists concerned about minimising harm from alcohol overconsumption (Anderson 1979).

In studying wine, historians and sociologists are less concerned than geographers and anthropologists with the politics of place, **terroir**, and other facets of environment, nature and spatial regionality (see Box 12.2). Historians have been occupied with the development of national industries, comparative national industry development, wine and nationalism. Sociological research shows a strong link between consumption and identity choices, focusing on how the consumption of alcohol is not just a matter of individual choice, but also a matter of cultural taste.

Wine-studies research intersects with interdisciplinary food studies, but is not circumscribed by it. Wine is central to food research focused on gastronomy, tourism, and globalisation versus localism but, unsurprisingly, absent from studies of starvation and of cultures without wine traditions. Although at first wine studies existed at the fringe of food studies and in anthropological critiques of wine culture in traditional wine countries, the convergence of the democratisation and globalisation of wine in the early years of this century has given rise to new issues that demand

separate attention. Given wine is not required for human survival, development and health, the underlying catalysts for research differ from those of food. Wine studies—as distinct from food studies—require attention to the wine complex of production, distribution and consumption (McIntyre & Germov 2013).

Wine history is yet to take on a clear shape within food history, but themes arising from such scholarship, such as the historicisation of authenticity, are relevant to research on wine (Pilcher 2012; Scholliers 2001), particularly the concept of *terroir* (see Box 12.2). Wine can be shown to have **historical capital**. This is a combination of symbolic capital (wine show prizes, medals), **cultural capital** (reputation based on the longevity of wine-growing and wine-making experience in a company; favourable wine reviews) and 'natural capital' (*terroir*; either the distinct qualities of the soil, climate and aspect of vineyard sites, or the length of time particular vines have been grown on that site, preferably by multi-generations of the same family, or both).

BOX 12.2 WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT TERROIR

Terroir has become the single most important concept in defining wine production identity, product provenance and therefore authenticity. *Terroir* may be defined in relation to wine as a unique place (or space with meaning) with specific qualities of soil, climate, vineyard aspect and traditions of vine culture and wine making. It refers to a cultural landscape, usually a single vineyard or micro-region, preferably possessing a long history of vine growing and wine making. However, this does not capture the variability of the meaning of *terroir* among academics, wine critics, consumers, promoters and producers. Its plasticity makes it of great interest for historical sociological research into changing cultural values.

Terroir is almost always written in italics. Initially this signalled its derivation directly from French, without translation. Often it is claimed that *terroir* cannot be adequately translated into English. To attempt a translation would remove the essence or poetry from what is being described about the relationship between wine and place. Still, any French dictionary will give a definition of *terroir* that is not particular to wine. The French meaning of *terroir* is a rural area viewed in terms of its agricultural products, traditions of production and lifestyle, and joint operations of farmland.

Some versions of *terroir* in current Anglophone wine discourse hold that it is a sense of place discernible in the sensory taste of wine. Trained tasting experience may lead to expertise about the very pleasant odours or flavours of wines from certain places. In wine discourse, odours of young wines are 'aromas', odours of aged wines are 'bouquet'—smell is vital to the precision and pleasure of taste. The relative status of these qualities in wine is subjective. The effect of the alcohol in wine on how a drinker might express the experience of drinking it cannot also be discounted. To this point, rather than becoming more clearly defined over time, the term *terroir* is becoming more opaque. This is evidence of its rhetorical rather than scientific basis.

Current meanings ascribed to *terroir* in English-language discourse on wine have been socially and culturally constructed during the recent wave of wine globalisation. The politics of *terroir* is that French regions, such as Burgundy and Bordeaux, allegedly have the world's best wine *terroir*. In the wine world, *terroir* distinctions are related to wine status and social status. Wine critics, educators and others with cultural authority encourage consumers to demonstrate their 'good taste' through knowledge of *terroir*. There are other means of conferring status on wine, but *terroir* is dominant among wine producers seeking premium status for their wines and among consumers seeking to differentiate quality in a global market.

Sources: Demossier (2010), McIntyre (2011b), Harvey et al. (2014)

As anthropologist Marion Demossier (2010) observed of former temperance taboos in anthropological research on wine, historians and sociologists generally steered away from wine for ideological and epistemological reasons. Temperance waned as the dominant means of framing research on alcohol and drinking because of the rise of relatively responsible drinking in Western nations and wine's democratisation and globalisation. In the same period, researchers in history have experienced a series of postmodern turns away from a traditional disciplinary emphasis on narrow agendas of celebrating national achievement, towards social histories that reflect the concerns of power relations and social movements and, more recently, cultural histories of food and drink that consider the interplay between local and global scales of inquiry about production, trade and consumption. French wine identity has proved to be a key area of wine studies for a post-temperance generation of researchers. Within food studies, historian Kolleen Guy pioneered this work by arguing for the construction of the relationship between ideas of 'Frenchness' and cultural conceptions of champagne (Guy 2001; 2003). Her research broke ground as a wine studies text by taking account of gender, class, race, power, culture and identity. It reflected New World, and specifically American, concerns about the French dominance of wine discourse. Guy's (2003) research appeared as a successful book that showed that interdisciplinary wine research could reveal new tensions at the intersections of the past and the present.

Since the 1950s, sociologists have gradually widened the net of their research from a strictly temperance paradigm of prevention of social harm from 'deviant' drinking, to considering questions of identity, distinction and power relationships related to wine sales and wine drinking at all scales of inquiry. As a result of post-war migration, sociologists in the United States were exploring wine, religion, non-Anglo identity and culture (Williams & Straus 1950; Lolli et al. 1959). This reflected the migrant origins of the researchers, specifically Jewish influence on American wine consumption and Italian influence in creating the modern wine industry of California, particularly in the Napa Valley. As the role of wine in US society became normative, this change required sociological research (Mizruchi & Perrucci 1962). Questions about class became a critical research frame during the social revolutions of the 1960s, as exemplified by E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), and the opportunity such thinking presented researchers to identify class as a structural force influencing social power relationships. As revisionist scholarship arising from a few key texts gave rise in the 1980s to new scholarly arguments, the class status of wine producers emerged in historical sociological studies of class formation in France (Aminzade & Hodson 1982). The environmental movements of the 1970s spurred a focus towards ecological studies of the Californian wine industry (Delacroix et al. 1989).

Among sociologists the negative effects of overconsumption of alcohol, including wine, remain a key focus, but studies of the nuances of wine consumption as 'civilised' and 'responsible' have blossomed alongside research on non-harm related studies of food. These include studies of organic wine production and a so-called return to 'natural' winemaking, as discussed in Box 12.3 (Black 2013; Cohen 2013).

BOX 12.3 THE NATURAL WINE MOVEMENT AND ALTERITY: CONTESTING CORPORATISED WINE

The natural wine movement is an umbrella term that has been used to describe a trend among boutique producers towards artisanal wines, with claimed unique styles, using so-called 'natural' methods. The natural wine movement has been influenced by sustainable, organic and biodynamic movements, but is equally a reaction against the standardisation and 'sameness' of mass-produced and industrialised wine.

The term 'natural' has always been a slippery and contested word. In terms of the natural wine movement, 'natural' is generally taken to mean wine produced without chemicals (such as sulphur or acidifiers) or other additives such as sugars, filtration and, in some cases, mechanisation. Natural wine-makers focus on human craftsmanship, distinctive grape varieties, and indigenous yeasts to ferment and produce their wines. As Rachel Black (2013, p. 288) states: 'The return to and valorization of indigenous grape varieties has become a hallmark of the natural wine movement, imbuing a greater sense of place through tradition. These wines go against the industrial grain and express the unique character of the winemaker and the place.' Natural winemakers appeal to a romanticised notion of artistry, authenticity and place, and echo past counter-cultures through an appeal to alterity.

Sources: Black (2013), Cohen (2013)

Cross-disciplinary studies include the argument by Diaz-Bone and Hahn (2007) that social practices are inherent to wine consumption experiences. Sociologists Michael Allen and John Germov (2011) confirmed the legitimacy of the Australian capital city wine show system to confer symbolic value on wines. They found while the wines entered were most often from larger companies, judging standards were moderately uniform with the least disagreement about the highest awarded wines. The **cultural consecration** of the highest awarded wines in the show system were subsequently marketed at the highest prices (Allen & Germov 2011). Ian Woodward and David Ellison (2012) conducted a cultural sociological analysis of how Penfold's Grange became symbolic of ultimate Australian wine quality, despite defying the emerging global wine discourse of *terroir* and single vineyard wines, and in the ownership of a multinational company. They attribute Grange's iconic status as the result of a company-driven narrative of covert and maverick innovation, association with lifestyles of the rich and famous, and a 'technology of caring' where the cellaring of the high-priced wine received support from the company through quality check 'clinics' (Woodward & Ellison 2012, p. 166). The historical capital of highly priced fine wine, like Grange, has resulted in a global investment market in wine and, as Box 12.4 shows, an equally vigorous trade in fraudulent wine.

BOX 12.4 WINE FRAUD: 'OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLES'

Wine fraud has a long history, although many people would be surprised to know that it remains an extensive problem. While adulteration of wine was not uncommon in past centuries—in the form of blending good quality wine with wine of lesser quality, or using additives to dilute wine or effect its taste (with many additives proving to be poisonous in high doses)—contemporary wine fraud generally consists of 'mislabelling' or rebottling cheap wine using fake labels to fraudulently represent it as premium quality high-priced wine. The most serious case of modern wine fraud occurred in Italy in 1986, where a number of producers had adulterated their wine by using wood alcohol (methanol), which resulted in a number of deaths. In 2012, a Chinese operation in Shanghai was uncovered with over 400 cases of fake premium French wine (Chateau Margaux and Lafite), valued at around US\$1.5 million. In 2013, Rudy Kurniawan was sentenced to 10 years jail in New York for operating a US\$20 million scam selling counterfeit vintage wine—mostly fake-labelled wines from Bordeaux and Burgundy. In 2014, Italian fraudsters were arrested for using fake labels on Italian table wine to represent it as premium Brunello di Montalcino, with an estimated value of over US\$6 million. The lure of 'easy money' in an industry where iconic wines attract an economic and symbolic premium, means that the adage 'old wine in new bottles' continues to have currency to this day.

Sources: Lawrence (2015); Holmberg (2010)

In discussing wine history and sociology, a distinction has to be made. Where sociological research is generally understood as academic research, there is a great deal of slippage about what constitutes wine history within and beyond the academy. Histories of wine for industry and consumers are not the same as academic historical scholarship, in which wine production, distribution or consumption—and the interplay or ‘complex’ of the three—feature as subjects of inquiry (McIntyre & Germov 2013). Much has been written on what might be problematically termed ‘the history of wine’ and its importance to traditional European wine societies and culture. This has been penned principally as literature for the pleasure of members of the wine industry and wine drinkers, rather than by academic researchers. Such literature has an important place in wine culture, but is not usually what academic historians recognise as research. Of the wine history research conducted by academics, traditional wine-producing countries have a greater degree of sophistication in historical scholarship about wine than other nations because of the deeper layers of meaning of production to national identity and economic development in those countries.

The history of wine drinking

Wine was made and enjoyed in ancient times, and Box 12.5 outlines the key developments in this history. In the modern era, expression of a prized cultural connection between wines in the classical era and the wines of modern Europe occurred in Britain, the major market for premium European wines. The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 ushered in an era of peace between European or Old World powers. This enabled Britain to focus on empire-building in new territories, several of which have become part of the New World of wine. In this era, Enlightenment thinking coalesced into strong conceptions of progress and improvement that could be realised in an era of economic prosperity to create comparatively greater leisure time and optimism for the educated middle classes of the United States, Britain and the British colonies. For this audience, Scottish medical doctor Alexander Henderson’s *The History of Ancient and Modern Wines* (1824) described the pleasure to be gained from knowledge of the provenance of wine. According to Henderson:

The invention of wine, like the origin of many other important arts, is enveloped in the obscurity of the earliest ages: but, in the history of ancient nations, it has generally been ascribed to those heroes who contributed most to civilise their respective countries, and to whom divine honours were often rendered, in return for the benefits which they had conferred upon mankind. (1824, p. 1)

So began the era of the evocation of civility, heroism and divinity ‘conferred upon mankind’ by the existence of wine, chiefly what is referred to as ‘fine wine’. This association of vineyards and grape wine with refinement, nobility and a relative civility and sobriety compared with other forms of alcoholic drinks remains persuasive in Western thinking (McIntyre 2011a; Bamforth 2008). When Henderson wrote of the invention of wine, he meant its genesis, not its emergence as an identity-based cultural construct, which is how it has come to be understood in the past two decades by scholars (Guy 2003; Demossier 2010).

BOX 12.5 HISTORY OF WINE TIMELINE

People were drinking and using wine for hydration, nutrition, medicinal and exchange purposes centuries before the common era (BCE). Within the Christian and Jewish faiths, wine has an enduring history in religious ceremonies and celebratory occasions to the present day.

BCE

Pre-10,000
8000

Earliest ‘wine’ made from berries and honey
Evidence of wine found in Northern China and Georgia

5400–1800	Evidence of wine in Iran, Egypt, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Sumeria, Israel and Greece Oldest known winery found in Armenia in about 4100 BCE
1700	In Greece, winemaking, drinking, and use in religious rituals and medicine is integral to daily life
1100	Vineyards first planted around Cadiz (now Spain)
600	Greeks established what is today Marseille, and taught the French how to prune grape vines to improve yield
500–100	By now, wine is cultivated throughout the Greco-Roman world and consumed daily by the wider population. The Greek god of wine, Dionysus (also known by the Roman name Bacchus), was widely worshipped, indicating the importance of wine to Greco-Roman society.
CE	
1st century	Rise of Christianity links rituals and ceremonies with wine to the present day
2nd century	Viticulture (grape growing) and Christianity spread together throughout Western Europe
Middle Ages	Monasteries maintain viticulture, experimenting and improving wine making
15th century	England dominates the wine trade assisted by the <i>Navigation Act</i> (1490)
16th century	Invention of the wine bottle in England provides the means to store and age wine
17th century	Introduction of sparkling wine and fortification of wine begins Use of sulphur to sanitise wine barrels and the late harvesting of grapes
18th century	Britain (England; UK) trade deal favours wines from Portugal over France First grape plantings in Australia
19th century	New era of prosperity for British middle classes after 1815. Addition of sugar to wine to increase alcohol content. Classification of Bordeaux wines in France (1855). Spread of <i>Phylloxera</i> almost destroys Europe's vineyards. First wave of wine globalisation due to drop in supply from Europe. Emergence of Australian export market to the UK. Advances in scientific knowledge about vine growing and wine manufacture. Increasing industrialisation of wine production. New social health norms lead British to favour lighter wines
20th century	France formalises <i>appellation d'origine controllee</i> (AOC) to regulate wine authenticity and quality 'Judgment of Paris' (1976). Australia and USA develop stronger domestic wine production and markets. Australia's Penfold's Grange is recognised among the best in the world. Marketing of the alleged health benefits of red wine emerges. Increased sales of Australian wine to the UK signals new global era
21st century	China becomes the world's largest consumer of red wine. Spain has world's largest vineyard plantings by area

Source: Adapted from Hanson (2015)

From the Old World to the New: Globalisation and the wine complex

In *Creating Wine: The Emergence of a World Industry, 1840–1914* (2011), economic historian James Simpson shows how the world of wine came to be modernised during the first wave of wine globalisation in the late nineteenth century; how new technologies resulted in greater production and greater scope for distribution, even as wine producers in the European Old World faced their most serious biological challenges from vine pests and diseases inadvertently imported from the

New World of the Americas. Simpson traces the growth of new forms of wine business, especially the relationship between wine producers and distribution in New World wine countries, such as the United States and Australia, in contrast to traditional European separation of production and merchandising of wine.

Australia had grape plants on the First Fleet, with elite visions for a wine industry. Julie McIntyre's *First Vintage: Wine in Colonial New South Wales* (2012) argues that elite colonists in Australia's first British colony drew on established patterns of colonisation and experiments with wine-growing to 'civilise' a colonial milieu that began as a British Government penal settlement. She uses a socially inclusive approach to trace the ideological foundations and historical precedents for wine-growing in early Australia. Charles Ludington's *The Politics of Wine in Britain: A New Cultural History* (2013) argues for the centrality of wine to English and Scottish politics and commerce in the early modern period. Wine both created and reflected political power; it contributed to British elite identity; and it signified degrees of masculinity as well as social class. American environmental historian Erica Hannickel's *Empire of Vines: Wine Culture in America* (2013) interrogates the mythologies of agriculture and wine-growing deployed by aspirational elites in the United States in the development of the nineteenth-century wine industry.

From the early twentieth century to the post-war era, little changed in wine culture worldwide. Significant change began in the 1970s. An influential event in the history of wine is the 1976 'Judgement of Paris', where a British wine merchant brokered a blind tasting of classic French wines alongside Californian wines he had selected on a trip to the United States. The French judges were shocked to discover they rated the American wines as superior. This event is central to Californian wine lore, and is the subject of a major film called *Bottle Shock* (Miller 2008). The Judgement of Paris occurred as the new wine-producing nations—the United States and Australia—began to develop social practices of popular rather than elite wine drinking. The 1976 event was largely symbolic, but foreshadowed disruptions to the wider context of wine production, distribution and consumption that occurred at the turn of the twenty-first century because of globalisation.

At the same time, traditional beer-drinking nations such as Australia began to turn to wine. This democratisation of a formerly elite drink led to greater quantities of domestic wine production. The successful marketing of 'sunshine in a bottle' Australian wine-styles to the lucrative and democratising UK and US wine markets marked the beginning of a second wave of wine globalisation in the 1990s (see Box 12.6). The entry of Australia and other so-called New World wine producers, such as the United States, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina and South Africa, into traditional Old World markets resulted in lower costs of doing business, which is viewed positively by economists (Anderson 2004). This internationalisation of wine saw transnational flows of skills and labour, and the emergence of multinational wine companies. For Old World wine-producing nations, distributors, commentators and consumers interested in traditional, localised identities in wine, globalisation is viewed negatively (Anderson 2004). Either way, wine globalisation has given rise to new social norms and behaviours. It has led to a championing of localism and established the new institution of wine tourism in new locales, while continuing to reflect historic notions of wine as a drink of the 'best' people (Howland 2013).

BOX 12.6 AUSTRALIAN WINE INDUSTRY: KEY FACTS

In 2014–15, the Australian wine industry was estimated to contribute \$1.6 billion to the economy, and a further \$50 billion in value-added economic activity from supporting industries, such as \$8 billion from tourism.

- 40.5 per cent of vineyards were established from 1990 onwards.
- More than 16,000 people are employed in Australian wine production, in addition to around 7500 people employed in grape growing.

- Wine is Australia’s fifth-largest agricultural export.
- There are more than 65 distinct wine-producing regions in Australia; they are in all Australian states and territories bar the Northern Territory (which ceased wine production in 2007); see Figure 12.1.
- South Australia (46 per cent), New South Wales/ACT (31 per cent) and Victoria (20 per cent) account for 97 per cent of wine production.
- The Riverland in South Australia is Australia’s largest wine-producing district. Together with the Riverina in New South Wales and the Murray Valley in Victoria, they make up 60 per cent of Australia’s total wine grape production.
- The Australian wine industry tripled in size 1991–2007.
- Australia is the world’s fourth-largest exporter of wine (Wine Australia 2013).

Source: Adapted from Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport (2016)

FIGURE 12.1 Wine regions of Australia



Wine Australia

Source: Reproduced with permission of Wine Australia www.wineaustralia.com.

New Zealand geographer John Overton has researched the effects of wine globalisation on the relationship between identity and place. His work ranges broadly, including study of the transformation of worthless land in New Zealand into valued wine-growing country (Overton & Heitger 2008); the definition and reconstruction of wine-growing country in Chile (Overton & Murray 2011); and recently, interdisciplinary research that draws on sociological concepts of class and social capital (2013). This latter study addresses the unique relationship that exists between class and capital in the **neoliberalised** global wine industry.

Just as Western wine producers are aggressively targeting the Chinese market, the Chinese fascination for consumption of premium European wines has seen Chinese investment in premium wine production in traditional regions such as Bordeaux in France and the Hunter Valley in Australia. This also represents a subversion of traditional cultural landscapes. Similarly, many wine companies are multinational. A global expansion and concomitant cultural fragmentation of traditional geographical wine production spaces, traditional nationalities of consumption, traditional patterns of national consumption, and the ever-present adaptability of wine traders—whether they be the merchants or *negociants* of the Old World or the vertically-integrated wine companies of the New World—has broadened the human impact of wine worlds and wine ways. In the process, the fracturing of traditional cultures and identities, and the constitution of new cultures, requires attention within the humanities and social sciences. Changes in wine production, trade and consumption practices and contestations of culture and identity can reveal the formation of power structures in the shifting kaleidoscope of human civilisations.

