

UC Berkeley

UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Eating Aspirations, Eating Abjections: How Race, Class, and Place Shape Food Consumption Practices in Two Neighborhoods of Oakland, California

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5sm6f67p>

Author

Young, Kara Alexis

Publication Date

2017

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

**Eating Aspirations, Eating Abjections:
How Race, Class, and Place Shape Food Consumption Practices in Two
Neighborhoods of Oakland, California**

By

Kara Alexis Young

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Sandra Smith, Chair

Professor Raka Ray

Professor Michael Burawoy

Professor Tianna Paschel

Summer 2017

**Eating Aspirations, Eating Abjections:
How Race, Class, and Place Shape Food Consumption Practices in Two
Neighborhoods of Oakland, California**

© 2017
by Kara Alexis Young

Abstract

**Eating Aspirations, Eating Abjections:
How Race, Class, and Place Shape Food Consumption Practices in Two
Neighborhoods of Oakland, California**

By

Kara Alexis Young

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Sandra Smith, Chair

Over the past two decades, the connection between food consumption, health and inequality has increasingly been the focus of scholarly and public debate. Scholars have been especially interested in interrogating how the neighborhood-level built food environment shapes people's food consumption and procurement practices. While scholars agree that low-income neighborhoods tend to have less access to grocery stores and higher rates of food related health disparities, scholars disagree on how exactly differential access translates into people's daily food consumption practices or differences in health. Therefore, researchers and public health policy makers have called for more comprehensive investigations of the local food environment, the sociocultural factors that contribute to everyday food consumption practices, and how structural and sociocultural factors work together to produce stratified patterns of food consumption.

In this dissertation, I investigate how race, class and place shape food consumption and procurement practices for residents who reside in two neighborhoods in Oakland, California: the Oasis, a multi-racial, class diverse urban neighborhood with a variety of grocery stores and restaurants within a 1-mile radius; and the Turf, an inner city, Black and Hispanic neighborhood with a high concentration of poverty and no grocery stores within a 1-mile radius. I argue that to understand how neighborhood shapes food consumption practices, we must look beyond food access and cost and also consider what I call *local logics of accomplishment* – belief systems constructed in relation to the opportunities, constraints, and resulting interaction orders of local environments around what constitutes accomplished daily practice.

Amongst mounting fears of unclean, unsafe, disease-producing food, respondents across neighborhoods expressed a desire to regularly eat “clean,” fresh, and home cooked food purchased in places where they felt cared for. However, socioeconomic status, racial group membership, and neighborhood mediated respondent's ability to do this successfully. In the middle-class neighborhood of the Oasis where care, beauty and abundance were prominent, respondents measured the value of their practices against their aspirations to easily eat fresh, local, “clean” and ethically produced foods while distancing themselves from food practices associated with need. They therefore felt

accomplished when they both could purchase and desire to eat fresh foods from day-to-day. In the poor neighborhood of the Turf where neglect, abandonment, and struggle characterized daily life, respondents measured the value of their daily food consumption practices against the abject conditions of poverty. They therefore felt accomplished when they were able to either survive within this struggle or create any modicum of space between their practices and these abject conditions.

I illustrate how these local logics of accomplishment with regards to food and eating elicit positive and negative emotions for respondents. I also show how people engage in both positive and corrective emotion-work to manage these emotions from day-to-day. I argue that, approximating these food related health aspirations and distancing from the abject conditions of poverty was externalized through capitalism as a game in which people received emotional and symbolic rewards or penalties. These emotional rewards and penalties resulted in respondents experiencing their ability to align their practices with their aspirations not simply as a result of an objectively exploitative social structure and its patterns of domination but rather as an internal and individual quality of the self. I argue that this works to mystify and reproduce stratified patterns of food consumption.

I organize these ideas into five empirical chapters based on five relationships to food and eating that emerged during my fieldwork – relationships of ease, struggle, and distress constructed against eating aspirations in the Oasis; relationships of survival and accomplishment constructed against abject conditions of poverty in the Turf. I conclude by suggesting that neighborhood, race, and class matter not just for what people can purchase among alternatives, but also for what people feel they can accomplish with regards to their health through food. Further, what people feel they can accomplish impacts both their practices and how they feel about their practices. The implications of these findings for public health policy on food related health disparities are considered.