Class and wine consumption

As mentioned earlier, an Eliasian approach seeks to uncover the complex webs of interdependent social and cultural historical processes that transform people's conduct, avoiding the dualistic thinking in structure/**agency** debates (Mennell 2007). In studying social change across time, this *processual* approach links social structures with people's **habitus** (deeply ingrained dispositions, feelings and behaviours)—an interdependence of structure and agency that Elias termed **figurations** (social patterns of human relationships) (Mennell 1992).

For Elias, Western societies exhibited a long-term trend of **civilising processes**—a patterned shift from external social control of people's behaviour towards internal self-restraint. Social codes of self-regulated behaviour that arise in a particular era reflect the outcome of ongoing and dynamic civilising processes; they have no predetermined or universal end-state. For example, in the 1800s wine was often promoted as a 'civilising drink', and in the context of temperance movements, its consumption was imbued with notions of self-restraint, in contrast to the consumption of spirits and beer (McIntyre 2011a; Charters 2006). Cas Wouters (2011) extended Elias's work through his study of **informalisation** processes, showing that the rise of more permissive modes of behaviour since the 1800s to the present day remain underpinned by exacting standards of self-restraint. In the case of wine drinking, increased consumption has been matched by increasingly complex tenets of wine appreciation and aesthetics.

Elias (1939/2000) examined published works on manners between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries and evidence of daily life portrayed in artworks to trace the evolution in meaning of deceptively mundane dining habits. He found that the ruling classes of western European nations formalised their right to rule through frequently overlooked everyday practices that powerfully connoted superior social status. For example, over time the use of cutlery and napery came to signify refinement, whereas eating with hands or spitting indiscriminately was

distasteful and shameful. Civilised drinking forms advanced from not touching one's lips to the rim of a communal glass or dipping food into drinks to avoiding slobbering into one's own glass, to not drinking with a mouthful of food. The origin of such manners occurred over such a long period of time that they seemed to be a natural part of human biology but were in fact socially constructed and reinforced through cultural consecration.

While Elias does not separate wine from other forms of alcoholic drinks, folkloric distinctions existed in the early modern age between access to alcohol styles and national character. The peasant populations of southern European wine countries had a reputation, although not strictly true, for being more restrained in their drinking practices (Martin 1999). This led to theories that drinking wine improved the behaviour of the drinker compared with drinking beer, spirits or cider. In colonial Australia, there were consecutive policies of substitution to encourage a shift from spirits or beer to wine from the early to mid-nineteenth century (McIntyre 2011a). In periods of economic prosperity, the burgeoning urban middle classes associated wine with refined enjoyment (Fitzgerald & Jordan 2009).

Social and policy conditions in Australia up to the mid-twentieth century saw the development of a hedonistic masculine culture of beer drinking known as the 'six o'clock swill'—where working men engaged in binge drinking in city pubs in the short period of time between the end of their work day and the 6 o'clock closing time of hotels. Policies to 'civilise' drinking practices through later closing and other means were introduced from the mid-1950s. At this time, the spectre of national drinking reputations had its modern expression when organisers of the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games feared that Australia would seem uncivilised on the world stage as a culture that did not encourage drinking wine with food in restaurants, as occurred in Europe's more 'adult cities' (Luckins 2007, p. 87).

The following half-century saw dramatic changes in class structures and the creation of new reflexive identities based on consumption, in which wine-drinking practices have come to variously symbolise new elitism (Howland 2013). Social practices associated with wine as an alcoholic drink are not, however, universally 'civilised', as discussed in Chapter 13. Moreover, while new wine culture contains elements of civility it has a distinctive new emphasis on place and production characteristics. As Harvey and colleagues (2014, p. 2) found, in contrast with 'milk, flour, fruit or vegetables, consumers seek information about where, when and how wine was made... Wine is distinct in having an identity—a combination of brand, heritage and terroir'.

Recently, New Zealand anthropologist Peter Howland used wine tourism in the Martinborough region to undertake a Bourdieusian study of how the democratisation of fine wine has enabled middle-class self-expression as well as industry profit. This showed that 'appreciative consumption of good wine [...] was a signifier of middle class distinction and status' (2013, p. 326).

Conclusion

New transnational flows of knowledge, investment, cultural habits and expressions of identity centred on wine production, trade or consumption is a 'wine moment' that encapsulates distinctive elements of global human society in the early twenty-first century. A paradox of drinking alcohol is that while it loosens restraint, and its overconsumption may endanger social order through public and domestic violence, it also plays a key role in binding social ties. Drinking alcohol, particularly wine, in social settings formulates and gives definition to individual identities. For this reason, drinking patterns and behaviours are an important portal to understanding people's agency within changing historical structures and mores, such as class distinctions. Through the

wine complex, this drink has accrued meaning beyond interpersonal social relations. Producers, distributors and consumers are engaged in a field constitutive of identity in the same way as cultures of art, music or sport. Wine is a cultural form with social meaning distinct from other forms of alcohol. The wine complex, how it has shaped and been shaped through time, and the role it plays in cultural production and the creation of symbolic value and regional identity, are fertile and novel areas for historical sociological investigation.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Lauren Williams for her reorganisation of the chapter content.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- Wine is historically an elite drink in non-wine producing countries.
- Wine democratisation in the New World is the result of social change and has led to new norms and behaviours.
- Wine globalisation means that traditional Old World markets have been invaded by New World producers.
- Old World producers have responded to globalisation by emphasising tradition as a marker of wine quality amid a worldwide proliferation of wine styles.
- The changing taste for wine across the globe makes it a significant subject of study, using the 'wine complex' as a dynamic interplay between producers, distributors and consumers.
- Drawing on an Eliasian approach, an historical sociological framework is useful to understanding the changing global, national and regional patterns of wine production, distribution and consumption.
- The future of wine may be determined in Asia's newest regions of wine production and consumption.

Sociological reflection

- Reflect on the influences on your drinking habits, including the locations and social occasions in which you consume alcohol.
- Why do you drink wine or not?
- What influences your choice of wine or the choices of others?
- Is wine drinking a more 'civilised' activity compared to other forms of drinking? Why/why not?

Discussion questions

- 1 How can wine production shape individual, regional and national identity?
- 2 What are some of the social influences that have led to the increased consumption of wine across the globe, and particularly in your own country?
- 3 How is wine symbolically represented in your society? Why do certain wines carry status and convey distinction?
- 4 In what ways does class impact the wine complex?
- 5 How did immigration affect the spread of wine production and consumption cultures?
- 6 How did wine producers foster a *cultural* taste for wine?
- 7 In what ways are wines culturally consecrated?

Further investigation

- 1 Examine the social influences on, and social implications of, the democratisation of wine drinking.
- 2 Compare the effects of wine globalisation in national and regional contexts.
- 3 Consider the gendered aspects of wine production, promotion and consumption.
- 4 Examine how digital technologies influence wine promotion, sites of consumption and drinking identities.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

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Websites

- American Association of Wine Economists: www.wine-economics.org/
- Australian Wine Research Institute: www.awri.com.au/
- History of Wine Timeline: Beginnings to Present: www.alcoholproblemsandsolutions.org/history-of-wine-timeline-beginnings-present/
- Wine Economics Research Centre: www.adelaide.edu.au/wine-econ/
- Wine Studies Research Network: www.newcastle.edu.au/research-and-innovation/centre/education-arts/wine-research/about-us

Films and documentaries

- Blood into Wine* (2010): Ostensibly a defence of American hard rock star Maynard Keenan's decision to seed the Arizona wine industry, this is a reflection on what motivates, irks and rewards those who plant vines and make wine. Directed by Ryan Page and Christopher Pomeranke. 100 minutes.
- Bottle Shock* (2008): A comedy-drama directed by Randall Miller that explores the 1976 Judgement of Paris in which Californian wines bested French wines. 110 minutes.
- Chateau Chunder* (2012): A documentary on the rise of the Australian wine story from pariah to 'sunshine in a bottle', mainly in the UK market. 57 minutes.
- Mondovino* (2004): Jonathon Nossiter's documentary of the tensions between New World and Old World wine producers and ideas of authentic wine production. Has become the benchmark for wine documentaries. 135 minutes.
- Red Obsession* (2013): This documentary, directed by David Roach and Warwick Ross, charts China's early 21st-century Westernisation through the frenzy over Bordeaux *premier cru* as the ultimate luxury item for the *nouveau riche*. It shows how profoundly wine can signify, as well as celebrate, historical change. 75 minutes.
- Sideways* (2004): A comedy-drama directed by Alexander Payne about two men on a road trip through California wine country as they explore the philosophy of wine and life. 126 minutes.
- Somm* (2012): A documentary directed by Jason Wise that follows four candidates attempting to pass the USA's master sommelier exam, considered the leading qualification of wine knowledge, and possessed by only a couple of hundred people. 94 minutes.

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CHAPTER 13

THE SOCIAL APPETITE FOR ALCOHOL: WHY WE DRINK THE WAY WE DO

Julie Hepworth, Lauren Williams and John Germov

OVERVIEW

- › What role does alcohol play in Western society?
- › How is alcohol drinking related to health?
- › What relationship do young people have with alcohol?

Unlike food, alcohol is not essential to life, so the way in which we choose to consume or not consume it says something about how we see ourselves and how we want to be seen by others. The study of alcohol therefore provides a frame through which to view the values and practices of a society. Australian life has been strongly linked with alcohol from colonial times, and it has formed an important part of our national identity. The relationship between alcohol and health is complex, but there are some clear health impacts of alcohol drinking. The state provides advice on limiting the amount of alcohol consumed by individuals in an

attempt to minimise the potential adverse impacts of drinking, and to some extent regulates the social settings in which people can drink. The impact of history, culture and structure on alcohol drinking are considered in this chapter, with a special examination of the drinking practices of young people, to attempt to answer the question: 'Why do we drink the way we do?'

KEY TERMS

class
discourse
domestic violence
gender
harm minimisation
healthism
masculinity
moral panic
neoliberalism
risk

Introduction

Drinking alcohol as a social activity is steeped in practices created through historical traditions, religious rituals, different cultures, sub-cultures and everyday celebrations. These practices take place in social spaces; from special occasions such as weddings and work-related events to celebrate staff achievements, to everyday situations where drinking alcohol socially is often an integral part of social life in many (although not all) societies. At first glance, drinking alcohol in the ways that we do—to celebrate, to enjoy with food, or to ‘party’ and get ‘tipsy’ or drunk—may not seem to be that different from earlier decades or even earlier centuries; it is *just what we do*. However, when we take a closer look at drinking alcohol more recently—in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—it has become infused with a set of increasingly dominant **discourses** of ‘health’, ‘harmful drinking’, ‘increased consumption’, ‘social anxiety’ and ‘alcohol-related violence’.

Together with these discourses, the emerging negativity around ‘excessive drinking’ has been reinforced for the past decade or more through the media’s focus on one population—young adults. Images of intoxicated young women lying on pavements outside clubs in the early hours of the morning and young men in alcohol-fuelled public brawls have led to an increasing **moral panic** that large numbers of young adults are ‘out of control’. Importantly, there is a growing recognition of the extent to which alcohol-related violence, largely carried out by men, is a serious and significant problem evidenced by the rates of **domestic violence** and physical assaults, including the recently named ‘coward’s punch’ (or ‘king hit’). Amid the emerging landscape of drinking alcohol in Australia there is little doubt that together with its pleasures, some of the uses and effects of alcohol are being increasingly challenged to address a perceived culture of ‘big drinkers’.

In this chapter we critically discuss several of these discourses in order to explicate why we drink the way we do. Given that the topic of drinking alcohol is so vast, we focus on three major areas and in the broader context of Western societies, particularly Australia. First, we provide a brief introduction to historical, cultural and religious influences on drinking alcohol. Second, the ways in which drinking alcohol has become subsumed within a conceptualisation of ‘health as an individual imperative’ is critically examined. Third, we draw on a case example of alcohol drinking among young adults to explicate the social dynamics and interrelationships that create the social conditions for specific drinking practices. Underpinning all three areas is the recognition that drinking alcohol is intrinsically a *social practice*.

Historical, cultural and religious influences on drinking alcohol

Intertwined with political and economic forces, drinking alcohol during various historical periods is also a representation of culture, religion, **class**, **gender** and race. Globally, some of the earliest signs of alcohol use date back over 9000 years, and possibly earlier, with wine and beer made from rice in northern China (Philips 2014). Grape wine first occurred around 7000 years ago from the region known as Anatolia (now Iran) and anywhere that wheat grain was able to be cultivated; the excess grain could be fermented to produce beer (Chrzan 2013). Prior to the invention of distilling alcohol, early forms of beer and wine were

likely to be low in alcohol and could not be stored for long. While drinkers may have been able to get tipsy, alcohol was a source of sustenance and nutrition, effectively consumed as a food that provided energy (Chrzan 2013).

Public drinking venues that served alcohol, such as taverns and pubs (public houses), became the primary social meeting place outside of church. Evidence dating back to Roman Britain demonstrates, via the letters written by soldiers, that among their diets were 'vintage wine', 'Celtic beer', and 'ordinary wine' (Renfrew 1997). Similarly, through the excavation of amphorae—pottery vessels—wine was clearly a staple alcoholic beverage during the early first millennium AD (Cool 2006). Alehouses were well established in medieval Britain, many of which were operated by women (alewives) who produced their own beer to earn a modest income to support their family (Chrzan 2013). A common argument has been promulgated that alcoholic beverages, particularly beer, were consumed on a daily basis because of the lack of clean drinking water. However, Chevallier (2013) in 'The Great Medieval Water Myth' strongly contested the notion that people drank beer for this reason, maintaining that clean water was actually plentiful via rivers and streams and it was the nutrients in beer and wine that attracted such drinking practices, especially among the poor. While it is likely that drinking large amounts of alcohol during medieval times was commonplace, Philips (2014) also argues that it was not because of the lack of clean water.

Most commonly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in many Western countries, distilled spirits (rum, gin and whisky) that were high in alcohol content and relatively cheap, became widely available to the public. The so-called 'gin craze' in Britain led to major public drunkenness and violence, resulting in the need for legislation to curb its availability (Chrzan 2013). In eighteenth-century Australia, cheap spirits—namely rum—not only formed the basis of 'drunkenness' and a growing trade in New South Wales that proved impossible to prevent or regulate, but simultaneously undermined the attempts of the British to establish and maintain a colony designed to reform convicts (Allen 2012; Lewis 1992). While moral tales about public drunkenness and excessive alcohol consumption can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks, it was not until the public had easy access to distilled spirits that notions about alcohol being cheerful, pleasurable and even medicinal began to change to a focus on its harmful effects. Temperance and prohibition movements cast alcohol as a sin and promoted other widely available options instead—coffee, tea and soft drinks (Chrzan 2013).

In America, spirits, particularly whiskey, were also plentiful. Drinking alcohol as an everyday practice and 'topping' were commonplace in the United States in the 1800s, as Michael Pollan (2006) writes in his book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, and gave rise to:

public drunkenness, violence, and family abandonment, and a spike in alcohol-related diseases ... inaugurating an American quarrel over drinking that would culminate a century later in Prohibition. (p. 101)

Prohibition in the United States, which took effect in 1920 and was ultimately repealed in 1933, proved a complete failure. Rather than promote abstinence, it fuelled organised crime and violence, and resulted in an underground alcohol economy of illegal producers selling 'moonshine' and illegal bars known as 'speakeasies'. While Prohibition had proven unenforceable, the remnants of this ideology can be seen in ongoing debates about alcohol in the United States, where the legal drinking age remains 21 (Chrzan 2013). The crucial argument made by Pollan (2006) is that it was the surfeit of corn that caused a huge production of corn whiskey and, drawing a parallel with the over-consumption of food in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Western countries, this cheap and plentiful supply of alcohol allowed humans to drink in large quantities (see Box 13.1).

BOX 13.1 AUSTRALIAN TEMPERANCE

While a prohibition movement never gained traction in Australia, the temperance movement had an impact by restricting the number of venues and hours of operation during which alcohol could be sold. As in the United States, this proved counter-productive. Australian pubs were licensed to operate only until 6 pm as an austerity measure during the first world war and in an attempt to curb drunkenness and instigate moderate temperance, yet it had the opposite effect. A 6 pm closing time led to the widespread practice known as the 'six o'clock swill', where working men would rush to the pub after work and consume as much beer as possible before the 6 pm closing time. After pubs closed, people continued to drink in the privacy of their own homes. In widespread recognition of this policy failure, by the late 1960s licensing laws were increasingly liberalised to extend pub opening hours until 10 pm. It took somewhat longer for women to gain equal drinking rights, as they continued to be excluded from drinking in pubs. While they could own and work in bars, they were restricted to drinking in the women-only Ladies Lounge, reflecting a sexist paternalism to 'protect' them from drunken men and the 'evils' of excessive drinking (Kirkby 2006).

In most countries, however, wine has become the common alcoholic beverage and its rise in popularity and availability is constituted by a complex and sophisticated set of economic, cultural and social practices, including the science of viticulture, the development and commercialisation of world-famous vineyards, wine tourism, cellaring and glassware. The pinnacle of all this work is encapsulated by 'wine competitions' or 'wine shows'. Allen and Germov (2011) argue that the cultural and social practices around the Australian Wine Show involve huge symbolic value in the awarding of bronze, silver and gold medals for premium wines, and they have enabled the Australian wine industry to evolve and prosper. (See Chapter 12 for a discussion of the historical sociology of wine.)

In further explaining the cultural significance of the 'wine show system', Allen and Germov (2011) draw on Bourdieu's (1984) treatise on 'taste' which, they state, 'situates taste at the centre of a comprehensive theory of the relationship between social inequality and cultural practices' (p. 35). Therefore, it is precisely through these cultural and social practices about the tasting and selection of wine that discourses continue to be produced and reproduced reflecting not only wine-related knowledge *per se* but, more importantly, the various levels of social position and education required to possess such knowledge.

Drinking alcohol and 'the imperative of health'

A large body of scientific evidence shows that drinking alcohol is associated with significant long- and short-term health consequences, including increased mortality rates, chronic disease, accidents and injury (World Health Organization (WHO) 2014; NHMRC 2009). The WHO (2014), in its most recent *Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health*, documented the high mortality and morbidity cost of alcohol worldwide. Alcohol is considered to contribute, in part, to more than 200 diseases and injury conditions worldwide, resulting in an estimated 3.3 million deaths (WHO 2014). In 2012, more than one in twenty (5.9 per cent) of all deaths were directly attributable to alcohol, with the proportion higher in men (7.9 per cent) than in women (4.0 per cent) (WHO 2014). These deaths are most commonly from cardiovascular disease, injury, gastrointestinal disease (liver

cirrhosis) and cancers. Alcohol also significantly contributes to morbidity (illness), with 5.1 per cent of the burden of disease and injury worldwide directly attributable to alcohol (WHO 2014).

In Australia, the main causes of alcohol-related deaths are road trauma, cancer and alcoholic liver cirrhosis (NHMRC 2009). Alcohol accounts for 3.3 per cent of the total burden of disease and injury, which is higher in males (4.9 per cent) than in females (1.6 per cent) (NHMRC 2009). Long-term drinking is associated with alcohol dependence, long-term cognitive impairment and self-harm (NHMRC 2009; WHO 2014). There are especially significant health consequences of drinking alcohol for some groups, such as adolescents—drinking alcohol before age 15 affects brain development and increases alcohol problems later in life—and the developing foetus, where high levels of maternal drinking can cause foetal alcohol syndrome—the most direct case of one person being affected by the drinking of another (WHO 2014).

Alcohol control is inadequate in most countries (Casswell & Thamarangsi 2009), and heavy drinking and alcohol-related harm are associated with lower socioeconomic status and marginalisation (Gray & Siggers 2005; Romelsjö et al. 2004). Also, because drinking alcohol is the major leisure activity in many countries, drinking to excess frequently results in violence in and around bars, clubs and pubs (Graham & Homel 2008), and gendered alcohol-related violence (Lindsay 2012).

Drinking alcohol in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries is particularly located within a broader political, economic and cultural climate of health. Having become a highly individualised phenomenon, health is regularly argued by government bodies to require improved 'self-management'. Health (or illness and disease) is also managed within a health-care system that is based on treating individuals, and which is organised to meet medical rather than patient needs (Baum 2014; Schofield & Donnelly 2015). In addition, public health interventions designed by governments at state and national levels increasingly expect 'improved health outcomes' to meet tighter fiscal measures in the face of mounting chronic conditions and an ageing population. Although wary not to add to the immense pile of critical literature about public health and citing **neoliberalism** as the problem (see Bell & Green 2016), the rise of neoliberal health discourse clearly comprises notions of 'individual responsibility' and fiscal 'austerity'. Moreover, the explanations of poor health and proposed solutions in neoliberal health discourse are especially lacking in community-based and social inequalities perspectives.

Interrelated to and within the ways the neoliberal health discourse operates socially is the promotion of self-surveillance of health. The emergence of health conscious movements and **healthism** (Crawford 1980) elevated 'health as a super value' (Crawford 1980, p. 365). Although the concept was identified several decades ago, it continues in various forms today. As Cheek (2008, p. 974) writes:

Outworkings of 21st century healthism take various guises and forms but are underpinned by new understandings of old problems, such as how to avoid death, how to view and respond to risk, and how to remain in an ever vigilant-state—a new and transformed version of a 'what if' approach to health rather than a 'what is'.

These popular cultural and social forces, together with formalised public health campaigns, imbue everyday lives with what Lupton (1995) termed 'the imperative of health'; whereby public health intervenes in private lives in ways that engender practices of the self to meet health targets and outcomes. Not least among such improved health outcomes are behaviours linked to smoking, excessive drinking and unhealthy eating. In their criticism of public health for not also engaging with notions of human pleasure around these topics, Coveney and Bunton (2003, p. 166) write:

Smoking, excessive drinking and eating unhealthy foods are all sources of pleasure, which are considered to damage health. Pleasure is considered as a prime force creating the 'root of resistance' whereby individuals flout the norms which public health attempts to impose.

Coveney and Bunton (2003) go on to say: 'The self-policing, or self-management, of health involves the fashioning and rationing of pleasure in ways that are highly socially situated' (p. 167).

Within such contemporary health discourse sits the *National Health and Medical Research Council Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* (2009) (see Box 13.2), which broadly reflect a **harm minimisation** approach. Importantly, these guidelines state there is no 'safe' level of alcohol consumption and focus on reducing 'risks over a lifetime'—no more than two standard drinks per day—and on 'occasions' of drinking—no more than four standard drinks. If we contrast these numbers and frequency—two and four drinks respectively—with the everyday social drinking practices of Australians, we can identify that many exceed these recommendations.

BOX 13.2 NHMRC GUIDELINES TO REDUCE HEALTH RISKS FROM DRINKING ALCOHOL (2009)

The National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines (2009) address the long- and short-term consequences of alcohol-related harm and consider the effect on individuals, families, bystanders and the broader community. There are four guidelines related to alcohol, and these universal guidelines relate to adults aged 18 years and over (Guideline 1 and Guideline 2), children and young people (Guideline 3), and pregnant and breastfeeding women (Guideline 4).

Guideline 1: Reducing the risk of alcohol-related harm over a lifetime

This guideline promotes drinking ≤ 2 standard drinks per day, drinking less on a single occasion, and drinking less frequently, to reduce the lifetime risk of alcohol-related harm. Consumption of ≤ 2 standard drinks per day is associated with a lifetime risk of less than one in 100, which increases with every drink above this level. Lifetime risk increases more quickly for women than men, and alcohol-related injury develops more quickly for men.

Guideline 2: Reducing the risk of injury on a single occasion of drinking

Higher consumption of alcohol is associated with risky behaviour, reduced skills and inhibitions, and concurrent risk of injury during or immediately after the occasion. Therefore, this guideline recommends reducing injury by limiting standard drinks consumed on a single occasion.

Guideline 3: Children and young people under 18 years of age

Alcohol consumption in children aged under 15 years has been associated with high rates of risky behaviour, negative consequences on brain development, and subsequent consequences later in life. Therefore, it is recommended that for children and young people under 18, no alcohol be consumed. It is recommended to avoid initiation of drinking for as long as possible for adolescents aged 15–17 years, and to avoid completely for those aged under 15 years.

Guideline 4: Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Alcohol is potentially harmful to the foetus and young babies. It has been associated with neurodevelopment abnormalities, prematurity, miscarriage, stillbirth and low birth weight. Further, it can affect lactation, infant behaviour and psychomotor development for breastfeeding babies. It is recommended to avoid alcohol when pregnant, planning for pregnancy and during breastfeeding.

Source: NHMRC (2009)

While on the one hand guidelines to drinking alcohol may be represented critically as a neoliberal project, on the other, there are serious and significant indicators that, in Australia, like many Western countries, drinking alcohol at a high level or with high frequency is clearly linked to harmful consequences. Alcohol consumption can negatively impact the broader community in numerous ways, including aggression and violence to others, resulting in injury, petty crime, assault, car accidents, offensive behaviour, vandalism, noise and litter (AIHW 2016; NHMRC 2009). Of particular concern are the consequences to children resulting from accident and injury during or after a drinking occasion (NHMRC 2009). Males in particular, in specific contexts and in everyday public and private spaces, overwhelmingly carry out alcohol-related violence. The fact that male aggression continues to be thought of as a 'natural' and intrinsic part of **masculinity** only serves to perpetuate a relative tolerance of such widespread violence. Research by Ennis and Finlayson (2015) on the links between 'boomtowns' created by, for example, the mining industry, and alcohol-related violence is a clear example of how a particular social context that includes a set of conditions can produce violence: workplace culture, masculinities, high income and social isolation. All alcohol-related violence has a negative effect on the immediate people involved and also, as argued by Snowden (2015), on the social interactions of those involved, the communities and the wider country.

The economic costs are also significant and are mostly borne by the state through the health and welfare system. In 2004–05 the estimated cost of drinking alcohol to the Australian community was \$15.3 billion, taking into account the cost of associated crime, violence, loss of productivity, treatment costs and premature death, with costs of alcohol-related work absenteeism at \$1.2 billion per year (NHMRC 2009).

Social practices and drinking alcohol: Young adults

Adolescents are generally more vulnerable to alcohol-related injury or accident as a result of having less experience with alcohol combined with the risk-taking behaviour characteristic of adolescents (NHMRC 2009). Recent trends show that in Australia, adults aged 18–24 were more likely to drink at harmful levels on a single occasion than the rest of the adult population, and younger Australians will drink at risky levels on the one occasion compared to older adults who consume less but more frequently (AIHW 2016). Alcohol is the major cause of drug-related deaths and hospitalisations among Australians aged 15–34 years. More than half of all serious alcohol-related road injuries occur among 15–24 year olds (NHRMC 2009).

In an analysis of data from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2001–2013 (Livingston 2015), the rate of abstinence from drinking alcohol has increased from 9.4 per cent to 14.1 per cent, mostly among younger age cohorts, with 14–17 year olds showing the greatest increase from 28 per cent in 2001 to 57 per cent in 2013. Interestingly, the largest abstainers come from population subgroups where a language other than English was spoken at home. Livingston's (2015) analysis of the data shows that those aged under 25 are drinking significantly less overall, which runs counter to the popular media portrayal of excessive youth alcohol consumption. For the overall population, rates of drinking remained relatively stable over the 13-year period. The rate of 'very heavy' drinking occasions (20 or more standard drinks at least once over the past 12 months) remained at under 10 per cent in 2013, although the rate of 'risky drinking' (five or more drinks on at least one occasion), declined significantly from 42.9 per cent (2001) to 38.5

per cent (2013). The findings also show that the top 10 per cent of drinkers are consuming an increasing proportion of alcohol (Livingston 2015).

A case study

This research case study of young adults serves to explicate the social dynamics and interrelationships that create the conditions for drinking alcohol. The case study is based on an Australian Research Council project (Schofield et al. 2009) that involved two of the co-authors of this chapter (Hepworth and Germov). The project included young adults aged 18–24 years who were university students at one of several universities in three Australian states: New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. Of the various studies, the focus group and interview studies are discussed here to elucidate the social dynamics of drinking alcohol. In a series of 19 focus groups with 70 young adults, the social practices around drinking alcohol were explored. Given the power relations involved in the research interview (see Hepworth & McVittie [2016] forthcoming), the sensitivity around the topic of drinking alcohol within the context of university life, and talking with an older researcher (and younger research assistant), considerable time was initially invested in establishing rapport with the focus group participants and assurance of confidentiality before the focus group commenced discussion about drinking practices.

Undoubtedly, the influence of peers either through 'friendship' groups or social networks is the major site for the creation of the conditions for and behaviours related to drinking practices. Although social pressure has been traditionally understood as an individual phenomenon, here it was examined critically by Hepworth and colleagues (2016) as being constituted by the social dynamics of peer groups and the institutional setting of university sub-cultures. Peers operated around alcohol-related practices and potential harms at various levels, including as a form of social coercion, as a protective factor, or a resource that young adults (mostly women) were at times ambivalent about drawing on when they were in situations that needed peer support. What is evident is that pressure to drink alcohol and large amounts in episodes operated through the social dynamics of peers, and was perpetuated through sub-cultures involving initiation rituals or 'drinking games', especially during orientation week. These dynamics were also heavily structured by power relations, as the students who were required to succumb to these 'games' were invariably first year students or 'freshers' involved in social practices that were 'overseen' by older and more established students in later years in university (Hepworth et al. 2016).

Relatedly, the broader institutional processes at play with particular social settings such as universities bring additional tensions to the drinking practices of young adults. On the one hand, institutions such as university residential colleges aim to invoke 'alcohol citizenship', reflecting a harm minimisation approach, involving alcohol at social events, such as formal dinners, to develop cultural competency. Yet on the other hand, drinking alcohol as a condoned practice may lead to 'excessive' drinking that becomes problematic for both students and university management when it takes place outside regulated institutional spaces (Leontini et al. 2015).

Given the normalisation of 'binge' drinking by young adults, its effects, and its marginalisation of young adults who are non-drinkers, it is through their experiences and accounts that we can possibly learn the most about the current state of drinking alcohol and future recommendations. As stated by Joshua Blake (2010) in his well-known opinion piece in *The Age* newspaper, 'My Name is Australia and I'm an Alcoholic', we first have to admit there is a problem (see Box 13.3).

BOX 13.3 BINGE DRINKING, AUDIT AND INDICATORS OF ALCOHOL ADDICTION

'Binge drinking' is a common term used to broadly define a lengthy session of excessive drinking, possibly over a number of days, that results in significant intoxication (drunkenness), loss of self-control, memory loss ('blackouts'), and is a major sign of potential addiction. In the scholarly literature, the notion of 'binge drinking' is contested, with little agreement over a common definition. The most widely used definition arose from the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS)—a major US study conducted in the 1990s (Wechsler et al. 2000, 2002). The CAS defined binge drinking as five drinks during a single drinking session for men and four drinks for women. The large scale of the CAS resulted in this definition being widely adopted and treated as unproblematic, despite the fact that such amounts of alcohol may not result in drunkenness, which is significantly dependent on the type of alcohol consumed, the timespan of the drinking session, and whether food was eaten. Caution should thus be exercised in interpreting research findings on binge or excessive drinking.

One measure that has gained widespread use is the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) (Babor, Higgins-Biddle et al. 2001), which identifies hazardous and harmful patterns of alcohol consumption. The AUDIT is a 10-item scale with fixed responses from which respondents choose, where each response has a score ranging from 0 to 4. Responses to the 10 items are added to produce an AUDIT score out of 40. Using WHO guidelines (Babor, Higgins-Biddle et al. 2001), scores can be grouped into four groups: 7 or less (low risk or abstinence); 8–15 (indicates drinking in excess of low-risk guidelines); 16–19 signifies harmful and hazardous drinking; and scores of 20 or more indicate the need for clinical assessment for potential alcohol dependence.

Conclusion

When drunk in moderation, alcoholic beverages are pleasurable, and play a key role in sociality in Western societies. Alcoholic drinks are one of the few legal psychotropic drugs available—with predictable effects that are related to dosage. Drinking alcohol is imbued with social values, expected norms of behaviour, and rules and regulations regarding its production, promotion, trade and consumption.

While mild levels of intoxication can be pleasant, alcoholic drinks consumed at greater volume can fuel violence and accidents and be personally harmful to the drinker and to innocent bystanders, causing disruption to personal and work life. Alcoholic beverages are a fascinating social phenomenon—drinking is widely practised and yet excessive consumption can be dangerous, and thus we have social rules about appropriate alcohol-related behaviour to enhance the pleasures and avoid the dangers of intoxication. The social appetite for alcohol exposes the paradox of human behaviour—its ability to create altered states in an individual is shaped by social conditions, social contexts and social rules of acceptable behaviour.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- Drinking alcohol is an intrinsically social activity.
- The ways in which we drink alcohol are shaped by historical, cultural, political and religious practices.
- Alcohol use has been regulated to various extents from prohibition to the restriction of licensing hours of pubs and clubs.
- Governments set guidelines for the consumption of alcohol and its relationship to health risks.
- Young people are particularly vulnerable to excessive alcohol use because of the social contexts in which drinking takes place.
- Drinking practices are heavily gendered, with alcohol-related violence carried out mostly by men having the most destructive impact on individuals, communities and society.

Sociological reflection

- Do you drink alcohol? Reflect on the reasons why you do or do not drink alcohol.
- Consider the last time you had an alcoholic drink, or were at an occasion where many people were drinking alcohol. What social influences were at play over when, how and what people drank?
- At what social occasions and times is it acceptable or unacceptable to drink alcohol? Where do such norms come from? How and why have they changed over time?
- In what ways is alcohol consumption gendered?

Discussion questions

- 1 What role has alcohol played throughout human history?
- 2 Why does alcohol remain one of the few illicit drugs available in most societies?
- 3 What are the potential health and social problems associated with drinking alcohol?
- 4 Why is university life often the focus of many public debates about the negative effects of alcohol? What have been your experiences to date?
- 5 What are the advantages and limitations of a harm minimisation approach to alcohol?
- 6 What are the debates over the regulation and promotion of alcohol?
- 7 Are public concerns about alcohol, particularly youth and alcohol, a moral panic?

Further investigation

- 1 As the World Health Organization (2014) reports, 'the greater the economic wealth of a country the more alcohol is consumed and the smaller number of abstainers'. Discuss the implications of this statement.
- 2 Compare and contrast societies in which alcohol is prohibited or significantly limited to those where it is widely available.
- 3 Public health concerns over alcohol are a moral panic. Discuss.
- 4 Examine gender differences in the drinking of alcohol.
- 5 The increasing availability of cheap alcohol products, particularly aimed at young adults, such as canned and sweetened mixed drinks, wine coolers, and 'alcopops', is fuelling harmful levels of drinking. Discuss.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

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Reports

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2014, *National Drug Strategy Household Survey Detailed Report 2013*, AIHW, Canberra.
- House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs 2015, *Alcohol, Hurting People and Harming Communities: Inquiry into the Harmful Use of Alcohol in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Livingston, M. 2015, *Understanding Recent Trends in Australian Alcohol Consumption*,

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, Canberra.

- National Health and Medical Research Council 2009, *NHMRC Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol*, National Health and Medical Research Council, Canberra.
- World Health Organization 2014, *Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health*, WHO, Geneva.

Films and documentaries

- Days of Wine and Roses* (1962): Film directed by Blake Edwards, 117 minutes.
- The Hangover*: Parts 1 (2009; 100 minutes), 2 (2011; 102 minutes) and 3 (2011; 100 minutes): Comedy directed by Todd Phillips.
- Prohibition* (2011): Documentary in three episodes directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. 330 minutes in total.
- Addicted to Pleasure—Whisky* (2012): Documentary directed by Tim Neil, 60 minutes.

Websites

- Alcohol (Australian Department of Health): www.alcohol.gov.au
- Alcohol Problems and Solutions: www.alcoholproblemsandsolutions.org/
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW): www.aihw.gov.au/alcohol-and-other-drugs/
- Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education: www.fare.org.au/
- National Drug Strategy (Australian Government): www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au
- World Health Organization: Health topics—Alcohol: www.who.int/topics/alcohol_drinking/en/

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CHAPTER 14

GENDER, FOOD AND THE BODY

Lauren Williams and John Germov

OVERVIEW

- › Why are some foods perceived as 'masculine' and others as 'feminine', leading men and women to eat differently?
- › What are the social origins of the pressure to conform to gendered body ideals?
- › How do women respond to the thin ideal? Is body acceptance an effective response?

Gender differences in food consumption remain one of the clearest examples of the social appetite—in short, women eat differently to men. Gender stereotypes around foods are reproduced in a number of ways, and reinforce differences in the body ideals for each gender. While men are under pressure to be muscular, the social norms governing women's appearance encourage a thin ideal, with implications for nutrition and health. The pursuit of the ideal body significantly influences food choices—particularly for women. This chapter examines why dieting is predominantly a female behaviour by exploring the historical, structural, cultural and critical factors that have contributed to the development of, and resistance to, the thin ideal. The ability to achieve body acceptance is conceptualised using Anthony Giddens' theory of self-identity to explain how certain social processes enable women and men to exercise their agency amidst social constraints.

KEY TERMS

agency
body acceptance
body dysmorphia
body image
body mass index (BMI)
eating disorders
emancipatory politics
epidemiology/epidemiological
fatism
femininities
feminist
gender
gender attribution
gender order
life politics
masculinities
muscle dysmorphia
muscular ideal
obesity
patriarchy
post-structuralist
reflexive modernity
social construction
social control
social embodiment
socialisation
social media
stigmatisation
structuralist
thin ideal

Introduction: What is gender and how does it influence food habits?

The concept of **gender** goes beyond the biological distinction of sex to refer to the socially constructed classification of the characteristics and behaviours that are considered to be masculine or feminine, which can change over time and vary between cultures (Oakley 1972). Gender plays a key role in the structure of society, as well as in defining the self, and is the most important part of any social interaction (Connell 2009). It is important to understand that gender is not fixed or static. **Socialisation** processes and particular forms of social organisation underpin the ways in which femininity and masculinity are understood, particularly through **gender attribution**—the taken-for-granted notions of maleness or femaleness based on physical appearance and outward behaviours. Masculinity is socially constructed as involving dispositions of heterosexual virility, independence, and physical and mental strength—known as ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell 1995). Femininity is socially constructed as entailing dispositions of dependence, mental and physical frailty, caretaking and nurturing. In reality, multiple variations of **masculinities** and **femininities** exist, especially in Western cultures where social movements advocating equal rights for women and lesbian, bisexual, gay and transsexual people have been influential (Connell 2009; 2012). These gendered social processes produce and reproduce the **gender order**, such as the gendered division of labour where women continue to be responsible for household work and men predominate the domain of paid work (Connell 2009).

Food choice is one of the ways in which we signify gender, with certain types of food and drink associated with masculine or feminine characteristics, such as red meat and beer being identified with masculinity, while other foods such as fruit, vegetables and white wine are associated with feminine attributes (Sellaeg & Chapman 2008). In a recent Italian study, Nicoletta Cavazza and colleagues (2015) showed that food type, portion size and presentation style all influence this relationship with food and gender. They found both males and females perceived that ‘a small and elegant Caprese salad’ epitomised feminine eating, while a ‘big and rough hamburger’ epitomised the masculine eating style (Cavazza et al., 2015 p. 270). Feminine food habits are often connected to the nurture of others, particularly through domestic cooking (Adams et al. 2015; Virudachalam et al. 2014), whereas masculine food habits tend to reflect instrumental notions of food as ‘fuel’ for the body. Male food preferences tend to dominate family meals (Lyons 2009; DeVault 1991; Charles & Kerr 1988; Harris & Ramsey 2015).

Red meat is more than a masculine food—it is *the* archetypal masculine food, signifying hegemonic masculinity. Being composed of animal muscle and blood, it is symbolic of the masculine activity of hunting, reinforcing the masculine notions of aggression, dominance and virility, and also of being the provider for the family. Men proclaim masculinity through eating large amounts of meat, particularly red meat. Women indicate their femininity by avoiding meat, eating small quantities of it, or eating it in ‘acceptable’ ways, such as ‘white’ meat, or in composite dishes where it may be minced, and therefore be less reminiscent of muscle (Sobal 2005). It is important to note that there are other influences on food habits beyond gender, such as health discourses to reduce meat consumption and increase vegetable consumption, food choices reflecting status and privilege through exotic and expensive cuisines and drinks, and those willing to accommodate the food preferences of others (Sobal 2005). Even though alternative food practices exist and gender stereotypes may be lessening among younger generations in Western countries (Lupton 2000), food habits remain a steadfastly gendered activity.

Nutrition education messages promote a more feminine way of eating, such as 'eat plenty of vegetables'. Looking after nutritional health is associated with the women's role in the household (Gough 2007). Reflecting this, the dietetic workforce—the health professional grouping that provides dietary advice—is overwhelmingly female and, in Australia, for example, females represent more than 90 per cent of the dietetic workforce (Brown et al. 2006).

Gendered bodies

Gender not only plays a key role in the foods we choose, but in determining how much we are entitled to eat. It is acknowledged that men and women have different physiological compositions (men having more muscle and women having more fat) and therefore men generally have higher requirements for energy and most nutrients. While this has some impact on the amount of food eaten, the extent to which eating is disciplined in order to discipline the body varies by gender. Women experience social pressure to conform to a **thin ideal**, which requires stringent modification of food choice in the act of dieting. Men are pressured to conform to a **muscular ideal**, which has some implications for eating, and strong associations with physical body work. This chapter will start by introducing the muscular ideal, but the main focus draws on the larger body of literature for the thin ideal in women to examine the way in which gendered bodies are constructed.