For Doron and Mahlika

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>iii</i>
Preface.....	<i>vi</i>
1 Introduction.....	1
2 Eating Aspirations, Eating Abjections.....	24
PART I: THE OASIS	
3 Ease.....	42
4 Struggle	60
5 Distress.....	78
PART II: THE TURF	
6 Survival.....	102
7 Accomplishment.....	128
8 Conclusion.....	144
<i>Bibliography</i>	147

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a dissertation is a long, hard, and often confusing process. It is a process that begins with a seed and, over time, grows into a tree. I am therefore deeply grateful to acknowledge the army of people who invested in, watered, and cultivated this project with me throughout the years.

First, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to all of the respondents who generously shared their time and stories with me. I was taken aback time and again when, in coffee shops, parks, and restaurants, total strangers shared profound stories of their dreams, struggles, joys and traumatic experiences with regards to food and eating. Food is such a personal and significant part of our lives, and when I set out to study feelings around food, I was not sure whether people would feel comfortable sharing much with me. On the contrary, I could have written a chapter on each and every interview that I did. While confidentiality prevents me from thanking them all by name, I want to express my deepest respect and gratitude for each and every one of them. I was struck and inspired by their resilience and thoughtfulness. Without them, this project could not exist.

This project could also not exist without the mentorship and guidance of my dissertation chair, Sandra Smith. When I was a first year graduate student, Sandra came to speak to my cohort in our first year proseminar. As I watched her speak about her research, I thought: “she does not know it yet, but she is going to be my mentor.” I am so grateful that she took me under her wing from that first year as a research assistant. From that point forward, Sandra has tirelessly mentored me through every step of this graduate program. She taught me interviewing methods and teaching, helped me articulate my Masters Thesis, trained me on the sociology of race for my qualifying exams, trusted me as a co-author on a publication, and helped me shape this dissertation project. Most importantly, Sandra believed in me when I couldn’t see the path through the trees and that encouragement was often the thing motivating me forward. I am especially thankful to her for believing in the very amorphous spark of intuition that became this dissertation. From the dinners, to the walks, to the long meetings discussing my drafts, to the many letters of recommendation that she has written me over the years – thank you!

I also want to thank my dissertation committee Raka Ray, Michael Burawoy and Tianna Paschel. Each of them provided brilliant feedback on this project, and I often left our meetings energized with an expanded vision of my work. Indeed, these incredible scholars believed in and could see what I was trying to articulate even when I didn’t have the words. They each dug deep with me through the years, giving me constructive criticism that fundamentally shaped many of my ideas. Additionally, their energy, wisdom and commitment to the emancipatory potential of sociology has been such an inspiration to me. They are my role models for the kind of sociologist, scholar, mentor, and professor that I strive to be. I also want to thank Cybelle Fox, Cristina Mora and Kim Voss who each invested time in reading drafts of this project and provided me with valuable feedback and professional development over the years.

Thank you also to Christine Trost, Deborah Lustig and David Minkus who advised me through the Center for Research on Social Change Graduate Training Fellowship. Participating in the CRSC fellowship program with the three of them was one of the highlights of my time in graduate school. They provided a supportive community and a structure to check in about my dissertation progress that motivated me

to get through my first round of fieldwork and dissertation writing. Thank you for your feedback, professional development, and mentorship.

Many of my colleagues have also closely read different drafts of this project and encouraged me along the way. Thank you to Tria Andrews, Yenhoa Ching, Colleen Henry, Mark Fleming, Pablo Gaston, Jen Shradie, Graham Hill, Angela Fillingim, Rafael Colonna, Zawadi Rucks Ahidiana, and Caitlin Daniel for taking time and energy to read through articles, cover letters and personal statements.

I could not have done this project without the financial support of several organizations and institutions that have awarded me funding and research grants throughout my graduate school career. I would like to thank the Chancellor's Predoctoral Fellowship, the University of California Diversity Initiative for Graduate Study in the Social Sciences (UC DIGSSS), and the Graduate Division Summer Research Grant for pre-doctoral funding. The Department of Sociology has provided me with generous funding over multiple years through the Berkeley Connect Fellowship, the Lowenthal Fellowship, and the Blumer Fellowship. I would also like to thank the Center for Research on Social Change, the Berkeley Social Justice Fellowship, and the SMART Mentorship program who have provided both funding and mentorship. Lastly, I have also received several research grants that have supported the cost of fieldwork from the Department of Sociology, the Center for Race and Gender, and the Carol Hatch Fund.

The Berkeley Food Institute has also been a fundamental support to me during the last three years at Cal. I am especially thankful to have been able to work on the Building Sustainable Food Systems at UC Berkeley project with an amazing team of people including Rosalie Fanshel, Melina Packer, Elsadig Elsheikh, Ruben Canedo, and Nadia Barhoum.

Additionally, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the undergraduate research assistants that have helped me since I began this dissertation – Antonina Entler, Zachary Raden, Tara Rastogi, Robin Ayers-Lee, Iza Benedicta, Dasom Nah, Tomas Delgado, Natalie Ruiz, Lusy Martinez, Sabre Rezapour, Marito Solis, and Samantha Lew. These students helped me recruit respondents, conduct interviews, write up field notes, create maps, collect demographic data, transcribe interviews, and analyze data. Their feedback pushed this project forward again and again, and I have been continually inspired by their passion and drive!

This dissertation would not have been possible without the help of family, friends, and muses who came into my life over the past 10 years, offering support, pushing me to think differently about the world and helping me to awaken my creative process. First and foremost, I would like to thank my family, Leonard, Pamela, and Olivia Young. When people ask me why I decided to become a professor, I always joke that my parents knew that I was going to be a professor before I did. They encouraged me to love learning, to be curious about the world, and to challenge myself to go down the road less travelled despite the challenges I may face. They taught me that there was nothing that I couldn't do if I tried hard enough— well, except for, perhaps, chemistry. I also acknowledge the unending sacrifices that they made that allowed me to pursue this long path of higher education. My sister, Olivia Young, is one of the most compassionate and brilliant people that I know, and I have been lucky to have her in Berkeley with me over the past four years. Along with providing me with excellent feedback on this project, she has been my inspiration and my light in the darkness. I am profoundly grateful to my

family for being my best and loudest cheering section, for picking me up when I fell, and for helping me think through all of the obstacles on my path.

I am eternally grateful to Margo Mahan, Tianna Paschel, Ana Villarreal, Kate Maich, Fidan Elcioglu, and Alicia Pantoja whom I am lucky to call both colleagues and friends. The deep relationships that I have built and sustained with these magnificent women over the years have kept me going through the toughest parts of this program. Words are inadequate to express how overwhelmed I am with gratitude for the generosity, love, encouragement, and joy that they have brought to my life.

I am also deeply grateful to my boyfriend Gibran McDonald, who has been my rock through this process from beginning to end. He helped me stuff envelopes with recruitment letters, devise recruitment strategies, come up with well worded interview questions and theorize about my data. He read my cover letters and personal statements, listened to practice presentations, attended presentations, reminded me to breathe through the especially stressful times, and told me that I could do it again and again and again. It was often through our conversations while sharing meals that I had my deepest epiphanies about this work. His generosity of spirit and curiosity about the world continually inspired me. I am deeply and eternally blessed to have him by my side.

And to the weary graduate student who might read this as a model, I acknowledge you! Just keep going! You will find your way to the end. It was only in getting to the end that I knew what this project was really about.

PREFACE

It was a sunny afternoon in January of 2012 when I met Doron Comerchero, founder of the non-profit organization Food, What?! in Santa Cruz, California. I had come to talk to him about food justice and food inequality in California. As I set out down the coast from Oakland, there was an explosion of interest and dialogue in the public sphere around food production, food related health disparities, and food access. Public policy makers, academics, journalists, and community activists were mutually advocating for major food system reform. First, experts argued, food was being produced in ways that was harmful to the environment, to the consumer and often using unjust labor practices. Second, food related diseases such as type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure were on the rise particularly for low income Americans, and this was creating a burden on the health care system. Third, not everyone had equal access to the healthy and nutritious food needed to maintain optimal health. In fact, many low-income rural and urban neighborhoods lacked full service grocery stores and therefore had to rely on corner stores and fast food restaurants for their daily meals – a phenomenon that academics call living in a ‘food desert.’ People all over the country were gathering at conferences on food, engaging in lively public debates, creating curriculum, starting community gardens, and organizing local and national responses around these issues.

I came to the study food and inequality rather unexpectedly. Two years before I met Doron, I found myself suddenly dealing with a series of health issues. As I grappled with how to better my own health, I was struck by how frequently those around me advised me that changing my diet was the answer to my problems. Food was a pathway to disease or wellness, and, as such, eating the “right way” seemed to be the key to happiness and longevity. The academic work I had been doing up until this point was centered around interrogating systems of racial and economic inequality. As I navigated the food environment in search of better health for myself, I found racial and class inequality right there in the food system just as strikingly as it was in the education or prison system. I began doing research and following the debates taking place in the public sphere. I notice what community activists had long recognized – that eating better was a privilege not a right. The best quality foods were the most expensive foods and more likely to be sold in grocery stores catering to the upper middle class. It was through my personal experience that the seeds of this project took root. I was curious to understand other people’s experiences procuring food from day to day, making sense of what to eat among alternatives, and making meaning of their daily food consumption practices.