Men and body image: The muscular ideal

Men have increasingly become subject to social pressure regarding their bodies, particularly in the context of stigmatisation, although their experience is considerably different to that of women. Even though more men than women are overweight, men report less body dissatisfaction, are less concerned about their bodies, and are less likely to be on a weight-loss diet (Grogan 2008). The social pressure on men is to achieve a muscular ideal that indicates strength and masculinity. Rather than promoting weight loss and slenderness, the male body ideal exaggerates masculine traits to convey power and dominance. Epitomised by Arnold Schwarzenegger in the 1980s and more recently by Dwayne Douglas Johnson ('The Rock'), the muscular ideal has become widespread, as evidenced by the ubiquitous athletic-looking male model sporting highly toned musculature, a defined chest, large biceps and a 'six pack' of well-defined abdominal muscles.

In pursuit of a more muscular body, some men undertake excessive and obsessive exercise routines, or exercise dependence or, even more severely, resort to cosmetic surgery or performance and image enhancing drugs (PIEDs), such as anabolic steroids and human growth hormone. Anabolic steroids are typically used in conjunction with weightlifting in order to achieve weight loss and muscle gain (Kanayama et al. 2009). According to the Australian Crime Commission (2013), the use of PIEDs has quickly increased in recent years, with the number of PIEDs detected at the border increasing, and a 225 per cent rise in the number of growth hormones detected by Australian Customs and Border Protection Services between 2009–10 and 2010–11. There are significant negative consequences of anabolic androgenic steroid (AAS) use, both physiologically and mentally, including disorders of the kidney and liver, gynecomastia and testicular atrophy; psychological effects include hypomania, aggression, depression and suicidality (Kanayama et al. 2009; Olivardia, Pope & Hudson 2000; Trenton & Currier 2005). It has been suggested that AAS use may be understood as an **eating disorder** rather than a substance abuse disorder (Joubert & Melluish 2014), and may be symptomatic of **body dysmorphia**, or more specifically,

muscle dysmorphia. The term 'bigorexia' has been used with reference to muscle dysmorphia, described by Pope, Phillips and Olivardia (2000), referring to men who perceive themselves as 'skinny' and 'small' despite being above average in terms of muscularity (Pope et al. 2000). The average onset of **muscle dysmorphia** is around 19 years of age (Olivardia et al. 2000). In the past two decades, the prevalence and severity of **body image** disturbances among men has increased significantly (Murray et al. 2010).

The thin ideal for women and the muscular ideal for men are well entrenched by adolescence (Grogan 2008; Nowak et al. 2001). Women and men are exposed to these body ideals from childhood through the process of gender socialisation. Consider, for example, the popular Barbie doll made by Mattel. This doll is tall, thin, long-legged and slim-waisted, and has a flat stomach, square shoulders, large eyes and curved red lips. Ken Norton and colleagues (1996) undertook a study in which they scaled the anthropometric measurements of the Barbie doll to adult size, finding that the probability of an adult woman having a Barbie-like body shape is less than one in 100,000. Interestingly, they also scaled the Ken doll (the male equivalent of the Barbie doll, produced and marketed by the same company), and found it to have a 'more realistic' body shape, likely to be found in one in every 50 males. This makes Barbie's figure 2000 times less attainable than Ken's, reflecting the fact that women are encouraged to aspire to a more unrealistic body ideal than men. However, this may be changing. A study conducted in 2006 assessed the measurements of action figures over the preceding 25 years, found that they had become larger and more muscular over time (Baghurst et al. 2006).

The Body Shop produced its own version of Barbie, a full-figured doll named 'Ruby', as part of its campaign for body diversity. The company was initially forced to withdraw the doll as a result of pressure from Mattel, which considered the doll's features to be too similar to those of its idealised best-seller; the Body Shop subsequently released a revised version (Smith 1998). It seems that Mattel themselves have now recognised the need to show body diversity in their Barbie doll product. In what has been seen as an attempt to reverse the consistent drop in sales of Barbie 2012–2015, the company announced the release of 'curvy', 'petite' and 'tall' versions of the Barbie doll in January of 2016 (Abrams 2016). This is the first time since the original release of the doll nearly six decades ago that there has been a change in Barbie's famous shape, and it remains to be seen whether this has any influence on the falling sales.

The thin ideal and the sexual division of dieting

The term 'thin ideal' refers to the social desirability of a slender body shape in Western societies. A thin body is considered the epitome of beauty and sexual attractiveness, and has been linked to social status, health and even moral worth. In today's advanced capitalist societies, food is readily available and social worth is increasingly measured by a person's ability to resist excess. The moralistic censure of sloth and gluttony is a remnant of earlier Christian values that focused on purifying the soul and disciplining the body through abstinence and penance, and on purging oneself of excess (Schwartz 1986; Turner 1992).

As the overriding aesthetic ideal of female beauty, the thin ideal has significant implications for women's eating patterns. Dieting, or the conscious manipulation of food choice and eating patterns to reduce or maintain weight, is a common response to the thin ideal. Since the thin ideal is directed at women, it is unsurprising that dieting is primarily a female act. Women often assess food in terms of its dieting value, dividing foods into 'dieting' (good) and 'fattening' (bad) foods (Sobal & Cassidy 1987; McKie et al. 1993; Germov & Williams 1996a). Several authors have described the gendered nature of eating, particularly women's ambivalent relationship with food,

their bodies, and the provision of food for significant others (Burgoyne & Clarke 1983; Murcott 1983; Charles & Kerr 1988; DeVault 1991). Dieting requires a considerable investment of time and money, as well as emotional and physical resources. Kelly Brownell and Judith Rodin (1994) note that the unsuccessful nature of diets can lead to a cycle of 'yo-yo' dieting or 'weight cycling', with detrimental physiological and psychological consequences. For many women, dieting results in a lifelong 'tug of war' with food, to the extent that the act of eating is imbued with feelings of guilt, anxiety and deprivation.

The proportion of people desiring weight control has been measured in a few population-based studies in Western nations, including one conducted by the authors. The results show that between two-thirds and three-quarters of the adult population reports to be actively trying to control (to lose or maintain) weight, with the prevalence higher in women than men (Wardle et al. 2000; Serdula et al. 1999; McElhone et al. 1999; Williams et al. 2007). In a sub-study of the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH), Lauren Williams and colleagues found that 74 per cent of more than 11,000 women in the mid-age cohort (47–52 years) reported trying to control their weight, and that only one in five of these women was happy with her weight (Williams et al. 2007). Forty-three per cent wanted to lose more than six kilograms in weight. Dietary restriction was used more frequently than exercise, and two-thirds of those seeking weight control used a combination of two or more weight control practices. The majority of the cohort, using a variety of weight control combinations, gained more weight on average over a two-year period than the 26 per cent of women who reported doing nothing to control their weight. This provides some **epidemiological** evidence to the thesis that dietary restraint results in ultimate weight gain (Tiggemann & McGill 2004). On further analysis of this cohort according to self-selected social class, we found that women who identified as working class were significantly more likely to use potentially harmful weight-control practices (fasting, use of laxatives, smoking) than women who identified as upper or middle class, but still gained more weight over a two-year period (Williams et al. 2011).

Many women who diet are actually within the medically defined 'healthy weight range' for their height according to the **body mass index** (see Box 14.1). Successive surveys in Australia have shown a consistent finding that more men than women are above their healthy weight range for their height (National Heart Foundation 1990; Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997; Dunstan et al. 2000; AIHW 2006; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015) even though, as we have already seen, more women attempt weight control.

BOX 14.1 BODY MASS INDEX (BMI) AND DEFINITIONS OF OVERWEIGHT

In the health sciences, 'overweight' and 'obese' are generally defined in terms of BMI. A person's BMI is calculated by dividing their weight in kilograms by their height in metres squared:

$$\text{BMI} = \text{weight (kg)} / \text{height (m}^2\text{)}$$

For example, if a person weighed 67 kilograms and was 1.6 metres tall, their BMI would be 26.17 (67 divided by 2.56). The World Health Organization (WHO), using BMI, has defined the following weight ranges for both women and men:

BMI RANGE	WHO CATEGORY
<18.50	Underweight
18.50–24.99	Normal
25.00–29.99	Grade I overweight
30.00–34.99	Grade IIa* obesity
35.00–39.99	Grade IIb* obesity
40+	Grade III* obesity

*BMI greater than 30 is often referred to as 'obese'

Source: WHO (2000)

A 'normal' or 'healthy' weight range is generally considered to be a BMI of between 18.5 and 24.9, 'underweight' is below 18.5, 'overweight' is equal to or above 25 and 'obese' is equal to or above 30. While BMI can be useful for population-wide epidemiological studies, concerns have been raised about the appropriateness of a standard BMI measure for individuals because of the physiological differences between women and men and between individuals from different ethnic groups.

Why is the thin ideal so pervasive?

Why is seeking to conform to the thin ideal a female project? **Feminist** writers have generally approached this vexed question either from the opposing philosophical perspectives of **structuralist** feminism (liberal, Marxist and radical feminism) or **post-structuralist** feminism. Structuralist theories assume that the lives of individuals are primarily determined by the society in which they live. The focus is on the large-scale features of society—such as the economy, political system and dominant culture—and on how these structures shape individual and group behaviour. Post-structuralist theories developed as a critique of these structuralist approaches on the premise that they fail to adequately theorise how individuals shape society. Post-structuralist approaches generally abandon the search for universal causes (Annandale & Clarke 1996), and focus on human **agency** and **social construction**. Women are not conceived of as passive adherents to the thin ideal, but rather, 'It is women themselves who practise this discipline on and against their own bodies ... This self-surveillance is a form of obedience to **patriarchy** ... [a woman becomes] a body designed to please or excite' (Wearing 1996, p. 88).

The pressure to conform to the thin ideal cannot be explained by either perspective in isolation. The thin ideal clearly has structural elements, perpetuated by various social institutions and commercial interests, such as the media, fashion and cosmetics industries. The health sector has also participated in the development and perpetuation of the thin ideal, with anti-fat messages that equate health with thinness. These structural factors have clear antecedents in the historical development of patriarchy, particularly in terms of the social regulation of the female body (Schwartz 1986; Turner 1992). However, post-structural factors, which represent women's subjectivity and agency—that is, the way women respond to the social pressure of the thin ideal on a daily basis—also play an important role. This chapter aims to bridge these two perspectives by discussing the interplay between the patriarchal social structure and female agency; how the thin ideal shapes women's attitudes to food and eating, and how women adopt, modify or reject these social ideals. Before exploring these issues further, the next section considers the historical antecedents and cultural determinants of the thin ideal.

Thin ideal antecedents: A brief historical overview

How and why did the thin ideal emerge, and why were women singled out as its subjects? While the thin ideal is a relatively recent phenomenon, the historical antecedents of the **social control** of women's bodies are well documented (Rubin 1975; Ehrenreich & English 1979; Turner 1992; Corrigan & Meredyth 1997; Hesse-Biber 1996, 2007). The socially desired body ideal may change over time in terms of size and shape, but the existence of an aspirational female body ideal has remained constant.

The female ideal of the nineteenth century was a large, curved body, which connoted fertility, wealth and high status (Bordo 1993; Seid 1994). While women who were poor were occupied with physical work, the women of the middle and upper classes with voluptuous bodies were often viewed as objects of art, luxury, status, virtue and beauty. Fatness was linked to emotional stability, strength (stored energy), good health and refinement; to leisure rather than labour. The undergarment industry came to the rescue of the woman who is naturally thin with products such as inflatable rubber attachments (complete with dimples) to give that rounded, full-figured look (Seid 1994). These appearance norms for women reinforced patriarchal beliefs about female sexuality (Rothblum 1994).

The first break with the voluptuous tradition of the nineteenth century came in the 1920s with the 'flappers'. These women who were thin were financially and sexually independent, partly as a result of World War I, which left many women in charge of their dead husbands' estates. The term 'flapper' was used to trivialise the 'new independent woman', as Banner (1983, p. 279) states:

On the one hand, she indicated a new freedom in sensual expression by shortening her skirts and discarding her corsets. On the other hand, she bound her breasts ... and expressed her sensuality not through eroticism, but through constant, vibrant movement ... The name 'flapper' itself [was drawn] from a style of flapping galoshes popular among young women before the war; it connoted irrelevant movement and raised the spectre of a seal with black flapping paws.

Thus, these women rejected the dominant patriarchal ideal of feminine appearance—and the passivity that went with it—and assumed a more masculine ideal; the new liberated woman was to dress, act and look more like a man (thin and without curves) (Hesse-Biber 1991, 1996, 2007). However, when women lose their curves they tend to become smaller and can appear physically weak. This phase in the redefinition of women's bodies occurred during a time of female political activism in the USA and the UK, as the suffragette movement pressed for women's right to vote.

While women entered the public sphere and increased their profile and power, the ideal female body inversely decreased in size.

Other factors contributed to the emergence of the thin female ideal. The food shortages caused by the Great Depression in 1929, followed by World War II, led to austerity measures and a subsequent concern with the link between food and health. These decades marked the start of calorie-counting and use of food for its energy value (Schwartz 1986). Such measures imposed a dieting mentality on the population, especially women, as the primary gatekeepers of food in the family. The prosperity that followed the end of World War II, together with the rise of the food manufacturing industry, saw the balance shift back to food abundance during the 1950s in Western societies. As a number of authors have noted (Beller 1977; Mennell 1985), when food is scarce, cultural ideals favour a large body, whose 'abundance' symbolises wealth and status. Conversely, in times of plenty, social values shift towards disciplining food intake, and the thin body becomes the ideal.

The contemporary thin ideal

The contemporary thin ideal was born in the 1960s and was epitomised by the model Twiggy (whose name alluded to her slight frame) as well as by actresses such as Audrey Hepburn and Grace Kelly. By the 1970s, a rare coalescence of factors emerged to reinforce the thin ideal: medical science, government authorities and the fashion industry all adopted an anti-fat stance. At the same time, medical and epidemiological studies began to find links between having an obese body and premature mortality. In Chapter 15, Jeffery Sobal discusses the changing social attitudes towards 'fat' and the rise of obesity stigmatisation. While dieting and the cultural aversion to 'fat' have historical underpinnings that predate contemporary health warnings (see Schwartz 1986), the well-intentioned anti-fat messages of health professionals and government agencies may have reinforced and legitimised the thin ideal (Germov & Williams 1996a).

Roberta Seid (1994) argues that the second wave of feminism in the 1970s initially embraced a super-fit, thin ideal as a celebration of women's strength and control. Such body control was regarded as a positive symbol of femininity, in contrast to the aesthetics of previous centuries, which conceptualised women as invalids (the 'weaker sex') or as maternal icons (useful for their reproductive capacity). Both of these stereotypes were used to support orthodox views that women should be 'protected' from physical and intellectual labour, and that they were dependent on men. Actress Jane Fonda was a vocal feminist in the 1970s and 1980s, and promoted health and beauty through physical fitness by positing the thin ideal as a break from the maternal ideal. Marjorie Ferguson's content analysis of women's magazines at that time (1983, p. 113) notes the influence of the self-help movement on contemporary femininity, bringing about a shift in editorial emphasis 'towards greater self-realisation, self-determination, and the presentation of a more independent and assertive femininity'. This development, which paralleled the growth of consumerism and individualism in advanced capitalist societies, reflected the magazines' profitable marketing strategy of teaming the thin ideal with women's sexual and economic liberation. As Fonda and various imitators discovered, the focus on female self-help and independence through body discipline tapped into a new market of potential consumers. Fonda, who later admitted suffering from an eating disorder and having had cosmetic surgery, presents an interesting case study of a celebrity, well known for advocating women's emancipation from patriarchy (in terms of economic and sexual liberation) while at the same time playing a significant part in reinforcing their subjugation to the patriarchal thin ideal—liberation from the beauty myth was seemingly not part of her agenda.

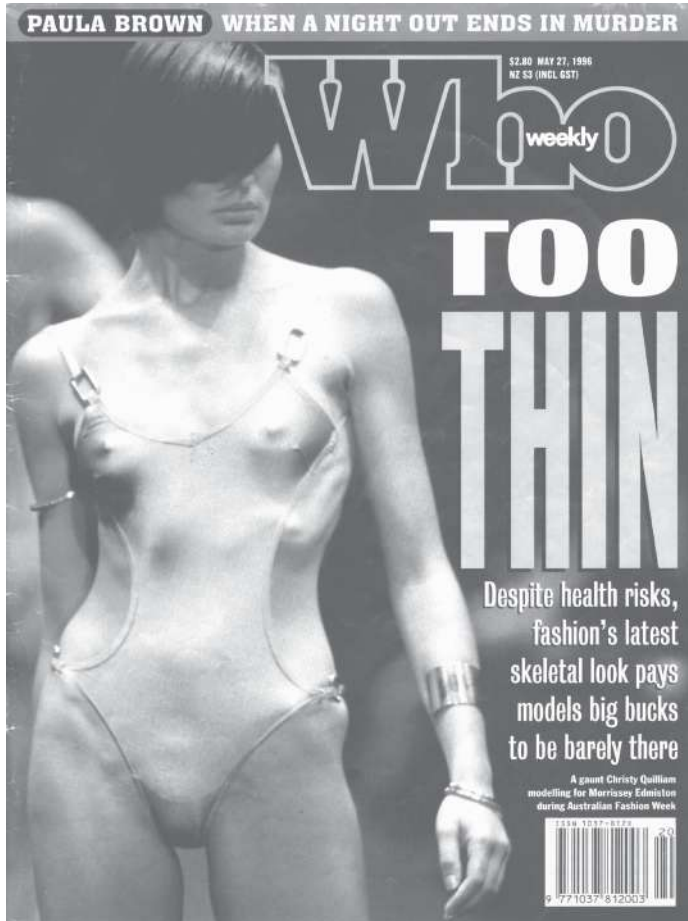
Body backlash: The continued social control of women's bodies

Susan Faludi (1991) and Naomi Wolf (1990) argue that it is no accident that the current thin ideal emerged during the second wave of feminism, a period of increased female sexual and socioeconomic liberation. As Sharlene Hesse-Biber states, 'when women are "demanding more space" in terms of equality of opportunity, there is a cultural demand that they "should shrink" ... Thinness may be considered a sign of conforming to a constricting feminine image, whereas weight may convey a strong, powerful image' (1991, p. 178). This echoes the era of the flappers where the rise of women's political and social status resulted in a female body ideal that was diminutive and weak. However, this time around the social control over women's bodies has not only been exercised through the external industries of fashion, cosmetics, fitness and the media, but through the internalisation of the thin ideal by women.

Popular portrayal of the thin ideal

Models and celebrities have been the overt public face of changes in beauty standards over the decades. Compare, for example, the figure of Marilyn Monroe in the 1950s with that of Elle Macpherson in the 1980s, or Kate Moss, Eva Herzigova, Heidi Klum and Paris Hilton in the 2000s. Content-analysis studies of magazines, beauty pageants, Hollywood movies and television programs have consistently found that the female beauty ideal has become thinner with time (Silverstein et al. 1986; Morris et al. 1989). Moreover, experimental studies have found that exposure to media images of unrealistically thin bodies increases female body dissatisfaction (Groesz et al. 2002; Perloff 2014; Tiggemann & McGill 2004). The use of actors on covers, which has become increasingly common is, according to Cyndi Tebbel (2000), an attempt by magazines to move away from using supermodels towards what the industry terms 'real women'. Unfortunately, the bodies of celebrities are no more attainable than those of the models. Early in the twenty-first century, the ranks of thin ideal role models continue to swell, particularly among actors and pop singers—for example, Jennifer Aniston, Nicole Kidman, Kylie Minogue, Paris Hilton, Mischa Barton and Victoria Beckham. In the face of a constant barrage of glamorous images, it is little wonder that the number of cosmetic surgery procedures for breast augmentation, face-lifts, collagen injections and liposuction continues to rise. The non-surgical procedure of botox—a wrinkle treatment based on injecting small amounts of the highly toxic botulinum (the product of the bacterium that causes botulism)—has proven to be a popular treatment, resulting in a generation of Hollywood actresses and TV personalities with faces unable to show expression.

Occasionally the mass media takes an opposing perspective on women's bodies. Figure 14.1 depicts a front cover of the Australian *Who Weekly* magazine. It is one of the few examples of the mass media being critical of the thin ideal. This picture was seized upon by the media in Australia as an example of how the (mid-1990s) trend towards the 'waif look', promoted by the modelling and fashion industry, had pushed the thin ideal too far.

FIGURE 14.1 *Who Weekly* cover

Source: Reproduced courtesy of WHO WEEKLY.