With these questions in tow, I set out in the beginning of 2012 to talk with different communities across the states of California and Hawaii. During nine-months of preliminary fieldwork, I worked on farms and at farmer’s markets and did informal interviews with farmers, food justice activists, and residents about their relationships with food. This is how I came to meet Doron on that January afternoon. In 2007, Doron started Food, What?!, a summer youth leadership and empowerment program for at-risk youth from Santa Cruz and the neighboring farming community of Watsonville. During the program, youth live together on the teaching farm at UC Santa Cruz to grown, cook, manage, and distribute food.

While we walked around the UCSC farm, Doron raised four points about the intersection of food choice and inequality that became the basis for this dissertation. First, he told me that he did not particularly like the term ‘food desert’ and suggested the term ‘food swamp’ instead. A desert suggests that there is no food, but in low-income communities, there is often an abundance of food though it is primarily unhealthy and prepackaged foods. Second, he suggested that the term food desert erases the experiences of people who may have physical access to grocery stores and healthy food, but lack symbolic access based on race and class. To illustrate this point, he provided a poignant comparison of eating in West Oakland, California – a community that was frequently in the news at that time for being a food desert – versus the wealthier university and surfing town of Santa Cruz. He shared.

West Oakland has something like 50 plus liquor stores. Santa Cruz has something like nine. West Oakland has the one grocery store. Santa Cruz has a variety of grocery stores, health food stores and five farmers markets to choose from. Given this, you would think that people in Santa Cruz have more access to healthy food than those in West Oakland. But at the end of the day, the Hispanic family in Santa Cruz might live two blocks from a grocery store or farmers market and choose not to go there because they don’t feel comfortable or like they belong. So they travel 15 minutes away to a grocery store in another part of town.

In this situation, Doron wondered, who really has less access? The kind of access that people had in these two places was different indeed, and Doron noted that the current debate had missed the experiences of those like the Hispanic family in the food dense neighborhood.

Third, many of Doron’s youth shared stories of their parents going to food giveaways when they lacked other options for feeding themselves and their families. At the food giveaways, it clicking for these youth that they were poor and this lead to a great deal of shame that Doron was working to ameliorate in his work by setting up farm stands for low-income communities. Needed, he suggested, were more ways of procuring food for low-income communities that placed at the forefront dignity rather than poverty.

Lastly, Doron recounted stories of youth who came to the summer farm program and experienced deep transformation while on the farm. They felt healthier, empowered, and ready to take what they had learned back into their communities. Though many promised when they left that they would keep eating fresh, organic, food over the convenient foods that they ate before the program, little by little, Doron witnessed some of these youth fall back into old patterns as they became re-embedded within their local communities. Why was that, he wondered? Was there a way to create a more sustainable pathway to wellness through food for these kids?

I was inspired by my conversation with Doron and curious to understand more about the stories that he shared. During the remaining nine months of preliminary fieldwork, I witnessed these stories for myself through observations and conversations. People shared with me visions for their futures and desires for their health that they often framed as deeply correlated to the kinds of foods that they consumed and fed to their families from day to day. Often people were excited to share with me what they

conceptualized as right versus wrong, healthy versus unhealthy, or clean versus contaminated foods to eat. And yet not everyone was able to actualize their aspirations in practice. In fact, it was more so the case that I encountered people struggling to fully take up their visions for health and wellness through food. Strikingly, people also repeatedly shared what I came to call *psychic internal food wars*. For example, during my time in Hawaii, people talked often about their relationship to Spam. This processed meat was simultaneously a symbol of colonial power, a food that people grew up eating and therefore ate with fondness and enjoyment, and a food that people had learned would make them ill if they consumed too much. This caused an internal pull of joy and anxiety wrapped up together as one – emotions that needed to be managed as they attempted to distance themselves from this food or found themselves eating it anyways. In California, this showed up around discourses on clean, organic, local foods. Those who made a commitment to eating this way often expressed anxiety when they had to purchase foods that they had come to label as unclean or toxic. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would be surprised at this finding. In his theory of the relationship between social class and taste, he predicts that people form tastes for what they can afford and that they eat these class specific foods with joy and pride, often seeing their “choices” as a righteous symbol of their class position.