Around the same time, Kate Winslet was touted as a successful women who challenged the dominance of the thin ideal. This was short-lived, with subsequent shedding of kilos to attract work. Winslet has commented on her ongoing struggle to resist dieting to gain more acting work, but ultimately embraced a more conformist body shape.

More recently, body images portrayed by celebrities such as Beyoncé, Jennifer Lopez (J. Lo) and the Kardashian sisters have made curvaceous bodies more socially acceptable. A qualitative study of 27 Latina college women had some interesting findings with regard to the potential influence of media representation of the 'thin ideal'. One theme that arose was based on the standards of beauty and attractiveness set by society and the media (Franko et al. 2012). One participant discussed changes in perception of the ideal body, discussing that trends may be influenced by the presence of celebrities in the media, who more recently represent a 'curvy

ideal: 'I think the media, in some ways, is getting a little bit better. I know that like with J. Lo, of course, being celebrated for all of her, you know, achievements she has had. And I feel like Kim Kardashian, and just a lot of new celebrities—Eva Longoria and Beyoncé, think they're embracing their curves and kind of showing that they can still be really beautiful and still not be like the 100 lb. model with the small frame' (Franko et al. 2012, p. 383). In a qualitative focus group study, Michelle St. George (2015) interviewed female adolescents about body image. They discussed the beginning of a 'thick' movement, instigated by the Kardashian family. However, they noted that despite the recent acceptance of larger thighs and a curvaceous 'hourglass figure' as the new ideal, this figure was still one with a thin stomach. One participant described this as 'thick in the right places' (St. George 2015, p. 13). While Kim Kardashian is praised by fans as providing an alternative idea of 'attractiveness' that does not promote thinness, she is not necessarily a positive role model with regard to self-acceptance having famously participated in cellulite treatment, endorsed diet pills, and developed her own line of workout DVDs (Sastre 2014). Clearly, examples that challenge the thin ideal remain transitory and marginal. Nonetheless, they show that the thin ideal can be challenged.

Factors influencing the thin ideal today

Structuralist approaches to the thin ideal

In explaining the emergence of the thin ideal, a structuralist would maintain that it is the outcome of a patriarchal society, in which powerful men and the various industries and social institutions they control (structural factors) construct the 'beauty myth' for their own material and political benefit (Wolf 1990; Bordo 1993). These structural factors clearly have an impact on cultural beliefs, particularly in terms of gender socialisation, by constructing and promoting a particular ideal of female beauty.

The rise of consumerism led the body image industries to develop a 'sure-fire' formula for success: promote a thin ideal of beauty that the majority of women can never attain and thereby create virtually infinite demand among consumers. With the high proportion of people worldwide trying to lose weight, and dieting being a popular strategy, the diet industry is a significant economic force. Despite the evidence that diets don't work in the long term, the weight-loss industry has shown an impressive ability to continually reinvent itself, as witnessed by the emergence of new 'fad diets' (the '2&5' and 'Paleo' diets being recent examples) and the resurgence of old fad diets such as the Atkins diet. Moreover, a plethora of 'infomercials' on late-night and daytime TV advertise exercise equipment and diet supplements that promise to give buyers model-like bodies with a minimum of effort. The pharmaceutical industry continues to release so-called 'anti-obesity' drugs, which have significant side effects and have had only modest results to date. The irony of the weight-loss industry is that its very existence depends on the failure of its products. In what other industry would customers repeatedly pay large sums of money for products and services that do not work? The weight-loss industry has been clever enough to sustain its market share by placing the blame on the consumer, with caveats that their products will only work if used in combination with 'a sensible diet and regular exercise'.

As thinness became synonymous with health and beauty, the female body became increasingly exploited by both corporate interests and government health authorities. Calls to exercise self-control over one's body for the health benefits and for the sake of social conformity expanded upon the cultural values of individualism and self-responsibility. Women's magazines thus became an important sphere of influence for perpetuating the thin ideal. An example of the

extent of this influence is conveyed by the former editor of *New Woman* magazine in Australia, Cyndi Tebbel (2000), who claimed to have lost her job because the magazine featured a 'Big Issue', which supported International No Diet Day, used size-16 models, and promoted body diversity. According to Tebbel, sales of the magazine were not affected, but advertisers complained and threatened to withdraw, risking up to 50 per cent of the total revenue of the magazine (Tebbel 2000). Consequently, the magazine returned to featuring models that were thin and to stories promoting body insecurity. This illustrates the fact that the cosmetics, fitness and fashion industries will not tolerate a message that acts against their vested commercial interests—that is, a message challenging the dominant ideal of female beauty.

The phenomenon of **social media** has also had an influence. In the 1990s the Internet began to appeal to the average user, opening up new communication channels (Edosomwan et al. 2011), and is now the most commonly used form of media in Western society (Bair et al. 2012), with social-networking websites used more frequently than any other websites (Tiggemann & Slater 2013). Social networking began to emerge in the early 2000s, with the development and introduction of LinkedIn, Myspace and Facebook (Edosomwan et al. 2011). Since 2010, the use of the Internet for social purposes has expanded, with the introduction of sites such as Pinterest, and the photo-sharing smartphone application, Instagram. Social media usage has shown to be particularly high among adolescents and young adults, and higher among women than men (Duggan et al. 2015), so it is not surprising that social media is emerging as an influence on body image.

Marika Tiggemann has led Australian research in this field, showing a significant impact of Facebook use on appearance concerns and dieting behaviour in young women, with female adolescent Facebook users more dissatisfied with their appearance and expressing more motivation for thinness, when spending more time on Facebook (Tiggemann & Miller 2010; Tiggemann & Slater 2013, 2014). The research showed that these negative affects relate to exposure to Facebook photographs rather than to Facebook in general, leading women to negatively evaluate themselves in comparison with someone whom they believe is more attractive than themselves (Myers et al. 2012). While photographs of celebrities and models are famously altered to make them look more attractive, the ready availability to consumers of image-altering software means that photos posted on social media may be just as unreal.

The role of female agency in perpetuating the thin ideal

In contrast to a structuralist analysis, which focuses on the external forces that exert pressure on women to conform to a thin ideal, post-structuralist feminist theorists are concerned with the role played by women themselves in reproducing and resisting the thin ideal (Bartky 1990; Blood 2005). Post-structuralists do not deny the importance of the historical and cultural factors discussed above but, rather than viewing these factors as all-determining, they stress the importance of female subjectivity and deal with the complex and subtle facets of the social construction of women's bodies.

It is commonly stated that some women use body control to demonstrate their control over other aspects of their lives. However, Sandra Bartky argues that 'a tighter control of the body has gained a new kind of hold over the mind' (1990, p. 81). The thin body has become an essential symbol of modern femininity and a new form of social control of women's bodies; body regulation is self-inflicted, administered by women on themselves through dieting, starvation, excessive exercise and, at the extreme, plastic surgery. Therefore, there is a self-imposed component in the pressure to conform. Women are not simply passive sponges of coercive patriarchal structures

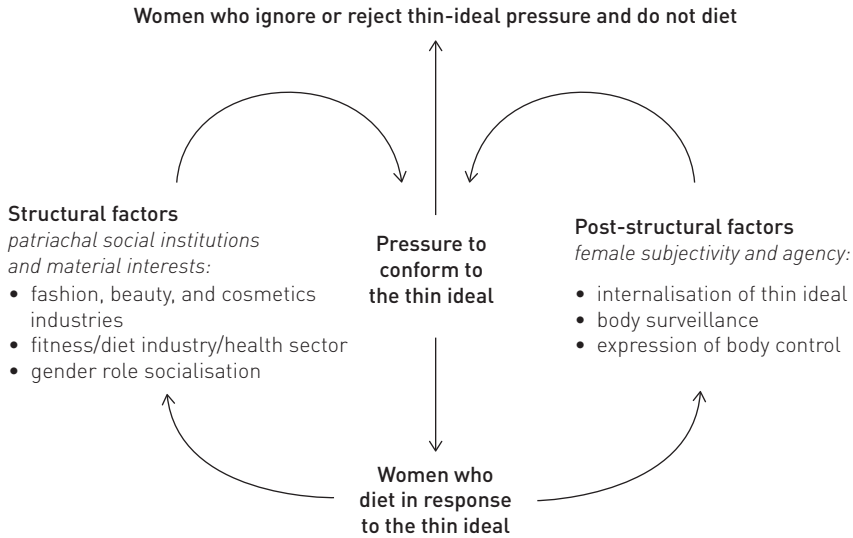
and cultural stereotypes. In effect, the social control of women's bodies becomes internalised by the women themselves. The desire to be seen as attractive and the pressure to conform socially are powerful reasons for weight control. The social importance placed on women's appearance can be so great that some women value weight loss above success in love or work (Charles & Kerr 1988; Wolf 1990). As Edwin Schur argues, 'physical appearance is much more central to evaluations of women than it is to evaluations of men; this emphasis implicitly devalues women's other qualities and accomplishments; women's "looks" thereby become a commodity and a key determinant of their "success" or "failure"' (1983, p. 68). Hesse-Biber (1991, 1996, 2007) argues that women are socialised to focus on physical appearance in order to receive social acceptance, while for men public achievement determines social worth and self-image. As Margaret Duncan states (1994, p. 50), women learn to 'compare their appearance with that of the patriarchal feminine ideal and thus become objects for their own gaze'.

Dieting and pursuit of the thin ideal can thus be viewed as a rational response by women striving for acceptance in the context of the dominant ideals of beauty, sexuality and femininity. The internalisation of patriarchal norms explains the active role women play in perpetuating the thin ideal (Bartky 1990). Women police their own bodies and the bodies of other women in a process of constant surveillance. In this way, the thin ideal is reinforced and perpetuated without coercion and often with women's consent. We have previously described this process of women's body monitoring as the 'body panopticon' effect (Germov & Williams 1999; see also Duncan 1994; Foucault 1979).

Our research has documented the myriad responses by women to the thin ideal (Germov & Williams 1996b). The benefit of a post-structuralist approach is that it sheds light on the active role that women play in the social construction of the thin ideal. While such an approach helps to explain the pervasiveness of the thin ideal, self-surveillance does not occur in a social vacuum and is reinforced by structural interests, such as the fashion, weight-loss, fitness, health and cosmetic industries.

Towards a synthesis of the structuralist and post-structuralist approaches

Both structuralist and post-structuralist perspectives are important in understanding the pressure on women to diet to attain the thin ideal—but can they be reconciled? On its own, neither perspective offers a complete explanation of why women diet. For example, structuralist explanations tend to imply that women are easily duped or even 'brainwashed' by the media, the fashion industry and men to succumb to the thin ideal. However, such an analysis ignores the fact that not all men act as oppressors of women (either consciously or implicitly) and that some women consciously and effectively resist the pressure to conform to the thin ideal. In an attempt to bridge these two approaches, we suggest that dieting and the thin ideal must be understood within a theoretical schema that acknowledges structural factors and female agency, but that avoids explanations of dieting behaviour as simply a matter of individual lifestyle choice. We have illustrated this model in Figure 14.2.

FIGURE 14.2 The social and cultural reproduction of the thin ideal

The starting point of Figure 14.2 is the pressure put on women in Western society to conform to the thin ideal. Our research has shown that women can respond to the pressure in one of two ways: by ignoring or actively rejecting the thin ideal, which takes them out of the cycle (as represented by the upward arrow); or, alternatively, by responding to the thin ideal by dieting, which results in gendered food and restrained eating practices (Germov & Williams 1999). The lists of structural and post-structural factors summarise the key modes by which the pressure to conform to the thin ideal is produced and reproduced (the arrows indicate the direction of influence). Dieting behaviour reinforces both structural interests (for example, the dieting industry) and post-structural factors (for example, self-surveillance), which in turn reinforce pressure to conform to the thin ideal and dieting behaviour, and the cycle continues.

Challenges to the thin ideal

Incorporating the concept of female agency to understand the production of the thin ideal also allows for the possibility of women rejecting this ideal in favour of an alternative ideal—that of **body acceptance**. Not all women respond to the thin ideal by internalising it and making it an integral part of their identity. Nor do all women perpetuate the thin ideal by reinforcing it in their relationships with—and evaluations of—other women. Research conducted with women who did or did not diet (detailed in Box 14.2) showed that responses to the thin ideal could be divided into the four categories listed in Table 14.1 (Germov & Williams 1999).

This categorisation scheme has more to do with whether or not women choose to conform to the thin ideal, and with the subsequent effect on their eating behaviour, than it has to do with actual body weight. Category 1 refers to the thin ideal 'body conformers' who diet to lose weight, either permanently or on an 'on-again, off-again' basis, which often results in weight cycling. Women who diet or who consciously restrict their eating (by eating low-fat, low-calorie foods, for example) may be of any weight, but will probably tend to be thinner than other women. The women in Category 4, whom we have called 'body acceptors', do not diet, possibly because they

have failed to achieve their desired weight and have decided to be unrestrained eaters, or because they have consciously rejected the thin ideal and accepted body diversity. In Category 3 are the 'weight maintainers', who have never needed to diet to stay thin and are unrestrained eaters. These women are able to conform to the thin ideal without effort. It is possible that if their weight were to increase, they would move to Category 1. A further group are the 'health maintainers' in Category 2, who do not pursue or conform to the thin ideal, but may seek to lose weight to improve their health or prevent the onset of disease (such as type 2 diabetes mellitus). Body-accepting women move out of the cycle depicted in Figure 14.2, thereby challenging the dominance of the thin ideal. Enough individuals are choosing this option to constitute an emerging social movement, variously termed the 'anti-dieting', 'size or body acceptance' or 'fat rights' movement (see Sobal Chapter 15).

TABLE 14.1 Responses to the thin ideal

	THIN IDEAL ACCEPTORS	THIN IDEAL REJECTORS
Diet to lose weight	<i>Category 1: Body conformers</i> Women who diet in pursuit of the thin ideal	<i>Category 2: Health maintainers</i> Women who diet for clear health benefits and not for aesthetic reasons
Do not diet	<i>Category 3: Weight maintainers</i> Women who are naturally slim and do not need to diet	<i>Category 4: Body acceptors</i> Women who accept body diversity and derive their self-identity from factors other than conforming to the thin ideal

Reflexive modernity, female identity and life politics

According to Anthony Giddens (1991), we live in an age of **reflexive modernity** in which social practices are increasingly questioned and changed as alternatives to past actions and beliefs come to light. The body, particularly the female body, has become a 'reflexive project', whereby the appearance of the body becomes a social marker of self-identity. The conscious monitoring and revision of appearance, behaviours and beliefs produces what Giddens refers to as **life politics**, defined as 'a politics of lifestyle' (1991, p. 214).

The life politics of body acceptance creates a bridge between the internal and external body—between self-identity and social identity. In an increasingly reflexive society, the conscious monitoring and revision of behaviours and beliefs creates the possibility of a socially reconstructed self-identity derived from life experiences and alternative body discourses. Furthermore, some women may translate their life politics of body acceptance into what Giddens (1991) refers to as **emancipatory politics**—that is, they may become body acceptance advocates and engage in public debate to undermine the dominance and salience of the thin ideal. For Giddens, emancipatory politics embodies a commitment to social justice and aims to reduce or eliminate discrimination and exploitation. Emancipatory body politics can be seen in the numerous groups and organisations that have formed to liberate women from the thin ideal. The US organisation National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) disseminates information and publicity material to promote body diversity, as well as lobbying governments and corporations about addressing size discrimination and **fatism** (Solovay 2000).

Critics of Giddens' notion of life politics and reflexivity argue that, when applied to women, such concepts tend to privilege self-determination and underestimate patriarchal constraints (McNay 2000; Frost 2001). Giddens does acknowledge the limits on lifestyle choice, saying that the existence of 'a multiplicity of choices is not to suppose that all choices are open to everyone ... the selection or creation of lifestyles is influenced by group pressures and the visibility of role models, as well as by socioeconomic circumstances' (1991, p. 82).

Evidence of alternatives to the thin ideal: Body acceptance and body diversity

Few empirical studies have investigated women who have ceased dieting. Those studies that have been conducted suggest the ability of some women to resist the thin ideal involves personal reflection, and is mediated by the ageing process, life achievements and self-esteem (Blood 1996, 2005; Williams & Germov 2004; Tunaley et al. 1999; Paquette & Raine 2004). Jillian Tunaley and colleagues (1999) interviewed 12 women between 63 and 75 years of age and found that even though the women reported some body dissatisfaction, they tended to dismiss the social pressure to be thin by viewing weight gain as an 'inevitable' by-product of ageing and judging the pursuit of a body ideal to be of less importance than the pursuit of their own interests. Sylvia Blood interviewed six New Zealand women between the ages of 23 and 39 about why they stopped dieting and rejected 'the myth of the "ideal body"' (1996, p. 111). Blood found that the cessation of dieting tended to occur once women developed 'self-acceptance' and countered 'the self-condemnation of body size' through an awareness of the negative influence on body image of external factors such as the media (1996, p. 112). Marie-Claude Paquette and Kim Raine (2004) interviewed 44 Canadian women between 21 and 61 years of age to explore personal and socio-cultural influences on body image. They found that despite the powerful effect of the media and other influences, a proportion of the women had come to accept their bodies through a process of reflection and empowerment.

In qualitative research conducted with 20 Australian women, we found body acceptance to be rare, even in women who reported not to diet (see Box 14.2 for detail about the study). Self-identity was no longer derived from the 'external body', but rather focused on 'internal' factors such as self-esteem and self-worth derived from life achievements. These findings illustrate Giddens' (1991) reflexive self in action, as some women exercised their agency to construct an alternative life politics to counteract or override the influence of the thin ideal. The formation of self-identity was also a social process, with participants commonly citing family members, particularly partners, as either positive or negative influences on their body acceptance.

The final theme to emerge from the study was that of non-discriminatory beliefs. Participants' acceptance of their own bodies was extended to the bodies of others, in support of body diversity and in rejection of one ideal body type. A few participants went further and drew a link between non-judgmental attitudes about the body and a broader tolerance of diversity and difference in society in line with Giddens' concept of emancipatory politics. This sheds light on how individuals' life politics can become the basis of social movements such as the fat-rights and anti-dieting movements.

BOX 14.2 A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN WHO DO AND DO NOT DIET

Study participants were drawn from a large established national cohort of mid-aged women participating in the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH) (Brown et al. 1998). Twenty women (aged 47–51) who indicated in the 1996 ALSWH survey that they were satisfied with their weight and had not dieted to lose weight in the previous year participated in individual interviews. The semi-structured interview protocol investigated the way the participants felt about their bodies and the factors influencing these body-image beliefs.

Although all participants had previously reported weight satisfaction and non-dieting behaviour in the earlier ALSWH survey, they were all in the medically defined 'healthy weight range'. When interviewed it became apparent that they did not all reject the thin ideal (see Table 14.1). Twelve women still conforming to the thin ideal were divided into 'body conformers' (Category 1 in Table 14.1) and 'weight maintainers' (Category 3). The weight maintainers remained thin without dieting, had been 'naturally' thin all their lives; 'never having what you'd call a weight problem' as one participant put it. For the thin ideal conformers, maintaining a slim body was central to their self-identity. These women valued a general aesthetic preference for thinness and some even espoused victim-blaming attitudes towards those they deemed overweight.

Only eight women espoused attitudes that did not conform to the thin ideal and were identified as 'thin ideal rejectors'; two of these eight indicated they would only diet to lose weight for health reasons and only if they gained a significant amount of weight, and were designated as 'health maintainers' (Category 2); the remaining six were 'body acceptors' (Category 4). These women tended to value body diversity and derived their self-identity from factors other than conformity to the thin ideal, including self-acceptance based on life achievements; the influence of significant others; and non-discriminatory personal beliefs.

Responses of health professionals to body acceptance: 'Health at Every Size'

In addition to activist organisations, some health professionals are recommending anti-dieting and body acceptance as part of a new health promotion paradigm known as 'Health at Every Size' (HAES) (Parham 1996, 1999; Kassirer & Angell 1998; Herrin et al. 1999; Higgins & Gray 1999; Ikeda 2000; Ikeda et al. 1999; Jutel 2001; Miller & Jacob 2001; Polivy & Herman 2002; Miller 2005; see Strain 1999 for a contrary view). The HAES paradigm focuses on psychological processes and holistic health rather than weight loss, and interventions of this nature focus on improving individuals' physical and psychological health, regardless of weight. Its advocates argue that people who are already overweight can be fit and healthy. While they do not dispute obesity-related health risks, they maintain that there is little evidence to support the position that weight loss per se improves health in individuals who are overweight, especially given the seemingly paradoxical empirical findings that suggest intentional weight loss is linked to increased mortality (Sorensen 2003; Yang et al. 2003). They cite the continuing high failure rate of weight-loss diets; the rising prevalence of overweight, despite the widespread promotion of weight loss by health authorities; the detrimental effects of weight cycling; and the fact that chronic dieting is a risk factor for eating disorders through increasing obsessive thoughts about food and eating, and greater risk of depression and overeating (Gagnon-Girouard et al. 2010).

Evidence to support the effectiveness of the HAES approach is growing through recent randomised controlled trials. When randomised into one of three groups: a HAES intervention group, a social support group, and a control group, two studies have shown the HAES group to experience significant weight loss (Provencher et al. 2009; Gagnon-Girouard et al. 2010). One of the studies also measured psychological variables and found that all interventions significantly improved body satisfaction, self-esteem and quality of life, but only the HAES group maintained these positive changes one year later (Gagnon-Girouard et al. 2010). Leblanc and colleagues (2012) showed that hunger and daily energy intake decreased in the HAES group. These studies show that promoting HAES has the potential to improve physical and psychological health and wellbeing. Given this evidence, some health professionals believe it is inappropriate to promote weight loss *per se*. Dietitians such as Joanne Ikeda and others advocate alternative strategies to minimise health risks and promote positive self-esteem, body acceptance, healthy eating and moderate exercise—epitomised in the tenets of size acceptance listed in Box 14.3. However, it should be noted that this is a contentious issue within the dietetic profession itself, with other dietitians opposing the promotion of body acceptance.

BOX 14.3 TENETS OF SIZE ACCEPTANCE

- Human beings come in a variety of sizes and shapes. We celebrate this diversity as a positive characteristic of the human race.
- There is no ideal body size, shape or weight that every individual should strive to achieve.
- Every body is a good body, whatever its size or shape.
- Self-esteem and body image are strongly linked. Helping people feel good about their bodies and about who they are can help motivate and maintain healthy behaviours.
- Appearance stereotyping is inherently unfair to the individual because it is based on superficial factors that the individual has little or no control over.
- We respect the bodies of others even though they might be quite different from our own.
- Each person is responsible for taking care of his or her own body.
- Good health is not defined by body size; it is a state of physical, mental and social wellbeing.
- People of all sizes and shapes can reduce their risk of poor health by adopting a healthy lifestyle.

Source: Ikeda, undated, www.uwyo.edu/winwyoming/tenets.htm

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the influence of gender on eating practices including food choice and food preparation, and examined the way in which gender influences the disciplining of the body for both women and men. The case of women's bodies was considered in detail as an example of the social construction of gendered bodies, by examining the historical, structural and cultural factors that underlie the reasons for the sexual division of dieting and the pervasive nature of the thin ideal. A critical conceptual framework was adopted to reconcile structuralist and post-structuralist approaches. Women are not merely victims of patriarchal and capitalist imperatives, nor are they simply free to adopt or reject the thin ideal as they please. Some women

actively participate in the reproduction of the thin ideal, while others resist it by constructing alternative discourses, such as that of body acceptance. We argue for a nuanced approach that conceptualises a 'body project' that accounts for the influence of both social structure and agency on female identity. Raewyn Connell (2002, p. 47) refers to this process as **social embodiment**—that is, 'human social conduct in which bodies are both agents and objects'. While some women pursue the life politics of the thin ideal, albeit under significant social pressure, there is evidence that others construct their self-identity through alternative lifestyles. This framework attempts to move beyond both deterministic and voluntaristic assumptions of women's identity formation in order to understand how some women resist patriarchal social pressure and reject the thin ideal.

The empirical research conducted into body acceptance has shown that age and external influences affect body acceptance in women. We found that non-discriminatory attitudes contribute to the acceptance of the body in all its diversity. Such life politics or lifestyle factors, as Giddens states, create a set of routinised practices that 'give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity' (1991, p. 81). The anti-dieting and size-acceptance social movements, which have modelled themselves on the successful civil rights and women's liberation movements, provide an alternative form of social acceptance (of body diversity) by attempting to influence cultural and institutional practices. The rejection of the thin ideal and the promotion of body acceptance are key strategies through which body dissatisfaction and associated unnecessary and harmful dieting practices can be challenged. Some health professionals are embracing this movement because of its beneficial effects on health and wellbeing.

Acknowledgments

The research by the authors reported in this chapter was supported by a grant awarded by the University of Newcastle, Australia. Grateful thanks are due to Ishtar Sladdin for researching the recent literature used to update the text for this edition.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- Gender is a social construct that is subject to change.
- Gender plays a significant role in how men and women eat, prepare food and seek to discipline their bodies.
- Women are subject to pressure to conform to a thin ideal, while men experience a drive for muscularity.
- A sexual division of dieting exists, in which dieting to lose weight is primarily a female act.
- The thin ideal has historical origins and is linked to events that have enhanced women's social status and power.
- Sociological explanations of why women diet can be divided into two broad categories: structuralist and post-structuralist.
- The representation of women as victims of patriarchal subordination has been successfully critiqued by post-structuralist feminist theorists through a renewed focus on women's agency and the subjective experiences of femininity.
- An understanding of why women diet and of the persistence of the thin ideal requires a synthesis of structural and post-structural factors.
- Giddens' concepts of life politics and emancipatory politics provide a useful theoretical framework for understanding the interplay of structure and agency in the social construction of women's and men's bodies and identities in Western society.
- Women react to the thin ideal in myriad ways—accepting, reinforcing and resisting the dominant discourse.
- Resistance of the thin ideal through body acceptance and the 'Health at Every Size' social movement is gaining momentum.

Sociological reflection

- Do you accept your own body? Do you judge other people's bodies?
- If you are a woman, reflect on where you fit into the schema presented in Table 14.1. Have you always been in this category, or have you changed the way you respond to your body? If so, what do you think caused that change?
- If you are male, what body-ideal pressures are you subject to? Are these pressures equivalent to the pressures on women to conform to the thin ideal?

Discussion questions

- 1 What are the differences between the structuralist and post-structuralist perspectives on the thin ideal?
- 2 How did the thin ideal and the muscular ideal originate, and why did they become so pervasive?
- 3 How do women and men perpetuate the thin ideal and the muscular ideal?
- 4 In what ways do you think women's and men's notions of body acceptance differ? What are some of the key factors that influence whether women and men accept their body?
- 5 Should health professionals in countries with a high prevalence of overweight and obesity promote body acceptance?
- 6 Discuss the potential of the 'Health at Every Size' movement to dismantle the thin ideal. Do you think this could happen in your lifetime? In what ways could this movement be extended to address the muscular ideal?

Further investigation

- 1 Some authors argue that there is a parallel between Victorian attitudes to sex and modern attitudes to food, such that 'food rules have become as dour and inhibitory as the sex rules of the 19th century' (Seid 1994, p. 8). Discuss the implications of this quote with reference to gender and food.
- 2 The media is to blame for the thin ideal and the associated harmful dieting practices and eating disorders of many women. Discuss.
- 3 The pressure on men to meet the muscular ideal results in harmful exercise practices and the taking of non-prescription drugs that are just as dangerous as the thin ideal for women. Discuss.
- 4 How have health professionals contributed to the reinforcement or dismantling of the thin ideal?
- 5 To what extent could the promotion of body acceptance challenge the thin ideal? What evidence have you seen that an alternative body ideal may be emerging?

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

- Blood, S.K. 2005, *Body Work: The Social Construction of Women's Body Image*, Routledge, London.
- Brownell, K.D., Puhl, R.M., Schwartz, M.B. & Rudd, L. (eds) 2005, *Weight Bias: Nature, Consequences, and Remedies*, Guilford Press, New York.
- Grogan, S. 2007, *Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women and Children*, 2nd edition, Routledge, London.
- Hesse-Biber, S. 2007, *The Cult of Thinness*, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, New York.
- O'Connell, R. & Brannen, J. 2016, *Food, Families and Work*, Bloomsbury Academic.
- Parsons, J.M. 2015, *Gender, Class and Food: Families, Bodies and Health*, Palgrave.
- Schwartz, H. 1986, *Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies and Fat*, The Free Press, New York.
- Sobal, J. & Maurer, D. (eds) 1999, *Weighty Issues: Fatness and Thinness as Social Problems*, Aldine de Gruyter, New York.

Articles and book chapters

- Corrigan, A. & Meredyth, D. 1997, 'The Body Politic', in K. Pritchard Hughes (ed.), *Contemporary Australian Feminism 2*, 2nd edition, Longman, Melbourne.
- Germov, J. & Williams, L. 1996, 'The Sexual Division of Dieting: Women's Voices', *Sociological Review*, vol. 44, no. 4, pp. 630–47.
- Miller, W.C. & Jacob, A.V. 2001, 'The Health at Any Size Paradigm for Obesity

- Treatment: The Scientific Evidence', *Obesity Reviews*, vol. 2, pp. 37–45.
- Parham, E.S. 1999, 'Promoting Body Size Acceptance in Weight Management Counseling', *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, vol. 99, no. 8, pp. 920–6.
- Williams, L., Germov, J. & Young, A. 2011, 'The Effect of Social Class on Mid-Age Women's Weight Control Practices and Weight Gain', *Appetite*, vol. 56, pp. 719–25.

Documentaries and films

- Disfigured*, 2008. A film about women, weight and the fat acceptance movement. (96 minutes).
- The Illusionists*, 2014. A documentary about the marketing of unattainable beauty throughout the world. 91 minutes: Director's cut; 51 minutes: TV/educational cut.
- Miss Representation*, 2011. A documentary examining how women are presented in the media. (89 minutes).

Websites

- About-Face: www.about-face.org/
- Adios Barbie: www.adiosbarbie.com/
- Health at Every Size: <http://haescommunity.com/>
- Healthy Weight Network: www.healthyweightnetwork.com/
- National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance: www.naafaonline.com/dev2/
- Women's Health Australia—The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health: www.alswh.org.au/

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- AIHW—see Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
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CHAPTER 15

SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE STIGMATISATION OF OBESITY

Jeffery Sobal

OVERVIEW

- › Why is obesity stigmatised?
- › What sociological approaches are useful in explaining the stigmatisation of obesity?
- › How do individuals deal with the stigmatisation of obesity?

Stigmas are attributes of a person that are deeply discrediting, and obesity is highly stigmatised in contemporary Western post-industrial societies. Obesity is the condition of having high levels of stored body fat. Sociological work on the stigmatisation of obesity can be divided into two major streams: one focusing on documenting the presence, arenas, extent and sources of stigmatisation; and the other examining strategies for managing and negotiating the stigma of obesity. Prejudice, labelling, stigmatisation and discrimination based on obesity are very widespread, and occur in many arenas of life: work, family, health and everyday interactions.

Obesity is stigmatised more than some conditions, but less than others. A variety of coping mechanisms are used by people who are obese, including denial, concealment, avoidance, mutual aid and redefinition of situations. Eating is an especially problematic act for those who are obese, because of the potential for stigmatisation. The coping strategies used to explain food choices include providing several types of accounts, making disclaimers and

discounting some eating behaviours. Some people who are obese adopt 'fat' identities as they deal with the stigmatisation of obesity. Sociologists have examined the stigmatisation of obesity from several mainstream disciplinary perspectives, and yet many aspects of the stigmatisation of obesity remain unresolved and need further attention.

KEY TERMS

accounts
 attribution
 avoidance
 concealment
 constructionist-symbolic-interactionist
 culture-bound syndrome
 denial
 deviant
 disclaimer
 discounting
 dramaturgical analyses
 ethnographic techniques
 functionalism
 marginality
 master status
 mutual aid
 obesity
 participant observation
 post-industrial society
 redefining situations
 stigma
 stigmatising act
 symbolic interactionism

Introduction

A **stigma** is 'an attribute that is deeply discrediting' and that disqualifies a person from full social acceptance (Goffman 1963, p. 3). Stigmatised individuals are seen as blemished, disgraced and tainted, and routine social interactions become problematic for them. Types of stigma include physical deformities, character blemishes and group stigmas (Goffman 1963). **Obesity** has become a stigma in contemporary **post-industrial societies**, and sociological perspectives on the stigmatisation of obesity are the focus of this chapter.

It has been over 50 years since Erving Goffman (1963) brought the concept of stigma to the forefront of sociological attention with his classic book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Since Goffman's insightful explication of the concept of stigma, the term and idea have diffused widely through sociology, other social sciences and wider public discourse (Link & Phelan 2001; Pescosolido & Martin 2015), with psychologists showing particular interest (Heatherton et al. 2000).

In contemporary post-industrial societies, many conditions and characteristics are socially defined as **deviant** rather than being accepted as 'normal'. These conditions are viewed as marginal, labelled as 'deviant', and stigmatised. The **marginality** of an attribute is not necessarily based on its prevalence or functionality, but instead is based on the social norms and values attached to that particular trait or condition. Individuals who are marginal with respect to one attribute are not necessarily marginal in other respects (Sobal & Hinrichs 1986). Marginal conditions that are stigmatised in contemporary society include those that are medical (AIDS, cancer, leprosy, physical deformities, infertility, disability), economic (poverty, unemployment, use of welfare, homelessness), sociocultural (ethnicity, homosexuality, prostitution, criminality, illiteracy, substance abuse, divorce), along with many other types of conditions. Obesity is a stigma that has received much attention from social scientists.

Obesity is the condition in which a person has a high level of stored body fat. The amount of body fat that people possess varies across a wide continuum. The leanest individuals carry only a few per cent of their total body weight as stored fat, while the majority of the fattest people's body weight is made up of stored fat. Cut-off points for defining obesity have not been absolute and universally agreed upon, and many standards have been used in practice (Dalton 1997). For sociological purposes, obesity can simply be considered as the condition in which an individual has relatively high amounts of body fat (Sobal & Devine 1997; Sobal 2001). Quantitative definitions that specify exactly the level of fat that constitutes obesity are often not necessary for examining sociological patterns and processes, despite their emphasis in biomedical work. A relative definition of obesity permits variation among different groups (such as dancers and construction workers) in their evaluations of how much body fat is excessive.

Public beliefs about the causes of obesity tend to focus on the assumption that people who are obese overeat and consume too much caloric energy, rather than on the role of low activity levels and low energy expenditure in producing obesity. In contemporary post-industrial societies, where the food system provides people with ample access to a wide variety of foods, many of which are high in fat and are calorically dense, there is a strong link between food, eating and weight. Post-industrial food systems add calories at all stages (production, processing, distribution, acquisition, preparation and consumption) and are labelled 'fattening food systems' (Sobal 2001). Sociologists have commented on how the social system provides easy access to high-calorie inexpensive food, with a consequently high prevalence of obesity and the parallel development of a rejection of fatness (McIntosh 1996; Beardsworth & Keil 1997).

The stigmatisation of obesity reflects the extent to which high body weight is socially defined as either central or marginal to what is collectively agreed upon and accepted as 'normal' in society (or a portion of society). Thus a person with lower body weight than the average may be defined as socially normal, while someone with a body weight equally far above the average may be regarded as marginal and be stigmatised. Where negative and prejudicial attitudes about obesity exist, obesity is treated as a physical deformity, and people who are obese are discredited and discriminated against.

Cultural and historical factors

The cultural and historical location of the current stigmatisation of obesity is important to consider in order to gain a broader, relative perspective on how the stigma of obesity is socially constructed (Sobal 2001). Traditional societies, which have not been involved in the modernisation associated with the Industrial Revolution, tend to appreciate and value at least moderate, if not large, amounts of body fat (Brown & Konner 1987). Traditional cultures view stored body fat as a sign of health and wealth, particularly for women (Sobal & Stunkard 1989).

Traditional societies are characterised by harsh survival conditions where food supplies may be uncertain; moreover, foods with concentrated fat sources are scarce and everyday life involves considerable energy expenditure. Consequently, people who can attain at least a moderate degree of fatness are viewed as attractive; they are observably not afflicted by a wasting disease or intestinal parasites, and appear to have access to the social resources necessary to obtain food. Cross-cultural data about body preferences for women reveal that over 80 per cent of cultures for which body shape preference data are available prefer a plump shape (Anderson et al. 1992). The value of fatness in many African and Pacific cultures is evidenced by the existence of fattening huts (Brink 1989), in which women (and sometimes men) engage in ritualistic ingestion of huge amounts of food and avoid activity to gain large amounts of weight to enhance their beauty and social status (Gaurine & Pollock 1995). The high prevalence of obesity and the strong rejection of body fat in Western, post-industrial nations are very different conditions from most other cultures, and anthropologists have described obesity as a **culture-bound syndrome** unique to Western societies (Ritenbaugh 1982).

Historical changes in the evaluation and prevalence of obesity also provide important perspectives about the current patterns of stigmatisation of obesity. Like traditional cultures today and in the past, most Western societies until the late nineteenth century valued at least moderate levels of body fat (Brumberg 1988; Stearns 1997). At the beginning of the twentieth century, a transformation in values relating to fatness was underway, as modern ideals of thinness were established, promulgated and widely applied (Farrell, 2011; Stearns 1997). The emphasis on thinness intensified in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly for women. Evidence for this can be seen in the increasingly thinner body shapes of women in idealised social roles, such as beauty pageant winners (Garner et al. 1980; Wiseman et al. 1992) and fashion models (Morris et al. 1989). As pressures towards slimness escalated and intensified, fatness moved from being a social ideal to being rejected as a marginal, deviant and stigmatised attribute. Most concern about body weight is motivated by appearance, not health (Hayes & Ross 1987).

The stigma of obesity as a master status

Attribution of responsibility for a stigma is a crucial consideration: stigmas that are not considered the 'fault' of an individual are treated differently from those for which personal

'blame' can be attributed (DeJong 1980, 1993; Menec & Perry 1995). The causes of high body weight are currently not established with certainty, with claims and counterclaims about whether obesity is the result of overeating, lack of activity, the built environment, or genetic or hormonal conditions (Saguy & Riley 2005; Sobal 1995). These disputes about the causes of obesity remain unresolved in the scientific and medical community, as well as among the general public. Stigmatising claims about gluttony and sloth are counterpoised with destigmatising claims about inheritance and metabolism. The general orientation in contemporary society is to hold people who are obese individually accountable for their size, and to discredit and reject them as personal failures.

An important aspect of stigma is that it is often incorporated into individuals' identities and involved in their self-concepts. The impact of stigmas varies, with some stigmas being of only minor importance and others dominating a person and becoming a **master status** (Goffman 1963). People who are obese are often characterised more by their size than by any of their other attributes, being described as simply 'fat' rather than being dealt with on the basis of other qualities. The effects of stigmatisation of obesity are often internalised, particularly by women (Crocker et al. 1993; Sobal & Devine 1997). Negative social stereotypes relating to obesity often become self-fulfilling prophecies for people who are obese.

Feminist analysis has shown that some stigmas, particularly obesity, are highly gendered (Bordo 1993; Yancey et al. 2006). Stigmatisation of obesity is much more problematic for women because they are evaluated more on the basis of their appearance and weight than are men (Millman 1980). The gendered nature of the stigmatisation of obesity makes weight much more important to women (Tiggemann & Rothblum 1988; Germov & Williams 1996; see also Chapter 14).

Ever since Steven Richardson and his colleagues' (1961) pioneering quantitative research and Werner Cahnman's (1968) interactionist analysis, sociologists have been examining the stigma of obesity. Sociological analysis of the stigma of obesity typically uses two mainstream theoretical perspectives—**functionalism** and **symbolic interactionism**—and has rarely applied other theoretical orientations, such as Marxism (Veenstra 2006) or rational choice theory (Cawley et al. 2006).

While a variety of research methods have been applied to the study of stigmatisation of obesity (Sobal 2011), the bulk of sociological studies have used the two major sociological data-collection methods of quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. Functionalist analysis generally quantitatively documents and describes as social facts the presence, arenas, extent and sources of the stigmatisation of individuals who are obese. This stream of analysis takes a positivist approach in examining stigma as a barrier to access to social roles and privileges. Analyses often use quantitative surveys or experiments to analyse the frequency and extent of stigmatisation.

Interactionist analysis usually qualitatively examines the strategies that individuals who are obese use to manage their stigma and to negotiate their way in a world that values thinness. It does so while considering the construction of social definitions of obesity. These analyses follow the **constructionist-symbolic-interactionist** tradition, often appealing to **dramaturgical analyses** grounded in the work of Goffman (1959, 1963). These investigations often employ **ethnographic techniques**, such as **participant observation** and in-depth interviews, to investigate stigmatisation as a socially constructed, negotiated and managed process (Sobal & Maurer 1999a, 1999b). These two lines of analysis will be reviewed in the next two sections.

The presence, arenas, extent and sources of stigmatisation of obesity

Severe stigmatisation of people who are obese exists in contemporary post-industrial societies (Allon 1981; Sobal 1984a, 1991; Goode 1996), although some reviews suggest that the negative effects of the stigmatisation of obesity have not been clearly demonstrated (Jarvie et al. 1983). In addition to establishing the presence of stigmatisation of obesity, studies have examined the arenas, extent and sources of stigmatisation.

Stigmatisation operates in many arenas, occurring broadly across most domains of an obese person's world—at work, at home, in public life and so on (Carr & Friedman 2005; Lewis et al. 2011). This observation supports the concept that obesity becomes a 'master status' (Goffman 1963) that pervades all aspects of life. Studies of stigmatisation have focused on some areas more than others, with much research having been carried out on stigmatisation in formal roles, such as that of employee. Less research has been done on stigmatisation in informal roles, such as that of friend (Sobal 2005). The major arenas in which stigmatisation of the obese has been documented are education and work, marriage and family, health and medical care, and interpersonal and social interactions.

Individuals in the United States who are obese have long been less favourably evaluated than thinner individuals for admission to the higher education essential for entry and advancement in many careers, and receive less financial support when they are admitted to college (Canning & Mayer 1966; Crandall 1991, 1995; Crosnoe 2007). People who are obese are also less successful in gaining employment and entering the labour force (Fikkan & Rothblum 2005). People who are obese who do become employees receive lower wages than comparable co-workers, are less likely to receive promotions, and experience more discrimination on the job (Averett & Korenman 1996; Cawley 2003). Overall, stigmatisation of individuals who are obese consistently occurs across the span of educational and work roles.

Weight is an important criterion for dating and mate selection, and people who are obese (women in particular) have a more difficult time dating and finding marital partners than do thinner individuals (Cawley et al. 2006; Sobal 1984b; Sobal et al. 1992, 1995, 2003). Most people who are obese eventually marry, but their choice of partners is restricted because of their stigmatised condition (Garn et al. 1989). Obese women, once married, may feel they are unable to leave their marriage because they have less value on the marriage market (Cawley et al. 2006; Sobal et al. 1995). These research findings show that stigmatisation of people who are obese occurs in the entry into and maintenance of marital and family roles (Hanson et al. 2014).

Health professionals frequently stigmatise patients who are obese, holding prejudicial attitudes and exhibiting them in discriminatory actions. Health-care professionals—including physicians, nurses, counsellors, dietitians, psychologists and health administrators—at many stages of their careers (as students, interns, practitioners and educators) have negative attitudes and beliefs about people who are obese (Fabricatore et al. 2005). The antipathy exhibited by student health practitioners towards people who are obese suggests that their attitudes are based on wider societal values about obesity, rather than on actual problems that they have experienced in dealing with obese clients. Prejudicial attitudes among health-care professionals towards people who are obese among health-care professionals have for many years been translated into discrimination in the provision of health-care services, such as diagnosis and treatment (Allon 1979; Young & Powell 1985). Health-care providers are not immune to the stigmatisation of individuals who are obese as they carry out their professional roles, providing unequal health-care service on the basis of body weight (Fabricatore et al. 2005).

The everyday interactions of people who are obese may also be hampered by stigmatisation (Pauley 1989; Sobal 2005). Compared with their thinner counterparts, those who are obese are discriminated against in basic transactions such as renting apartments (Karris 1977). Some investigations report that people who are obese have fewer friends (Strauss & Pollack 2003), although other studies find this not to be the case (Miller et al. 1995a). Overall, stigmatisation operates as a multidimensional burden on individuals who are obese, spanning work, family, health and interpersonal arenas.

The public at large stigmatises those who are obese in informal interactions of many types (Sobal 2005). The mass media stigmatise people who are obese actively by negatively representing those large people who do appear on television, and passively by not including large people in television, film and other media in numbers proportional to their presence in the general population (Fouts & Burggraf 1999; Fouts & Vaughan 2002; Wykes & Gunter 2005). The mass media also present extremely thin people as the ideal, which leads to negative comparisons of individuals who are obese with media images (Myers & Biocca 1992; Waller et al. 1994).

A classic series of sociological investigations compared the stigmatisation of physical disabilities with the stigmatisation of obesity by showing participants a series of pictures of children with a variety of disabilities as well as pictures of an obese child and asking who they would prefer as a friend (Richardson et al. 1961; Goodman et al. 1963; Maddox & Liederman 1968; Richardson 1970, 1971). The striking findings revealed that both adults and children consistently preferred disabled people to people who are obese, providing clear evidence that obesity is more stigmatised than physical disabilities such as blindness, crippling diseases, amputations and facial disfigurements. A replication of these studies 40 years after the first ones claimed that stigmatisation of obese children by other children had increased significantly over time in the United States (Latner & Stunkard 2003). However, in other cultures, such as in Nepal, children reacted positively to the pictures of the obese child (Harper 1997).

Some broader comparative analyses of stigmatisation of different forms of deviant conditions have been conducted. Several studies reveal that obesity is seen as being as stigmatised as many other deviant conditions, such as AIDS, drug addiction, criminal behaviour and homosexuality (Spiegel & Keith-Spiegel 1973; Weiner et al. 1988; Schwarzer & Weiner 1990). Stigmatisation of obesity is more severe than that of eating disorders (Brotman et al. 1984; Sobal et al. 1995), although eating disorders are also stigmatised and carry negative evaluations (Way 1995; Sobal & Bursztyl 1998). The stigma of obesity may combine with other stigmas, cumulating to produce 'double jeopardy' in discrimination (Napier et al. 2005). While legal measures and social norms have greatly reduced the stigmatisation of many racial, religious, gender and sexual groups, prejudice against and derogation of people who are obese are tolerated and even treated as socially acceptable (Solovay 2000).

In summary, stigmatisation of people who are obese exists, is prevalent and often intense, occurs in multifaceted ways, and emanates from a variety of sources.

Coping with the stigma of obesity

Goffman (1963) used the concept of stigma within a broad theoretical examination of interpersonal interaction processes, revealing the development and management of deviant identities. The development of the concept of stigma complemented his other sociological work on the presentation of self, dramaturgical role analysis and impression management (Goffman 1959, 1961). Based on the perspectives used by Goffman, many sociologists and psychologists have examined how individuals who are obese construct their identities and manage their interactions with others so as to cope with being stigmatised (Puhl & Brownell 2003) situated within social categories (Kusow 2004).

Stigmatising acts can be verbal (such as teasing, joking and negative comments) or non-verbal (such as staring, making gestures and avoiding a person). Stigmatisation can be active (operating through overt negative behaviours) or passive (occurring through avoidance of interactions with stigmatised individuals).

Everyday life involves the performance of a variety of activities, with individuals operating as actors presenting themselves to actual or imagined others who constitute audiences for their behaviour (Goffman 1959). Stigmatised individuals recognise that their performance of various tasks may be disrupted by negative treatment as a result of their stigma, and attempt to prevent or deal with problems resulting from their stigma. People who are obese are treated negatively in social interactions because of their body size and develop many strategies for dealing with the stigmatising acts of others (Sobal 1991; Brownell et al. 2005).

Gaining and maintaining acceptance is a central feature of a stigmatised person's life. Although legitimacy in interpersonal interactions may be claimed by individuals, it is conferred by others (Elliott et al. 1990). A variety of coping mechanisms exist for individuals with various types of stigma. These include denial, concealment, avoidance, redefinition of situations and mutual aid (Elliott et al. 1990; Puhl & Brownell 2003, 2006).

Denial is used by some people who are obese, particularly men (Monaghan 2008), to deal with interactional challenges associated with their body weight (Millman 1980). By denying that they are 'really' fat, or denying that the fat they have is their fault, they effectively ignore the stigma of obesity; this strategy offers one way of coping for particular individuals in specific situations. This type of management of stigmatising acts typically involves claims that large size or weight is caused by muscle, large bones or genetics.

Concealment is a form of strategic impression management whereby a stigma is hidden, disguised or modified to make it less obtrusive and therefore less likely to be attended to or focused on in a social encounter. Many individuals who are obese make considerable efforts in concealment, including hiding parts of their bodies by wearing loose or heavy clothing to mask their size. One form of concealment is deflection or distraction, whereby other aspects of appearance, such as hair or jewellery, are used to draw attention away from an obese person's body. 'Passing' occurs when stigmatised individuals successfully conceal their stigma and are accepted as 'normal' (Goffman 1963); passing as 'normal' may or may not be possible for an obese individual in face-to-face interaction, depending on the extent of their weight and their ability to conceal it.

Avoidance and withdrawal are common methods of coping with stigmatisation. Many stigmatised individuals arrange their lives so as to avoid or minimise stigmatising contacts, because of uncertainty about how 'normals' will receive and deal with them (Goffman 1963). Many people who are obese practise selective or widespread avoidance of social settings and individuals where they perceive a likelihood of being stigmatised. This involves outright refusal to enter some situations, particularly those in which their entire body will be on display, such as on a beach, at a swimming pool or in a locker room. Management of the frequency, content and extent of interactions with particular individuals is another form of avoidance, with those who are obese eschewing contact with people who have stigmatised them in the past or who are thought to be likely to engage in future stigmatising acts. Self-segregation (Schur 1979) occurs where stigmatised individuals interact with, and accept as 'insiders', only those who are obese or are 'wise' (Goffman 1963) to the plight of overweight people.

Redefining situations lets a stigmatised person steer the topic or subject of interactions away from a stigmatised condition to other more neutral or safe areas. People who are obese often develop strategies for deflecting or shifting the focus of interactions away from their size to other topics (Sobal 1991). The threat of stigmatisation leads some people who are obese to

present themselves in a comedic role, using humour to facilitate and negotiate interactions with people who could potentially discredit them because of their size.

Mutual aid is a strategy whereby communities of stigmatised individuals form to share feelings and resources and provide social support for one another (Goffman 1963). Mutual aid ranges from the exchange of stories and ideas between obese friends to the establishment of national or international organisations to promote size acceptance (Sobal 1999). While the manifest goal of weight-loss programs is to become thinner through diet and exercise, the latent services often sought and provided through such groups are the sharing of emotional support and the exchange of coping strategies for dealing with being overweight (Allon 1975; Laslett & Warren 1975).

Collective behaviour often results from the establishment of advocacy groups and organisations, and the size-acceptance movement has established itself as an important force in contemporary public discourse on obesity (Boero 2012; Kwan & Graves 2013; Saguy 2013; Sobal 1999). Many large people rebel against sizeism, fatism or weightism and celebrate their bodies (Joanisse & Synnott 1999; Braziel & LeBesco 2001).

Eating is an especially problematic act for people who are obese (English 1991), because it carries so much potential for critique and criticism by others (Zdrodowski 1996). Several sociological concepts help us to identify some of the special coping methods used by stigmatised individuals when their eating behaviours are scrutinised by others. Even when an obese person eats the same things as a 'normal'-weight companion, the obese person faces the threat of being criticised for overeating. Stigmatising acts include challenges to, and criticisms of, the eating behaviours of individuals who are obese. People who are obese may avoid food events entirely as a way of coping with the threat of being discredited. Alternatively, they may attend but eat nothing, or they may eat selectively and be prepared to explain their food choices.

Individuals who are obese may defend the legitimacy of their eating behaviour by providing what Scott and Lyman (1963) term '**accounts**' (English 1991; Orbuch 1997). Accounts can be divided into justifications and excuses (Scott & Lyman 1963). Justifications accept responsibility but deny the negative qualities of the behaviour, as when an obese person eating confectionery claims that it is the only thing that they have eaten all day. Excuses admit the negative qualities of an action, but deny responsibility, and there are several types. Accident excuses deny fault because a behaviour was beyond personal control, as when an obese individual eating ice-cream claims that it was the only food available. Defensibility excuses state that insufficient information was available, as when an obese person claims to have believed that the food being eaten was a reduced-calorie version. Biological-drive excuses explain actions in terms of a lack of control over a behaviour, as when an obese person claims that hormones led him or her to eat a particular item.

There are other ways of managing eating related to accounts. **Disclaimers** (Hewett & Stokes 1975) anticipate challenges to legitimacy, as in claims by people who are obese that they have adhered to a restricted diet earlier in anticipation of a particular food event. **Discounting** (Pestello 1991) includes several strategies. Coercion discounting occurs when a violation of personal principles is outside a person's control, as when an obese person claims that someone else prepared high-calorie foods for them. Exception discounting involves compromises that are seen as serving a greater purpose, as when an obese person claims not to have wanted to offend someone by refusing to eat high-calorie ceremonial foods that were specially prepared. Denial discounting makes no admission of a behaviour or its meaning, as when an obese person eats what is served at a dinner and makes no comments or explanations about the food. Concealment discounting entails accepting responsibility for a behaviour but denying that the behaviour is negative, as when an obese person reports having eaten a chocolate dessert but claims that the chocolate prevents other food cravings. All of these techniques are used to socially manage eating. They help people who are obese to negotiate a path through potentially precarious social interactions and to ward off threats to their selves.

Often people who are obese develop a 'fat identity' as they accept their weight, and they establish and elaborate a social self that incorporates weight as a personal attribute (Degher & Hughes 1991; Hughes & Degher 1993). Attempts to lose weight also involve aspiration to a new, thinner identity. Many people who are obese perceive this as the attainment of a 'normal' weight status, which will free them from stigmatisation. Often people who do change their weight have to reconcile their social identity with their body size (English 1993; Mustillo et al. 2012; Rubin et al. 1993), and this may have later health consequences (Schafer & Ferraro 2011). Renegotiation of body identity and stigmatisation occurs especially after weight loss surgery (Throsby 2008; Joannis 2005). Thinner identities may be seen as desirable in that they avoid stigmatisation, but they may also carry undesirable consequences, such as the need to deal with unwanted sexual advances, which did not occur before (Sobal 1984a).

While people who are obese suffer from stigmatisation in contemporary post-industrial society, they employ many strategies to cope with their stigma and to establish functional life patterns in spite of negative societal attitudes towards them. Psychological strategies are used to compensate for stigma (Miller et al. 1995b; Puhl & Brownell 2006), and social relationships are established to buffer against negative experiences (Millman 1980).

Organisations and groups help to empower individuals by validating and valorising their struggles against the weight prejudices of many people in the wider society (Kwan & Graves, 2013; Saguy 2013; Sobal 1999). Struggles with negative attitudes and with social avoidance and ostracism are often required throughout an obese individual's life, requiring coping efforts that deeply shape their identities. Sociological analyses that examine how individuals who are obese construct, negotiate and manage their lives provide a portrait of the stigmatisation of obesity that differs from, but complements, work describing the prevalence and types of stigmatisation.

Conclusion

Over the past 50 years, stigma has emerged as an important sociological concept, grounded in the pioneering work of Erving Goffman (1963). The concept of stigma has been widely applied to a variety of conditions, stretching and testing the boundaries of its conceptual coverage. Obesity was mentioned as a stigmatised condition in Goffman's seminal book, and it remains a clear case of a stigma in contemporary society.

The examination and elaboration of the concept of stigmatisation in relation to obesity has involved some work in a positivist tradition in social psychology and functionalist sociology. Simultaneously, constructionist work based in the symbolic interactionist tradition of sociological social psychology continued the lines of analysis begun by Goffman. The existing literature on the stigma of obesity reflects a consensus in some areas, but leaves other aspects of the topic to be addressed in future investigations.

Obesity has become a highly stigmatised condition in contemporary post-industrial societies, with people who are obese being labelled negatively and risking a variety of defiling and degrading prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory actions. The social position of obesity relative to other deviant conditions is currently unclear.

People who are obese employ several types of coping mechanisms to manage their social interactions with others. However, the frequency and success of different strategies for coping with the stigmatisation of obesity have not been thoroughly researched. Clearly, obesity is a stigma in contemporary society, but it is not clear how people who are obese can most effectively deal with this stigma.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- Stigmas are discrediting attributes, and obesity is often stigmatised in post-industrial societies.
- Stigmatisation of obesity is widespread, frequent and often severe.
- Stigmatisation of obesity occurs in work, family, health and everyday arenas.
- The mechanisms used to cope with the stigmatisation of obesity include denial, concealment, avoidance, mutual aid and redefinition of situations.
- Eating is problematic for people who are obese, who use accounts, disclaimers and discounting to explain their food choices.

Sociological reflection

- To what extent is obesity biological, psychological, social, economic, political and cultural?
- Which parts of society are more or less responsible for preventing and managing obesity: individuals using personal willpower; governments using political will; companies/corporations using industrial will; or others?
- Under what conditions, and how much, does stigmatisation deter obesity and prevent health problems? In contrast, how, for whom, where, when and how much does stigmatisation harm people who are obese, their families, their friends and the larger society?

Discussion questions

- 1 How is the stigmatisation of obesity similar to and different from the stigmatisation of other 'deviant' attributes?
- 2 How would an individual who is obese be treated in a culture that did not stigmatise either fatness or thinness, or in a culture that highly valued fatness?
- 3 What types or categories of people in society are least likely to stigmatise people who are obese, and what types are most likely to do so?
- 4 How do different approaches to sociological analysis (such as functionalist theory using quantitative methods, or symbolic interactionist theory using qualitative methods) provide both incompatible and compatible perspectives on the stigmatisation of obesity?
- 5 How could society change in order to reduce stigmatisation of people who are obese, and how can individuals who are obese better deal with stigmatisation?

Further investigation

- 1 Describe and discuss the medicalisation of obesity.
- 2 Discuss how the stigmatisation of obesity differs between women and men.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

- Brownell, K.D., Puhl, R.M., Schwartz, M.B. & Rudd, L. (eds) 2005, *Weight Bias: Nature, Consequences, and Remedies*, Guilford Press, New York.
- Cawley, J. (ed.) 2011. *The Oxford Handbook of the Social Science of Obesity*. Oxford University Press, New York.
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- Fatness and Thinness*, Aldine de Gruyter, Hawthorne, New York State.
- (eds) 1999, *Weighty Issues: The Construction of Fatness and Thinness as Social Problems*, Aldine de Gruyter, Hawthorne, New York State.

Documentaries and films

- Precious*, 2009. Academy–Award winning film about multiple prejudices, including obesity stigmatisation. (110 minutes).

Websites

- The Council on Size & Weight Discrimination: www.cswd.org
- Health at Every Size: www.haescommunity.org
- National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance: www.naafaonline.com/dev2/about/
- The Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity: www.uconnruddcenter.org

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GLOSSARY

accountability

In the context of food labelling, accountability refers to the food manufacturer or retailer taking responsibility for the truthful representation of the food and to prevent adulteration and subsequent harm to the consumer.

accounts

Specific claims about the reasons for particular behaviours, used to manage interactions and to gain or maintain acceptance.

activities of daily living

Activities considered fundamental to an individual's independent existence, including getting out of bed, bathing, cooking and eating food, and shopping for groceries.

ageism

Discrimination based on age.

agency

The ability of people, individually and collectively, to influence their own lives and the society in which they live.

agribusiness

The complete operations performed in producing agricultural commodities, including farming, manufacturing, handling, storing, processing and distributing.

agri-food

See *agribusiness*

agroecology/sustainable farming

See *sustainable agriculture*

agroforestry

To establish tree plantations on a farm so as to mix forestry with cropping and grazing.

alienated labour/alienation

'Alienation' is a Marxist term that refers to the experience of people who have to work for a monetary wage to live. They are alienated from—have no control over—their conditions of work, the process of production, what they produce, and the ownership and distribution of their products.

anti-vivisection

A movement that is against the use of animals for laboratory experiments.

attribution

Ascribing a characteristic, quality or causation to some factor.

avoidance

A coping strategy for individuals with various types of stigma that involves avoiding or minimising potential stigmatising situations.

biological determinism

An unproven belief that individual, group and organisational behaviours are ultimately determined by biology.

body acceptance

A set of beliefs held by those who have a positive body image. Also the name of the social movement that promotes body diversity. Previously referred to as 'size acceptance'.

body dysmorphia

See *muscle dysmorphia*.

body image

The image an individual has of their own body. Body image depends on both the actual shape and size of the body as well as the affective component of how that body is perceived in relation to body expectations.

body mass index (BMI)

A measure of body weight used in the health sciences to determine the prevalence in the population of underweight, overweight and obesity. BMI is derived by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by their height in metres squared. BMI is then compared to reference standards, such as those by the World Health Organization.

capitalism

An economic and social system based on the private accumulation of wealth; a system in which a relatively small capitalist class owns almost all the productive property of a society.

carnism

Melanie Joy's term referring to an invisible belief system, or ideology, that conditions people to eat certain animals. It is the opposite of veganism, as *carn* means 'flesh/of the flesh'.

cash crops

Crops produced to be exchanged for cash.

charitable food organisations

Not-for-profit organisations, often partnering with supermarkets and restaurants in developed countries, that collect and distribute food to individuals and households who face food insecurity.

civilising process/civilising of appetite

A concept coined by Norbert Elias to refer to the never-ending social process by which external forms of social control of people's behaviour are replaced by internalised forms of moral self-control. Stephen Mennell has applied this idea to food habits, using the term 'civilising of appetite'.

class (or social class)

A concept used by sociologists to refer to a position in a system of structured inequality based on the unequal distribution of power, wealth, income and status.

colonisation/colonialism

A process by which one nation imposes itself economically, politically and socially upon another.

concealment

A coping mechanism for individuals with various types of stigma that involves a form of strategic impression management, whereby a stigma is hidden, disguised or modified to make it less obtrusive and less likely to be attended to or focused on in a social encounter.

conspicuous consumption

Coined by Thorstein Veblen, this term refers to overt displays of wealth by which the upper class demonstrates its social status.

constructionist-symbolic-interactionist

See *symbolic interactionism*.

consumerism

The belief that the increased consumption of goods is economically and socially desirable and as a result consumers are able to dictate the terms of the transaction.

cooperative

An enterprise in which ownership is shared by all members for mutual benefit.

coping strategy

A plan or method to endure or overcome difficult or stressful situations.

cosmopolitanism

The global hybridisation of cultures, tastes and cuisines caused by the globalisation of the media, trade and travel.

cuisine

A style of cooking usually associated with a particular culture or geographic region, such as French or Mediterranean cuisine. *Cuisine* is a French word meaning 'kitchen' and is derived from the Latin word meaning 'to cook'.

culinary capital

A detailed knowledge about the provenance, quality, artisanal techniques and health impact of food and its preparation.

cultural capital

A concept that implies that culture can be treated like an economic asset upon which social hierarchies are founded.

cultural consecration

Pierre Bourdieu's (1930–2002) term for the public recognition of the symbolic value of cultural objects and practices, such as those embodied in awards and prizes.

cultural omnivorousness

A consumption trend that involves the blending of high- and low-status cultural tastes.

culture-bound syndrome

A health or medical condition that is characteristic of particular cultures and is not universal.

deficits-based model

Models that aim to explain inequality by highlighting what individuals or groups of individuals tend to lack.

denial

A type of coping strategy used to deal with an undesirable situation.

deviance/deviant

Behaviour or activities that violate social expectations about what is normal.

dietary guidelines

Principles of nutrition advice used by policy makers and health professionals to provide dietary advice for the population. National dietary guidelines aim to reverse trends in the national diet that contribute to chronic disease risk.

disabilities

Limitations on the ability to fulfil role obligations as a result of physical or cognitive impairments.

disclaimer

An explanation provided in anticipation of challenges to a person's or a behaviour's legitimacy.

discounting

A set of techniques for dealing with violations of personal principles without threatening internal self-definitions or identity.

discourse

A discussion, which can be in writing or through conversation, of an issue. Discourses can be socially constructed through ways of thinking, talking and acting; for example, the neoliberal health discourse that promotes the self-surveillance of health.

domestic violence

Sometimes known as family violence, the term refers to the behaviour of family members, partners or carers that is abusive or intimidating. Violence need not be physical abuse, and can include emotional, psychological, financial and sexual abuse.

dramaturgical analyses

The term used by Erving Goffman to describe how people take on social roles, just as actors do in the theatre.

eating disorders

Generic term for the cluster of psychological disorders that manifest in altered eating behaviour with physical consequences. Includes anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and eating disorders not otherwise specified.

emancipatory politics

A term used by Anthony Giddens to refer to a value-based commitment to reducing or eliminating inequality, discrimination and exploitation. See also *life politics*.

empty signifier

A symbol or concept whose meaning is vague and open to interpretation, and may depend on the context in which it is used.

epidemiology

The statistical study of patterns of disease in the population. Originally focused on epidemics, or infectious diseases, it now covers non-infectious conditions. Social epidemiology is a subfield, aligned with sociology, which focuses on the social determinants of illness.

ethnographic techniques

A research method based on direct observation of the social interaction and culture of a particular social group, involving detailed description and evaluation of behaviours, activities and events.

fatism

Discrimination against people with high levels of body fat.

feminism/feminist

A broad social and political movement based on a belief in equality of the sexes and advocating the removal of all forms of discrimination against women. A feminist is one who subscribes to, and may act upon, a body of theory that seeks to explain the subordinate position of women in society.

figurations

Norbert Elias's (1897–1990) term to describe the interdependence of social structure and agency. Using a game analogy, while our interactions are shaped by the rules of the game (structure), it is our individual decisions and behaviours (agency) that produce and reproduce particular social patterns.

food access

Having sufficient resources to obtain food for a healthy and active life.

food availability

Access to sufficient quantities of food on a regular basis, which can be a challenge for rural and remote communities and a major factor affecting adequate nutritional intake. Natural disasters and weather events such as flooding, cyclones and bushfires can also impact on food availability.

food forest

Tree crops and other perennials that provide most carbohydrates.

food guides

Advice about the amounts or proportions of various foods needed to provide healthful diets for the general public.

food insecurity

A state of regular hunger and fear of starvation.

food security

The availability of sufficient, affordable, safe, nutritious and culturally acceptable food.

food sovereignty

Government policy giving priority to local food production and ensuring the right to wholesome food, fair wages for workers and fair prices for producers; domestic control of natural and genetic resources such as seeds.

food stability

Situation in which the four pillars of food security—food availability, affordability, access and utilisation—are stable and not subject to variations over time.

food utilisation

The physical, social and human resources to transform food into meals, including food safety, which meets individual physiological, sensory and cultural requirements.

foodways

Habits and practices relating to food acquisition, food preparation, food storage, distribution of food among family members, meal and snack patterns, food combinations, uses of food, beliefs about food, and identification of core, secondary and peripheral foods in the diet.

frame

Refers to unconscious assumptions about causation and meaning that shape our perceptions, choices and what we believe to be possible; similar to worldview, belief system or ideology.

front-of-pack labelling

A public health strategy that aims to provide a simplified visual evaluation of nutrition, health and quality of a food on its external packaging.

functionalism

Also known as 'structural functionalism', 'consensus theory' or 'systems theory', this theoretical perspective focuses on how social structures function to maintain social order, based on the assumption that a society is a system of integrated parts, each of which has certain requirements that must be fulfilled for social order to be maintained. Key functionalist theorists include Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), Talcott Parsons (1902–79), Robert Merton (1910–2003) and Jeffrey Alexander (1947–).

fusion food

A general term to refer to the combination of different cultural food traditions resulting in innovative cuisines.

gender

The socially constructed categories of feminine and masculine (the cultural values that dictate how women and men should behave), as opposed to the categories of biological sex (female or male).

gender attribution

The taken-for-granted attribution of maleness or femaleness based on physical appearance and outward behaviours.

gender order

The way in which institutional structures and individual identities intersect to produce the social arrangements that mean one gender can dominate another—politically, socially and economically.

genetic engineering (or genetic modification)

Scientific alteration of the DNA in plants, micro-organisms, animals and humans to perform new functions, by rearranging or deleting existing genes or inserting genetic material from another species.

genetic modification (GM)

See *genetic engineering*.

gift economy

A proposed utopia in which goods and services are produced by collectives of people and either consumed by the collective or given to other community groups or to the community at large. There is no money and no wage labour in a gift

economy; community groups have effective ownership of productive property; individuals, families or households have effective ownership of personal property.

globalisation

Political, social, economic and cultural developments—such as the growth of multinational companies, information technology and international agencies—that result in people's lives being increasingly influenced by global, rather than national or local, factors.

Global South, Global North

Terms referring to the similar living conditions in groups of countries. These terms are gaining use because they are seen as more neutral than previous terms—underdeveloped and developed; non-industrial and industrial; poor and wealthy; third world and first world.

global warming

Gradual increase in the temperature of the planet caused by increased levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. There is strong scientific evidence that the current phase is due to human activities—mainly the burning of fossil fuels and the destruction of forests.

Green Revolution

Certain technological developments in agricultural production that increased productivity and were heralded as possible solutions to world hunger (such as hybrid seeds, irrigation, mechanisation, synthetic fertilisers and pest control agents made largely from fossil fuels).

habitus

An expanded notion of habit, *habitus* refers to the internalised and taken-for-granted personal dispositions we all possess, such as our accent, gestures, and preferences in food, fashion and entertainment (among other things).

harm minimisation

Public health policies and interventions that aim to reduce potential harms associated with legal and illegal practices.

haute cuisine

Translates from French as 'high cooking', and refers to the cooking of the grand and expensive restaurants, which became characterised by elaborately presented and rich meals in small portions and numerous courses.

health claim

In the context of food products, this term refers to a statement made by a manufacturer, usually on the packet or in advertising for the product, about the impact of a food, or a food ingredient, on a person's health.

healthism

An extreme concern with personal health, which becomes a dominant ideology.

historical capital

In relation to wine studies, historical capital is a combination of symbolic capital (wine show prizes, medals), cultural capital (reputation based on the longevity of wine growing and wine making experience in a company; favourable wine reviews) and natural capital (*terroir*, meaning land or place).

historical sociology

An interdisciplinary approach combining history and sociology to explore how complex social processes shape the development of societies across time and place.

human rights

The United Nations Human Rights Commission defines human rights as 'rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status'. Human rights are inalienable and the principle of universality is the cornerstone of international human rights law. The right to food is identified by many as a fundamental human right.

identity

A person's self-conception or self-definition. See also *social identity*.

informalisation

A social trend towards informality and more permissive modes of behaviour.

intersectionality

A concept to describe and analyse identity based on the interrelation and overlapping ('intersection') of categories, such as race, gender, class, age and disability. These categories can form the basis of a system of oppression that reflects multiple forms of discrimination.

life chances

The probability of people realising their lifestyle choices.

life choices

People's choices in their selection of lifestyle.

life politics

A term used by Anthony Giddens to refer to life decisions or lifestyle choices that affect the formation of self-identity, which occurs as a reflexive process in the context of the dynamic nature of social life. See also *emancipatory politics*.

living democracy

Democracy practised not as a particular political structure, but as a set of system values and a way of life based on the principles of inclusion, fairness and mutual accountability, inclusive of economic and social relationships.

marginality

The socially constructed definition of a characteristic as 'out of the mainstream' or 'abnormal'.

masculinity/masculinities

The socially constructed notion of how men are expected to behave, such as dispositions of heterosexual virility, independence, and physical and mental strength. The term *masculinities* acknowledges there can be multiple expressions of masculinity, some of which challenge the dominant stereotype.

master status

The dominant social label applied to an individual, according to which the individual is automatically attributed with a host of stereotyped personality traits commonly associated with the particular status (for example, criminal or homosexual) irrespective of the person's individual personality.

McDonaldisation

A term coined by George Ritzer (1940–) to expand Max Weber's (1864–1920) notion of rationalisation; defined as the standardisation of work processes through rules and regulations based on increased monitoring and evaluation of individual performance, akin to the uniformity and control measures used by fast-food chains.

microcredit

System for lending very small amounts to low-income people for income-generating purposes, and where financial collateral is not required.

modernity

A particular view of society that is founded upon rational thought and the belief that objective realities can be discovered and understood through rational and scientific means—a view rejected by postmodernists. Anthony Giddens (1938–) has referred to contemporary society in developed countries as high or late modernity, reflecting the advanced and dominant nature of rational and scientific views.

monoculture

The use of a piece of land to produce a single crop.

moral panic

An exaggerated reaction by the mass media, politicians, and community leaders to the actions and beliefs of certain social groups or individuals, which are often minor and inconsequential, but are sensationally represented to create anxiety and outrage among the general public.

muscle dysmorphia

A body image disturbance often used to refer to men who perceive themselves as 'skinny' and 'small' despite being above average in terms of muscularity.

muscular ideal

The social construction of the male body that reinforces the desirability of a large, muscular body as epitomising masculinity.

mutual aid

A coping strategy whereby communities of stigmatised individuals form to share feelings and resources and provide social support for one another.

neoliberalism

A philosophy based on the primacy of individual rights and minimal state intervention. Sometimes used interchangeably with economic rationalism/liberalism.

nutrient standards

The amounts of nutrients required to meet the needs of most healthy individuals in a population.

nutritional risk

Factors thought to increase the probability that an individual will develop undernutrition or malnutrition.

obesity

The condition of having a high level of stored body fat.

oil peak

Situation when the natural supply of oil begins to drastically decline, resulting in oil prices rising as demand increases; also known as 'peak oil', the 'oil crunch' or 'big rollover'.

organics

Agriculture that makes no use of artificial (synthetic) chemicals for fertilisers, pesticides or herbicides.

pacifism

A philosophical position that opposes war and violence.

participant observation

A data-collection technique that involves participating at some level in a social environment, while observing and recording experiences in that environment.

patriarchy

A system of power through which males dominate households. The term is used more broadly by feminists to refer to the pre-eminence of patriarchal power throughout society, which functions to subordinate women and children.

permaculture

A specific system of permanent, sustainable agriculture and settlement design.

polyculture

The use of a piece of land to produce a diversity of crops.

post-industrial society

A society in which information replaces property as the prime source of power and social control; in such societies, professionals become powerful social groups and employment is increasingly in service industries rather than manufacturing industries.

postmodern society

A debated concept in sociology that characterises contemporary society as one in which many social institutions, including the state, have lost their power to determine social outcomes. There are no longer clear paths for the individual to influence events by participating in such institutions as political parties, unions or professional bodies. The

result is a society that becomes fragmented as a result of a high level of social differentiation and cultural diversity.

post-structuralism/post-structuralist

A term, often used interchangeably with 'postmodernism', which refers to a perspective that is opposed to the view that social structure determines human action, and that emphasises the local, the specific and the contingent in social life.

productivism

Agricultural systems based on farming intensification (to increase productivity per unit of land area), land ownership concentration (fewer and larger owners) and specialisation (farms tend to produce one product).

public health nutrition

A population approach to preventing diet-related health problems that addresses the influence of food production, distribution and consumption on the nutritional status of the population at large and specific subgroups in particular (such as children, older people and indigenous groups).

rations

In terms of food, rations are a way of distributing food to the population based on a predetermined composition, amount and form to ensure adequate nutrition at low cost and unaffected by the individual needs of the recipient, the locality or the seasons.

real utopias

A seeming contradiction, the term refers to radical alternatives to contemporary forms of social organisation that focus on pragmatic details and the practical means to achieve social change. Rather than promoting vague notions of a future nirvana of human existence, real utopia supporters advocate specific proposals for the fundamental redesign of social institutions.

redefining situations

A coping mechanism for individuals with various types of stigma whereby a stigmatised person steers a topic or subject of interactions away from a stigmatised condition to other more neutral or safe areas.

reflexive modernity

A term coined by Ulrich Beck (1944–2015) and Anthony Giddens (1938–) to refer to the present

social era in developed societies, in which social practices are open to reflection, questioning and change, and therefore in which social traditions no longer dictate people's lifestyles.

risk

Risk refers to 'danger'; in relation to health, it refers to behaviours such as excessive drinking of alcohol beverages, smoking, overeating and under-exercising.

risk society

A term coined by Ulrich Beck (1944–2015) to describe the centrality of risk calculations in people's lives in Western society, whereby the key social problems today are unanticipated hazards, such as the risks of food poisoning, pollution and environmental degradation.

role

Behavioural expectations (including duties and rights) associated with a position in society.

ruralisation

A process of relocating urban populations to agricultural regions. This allows food to be produced and consumed locally.

safety net

A minimum level of welfare payments, pensions and services that aim to support vulnerable individuals and households from entering into poverty.

salinity/salinisation

Agricultural processes that bring salts in the soil to the surface, making the land unfit for agricultural use.

social appetite

Term coined by John Germov and Lauren Williams (1999) to refer to the social patterns of food production, distribution, consumption and waste.

social capital

Social relations, networks, norms, trust and reciprocity between individuals that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit.

social construction/constructionism

The idea that people actively construct reality and its associated meanings, so that nothing is 'natural' or inevitable and notions of normality/abnormality, right/wrong and health/illness are subjective human creations that should not be taken for granted.

social control

Mechanisms that aim to induce conformity, or at least to manage or minimise deviant behaviour.

social differentiation

A trend towards social diversity based on the creation of social distinction and self-identity through particular consumption choices and through group membership.

social embodiment

The experience of one's body as both a social artefact/object and as a corporeal entity.

social identity

A person's understanding of themselves and how others perceive them reflects social processes and experiences, such as nationality, religion and social status. See also *identity*.

socialisation

The process of learning the culture of a society (its language and customs), which shows us how to behave, communicate and interact.

socialism

A political ideology and system of government with numerous variations, based on the elimination of social inequality, the promotion of altruistic values, and the replacement of private wealth accumulation with state ownership and/or distribution of economic resources.

social isolation

The condition in which an individual both lives alone and has little social contact with other people.

social media

Websites, mobile applications ('apps') and online networks that enable users to create and exchange text, documents, images and audiovisual content, and participate in personal and professional networking.

social network

The persons with whom an individual normally has the most contact. These can include friends, immediate family members, more distant relatives, neighbours, co-workers, fellow members of voluntary organisations and fellow church members.

social norms

Shared expectations about how people ought to act or behave in a particular society.

social security

The provision of public funding to individuals, usually from taxation revenues (and in some countries from insurance schemes contributed to by individuals), in the form of welfare payments, unemployment benefits and pensions, to provide economic security for people with minimal or no income.

social structure

The recurring patterns of social interaction by which people are related to each other through social institutions and social groups.

social support

Instrumental aid (goods and services) and expressive aid (companionship, comfort and advice about personal matters) provided by members of a social network.

socioeconomic position (SEP)

Sometimes used synonymously with SES, this concept refers to the individual position people occupy within the structure of society based on social and economic measures. See *socioeconomic status*.

socioeconomic status (SES)

A measure of social status based on the statistical grouping of people into high-, medium- and low-SES groups according to certain criteria (usually a composite index of income, occupation and education): used to gauge social and economic inequalities.

sociological imagination

A term coined by Charles Wright Mills (1959) to describe the sociological approach to the analysis of issues. We see the world through a sociological imagination, or think sociologically, when we make a link between personal troubles and public issues.

speciesism

A term coined by Peter Singer to describe the form of discrimination where one species allows their own interests to justify causing pain and suffering to another species.

status

The respect or prestige associated with a particular position in society.

stigma

An attribute of a person that is deeply discrediting and that disqualifies that person from full social acceptance.

stigmatising act

An act of a 'normal' individual that devalues another person, in the process of stigmatisation.

stressors

Life events that may have a negative impact on health and wellbeing, depending on an individual's response to a stressful event.

structuralism/structuralist

A view maintaining that individuals' actions and beliefs are primarily determined by the society in which they live, emphasising that language, culture and economic organisation pre-exist the individual and limit the possibilities for thought and action.

structure/agency debate

A key debate in sociology regarding the extent to which human behaviour is determined by the social structure.

sustainable agriculture

Any system of plant and animal production that can satisfy human food needs and maintain or enhance natural resources by maximising the use of renewable resources, conserving and efficiently using non-renewable resources, and ensuring that the environmental impact of agricultural processes is minimised, so that affected ecological systems survive and prosper.

symbol

In the context of food, symbols are used on food products to represent particular societal values and product qualities to inform and sway consumption choices. Symbols may communicate specific information about the product (e.g. its contents, place of manufacture, or key features such as 'heat and serve'), may convey particular values (e.g. 'Fair trade', 'free range') or be used to differentiate product qualities for competitive advantage.

symbolic interactionism

A theoretical perspective that focuses on agency and how people construct, interpret and give meaning to their behaviour through interaction with others. Rather than large social structures, small-scale, face-to-face symbolic interactions are studied, as social life is viewed as the cumulative product of human action, interaction and interpretation. Key symbolic interactionist theorists include George Herbert

Mead (1863–1931), Charles Cooley (1864–1929), Howard Becker (1928–), Erving Goffman (1922–82), and Herbert Blumer (1900–87), who coined the term in 1937.

terroir

Refers to either (or both) the distinct qualities of the soil, climate and aspect of vineyard sites, or the length of time particular vines have been grown on that site, preferably by multi-generations of the same family.

thin ideal

The dominant aesthetic ideal of female beauty in Western societies, which refers to the social desirability of a thin body shape.

transnational corporations (TNCs)

Companies that have operations in more than one country and no clearly identifiable country as a home base. Often used in preference to the superseded term 'multinational corporations', which tended to refer to companies primarily based in one country, but with subsidiary operations in other countries.

unproblematised

Treated as natural and therefore not requiring research or examination.

values-based labelling

Symbols that distinguish a product both on quality and a social value, such as 'Fair trade' symbols that reflect a value of social justice.

vegetarianism

The practice of voluntarily refraining from eating meat, chicken or fish and the beliefs underpinning this practice. There are many variations, but the major subcategories include lacto-vegetarian (dairy food is still consumed), ovo-vegetarian (eggs are consumed) and vegan (abstinence from eating—and sometimes from wearing—all animal products).

welfare

Policies, services and infrastructure that can help to ensure a designated level of wellbeing, either for select population groups or universally applied, such as the provision of education, health-care, housing and income supplementation (e.g. social security and unemployment benefits).

wine complex

Term used to convey the fact that wine has social, cultural, economic, symbolic and political dimensions that manifest in the interplay of wine production, distribution and consumption at the regional, national and global level.

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

ISBN 978-0-19-030467-6



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