This preliminary fieldwork, led me to a series of research questions: how do race, class, and place inform people’s food related health aspirations and their daily food consumption practices? How do people make sense of their ability or inability to align their aspirations with their practices? Connected, I was curious to explore a series of sub-questions: how does the Hispanic family living in a food dense neighborhood make sense of the food options around them? Do they feel that they have equal access to health and wellness through food as their neighbors? If not, how *do* they feel as they eat from day to day? Would that family’s experiences and the set of meanings that they attach to food and health be the same or different if they lived in a food swamp, as Doron called it? And how do people make sense of their choices when they perceive a gap between what they aspire to eat or think of as good and what they can actually eat given their location within the city or their racial or economic position? What follows is an exploration of these questions and an attempt to provide a nuanced and multidimensional, qualitative account of how race, class, and place affect people’s relationships to food.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

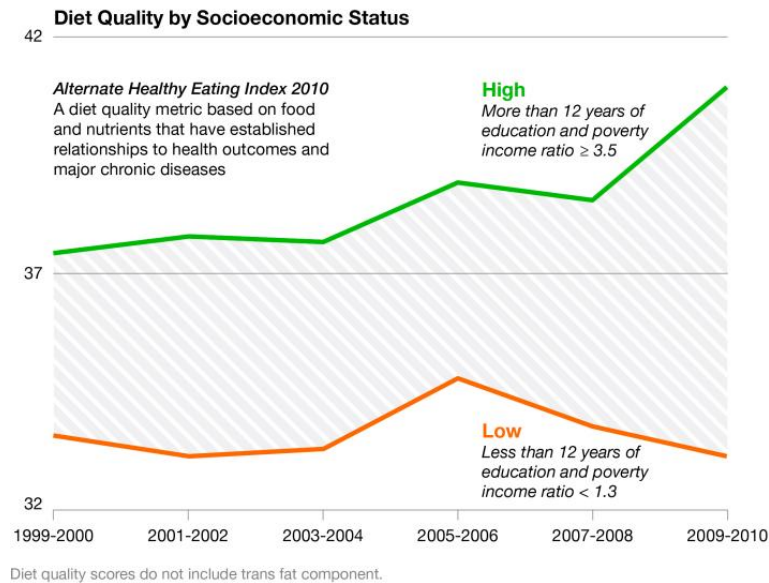
Over the last 20 years, the connection between food consumption, health and inequality has been at the center of influential public debate and academic scholarship. On the one hand, eating a diet full of fruits and vegetables has been shown to lower the risks of certain diseases and increase longevity and wellness. On the other hand, eating a diet that lacks fruits and vegetables or that relies on high sugar, high fat, nutrient-poor foods has been linked to increased risks for food related diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, type-two diabetes, and high blood pressure (Agardh et al. 2011; Braveman et al. 2010; Rabi et al. 2006; Meich et al. 2006; McLaren 2007). In other words, what we eat and how much we eat can offer us a path towards better health or a path towards disease. Moreover, recent studies have raised alarms about the connection between the quality of ones diet and ones race and class status. These studies show that “nutrient rich” diets are consumed more frequently by individuals who occupy high socioeconomic status and race positions whereas “nutrient poor” diets are consumed more frequently by individuals who occupy low socioeconomic status and race positions (Darmon and Drewnowski 2008; McLaren 2007; McLeod, Lawler, and Schwalbe 2014; Miech et al. 2006; Pampel, Krueger, and Denney 2010). In fact, some research shows that this gap in diet quality between the rich and poor has been increasing. A popularly cited report by Wang et al (2014) shows that while the dietary quality in America overall has gotten better with time, the nutritional disparity between the rich and poor is widening. Their report also reveals that non-Hispanic Blacks with low socio-economic status have the poorest dietary quality and show minimal improvement over time. These findings, along with studies that show rates of obesity and food-related diseases on the rise, have led academics to examine the links between food consumption, health, and inequality. What factors lead to these race and class stratified patterns of food consumption?

Scholars have been particularly interested in understand issues surrounding food access and how disparities in food access and cost lead to disparities in health. As such, much attention has been paid to differences in food availability, quality, and price at the neighborhood-level. Studies find that price determines the kinds of foods that individuals can purchase as fresh fruits and vegetables are often more expensive and quicker to spoil than pre-packaged and fast foods (Drewnowski and Darmon 2005; French 2003; Lin et al. 2014). Income and neighborhood also determines access to transportation, which affects where individuals can purchase food among alternatives (Beaulac, Kristjansson, and Cummins 2009). Studies reveal that some low-income communities have less access to healthy and affordable food as full-service grocery stores, farmers markets, and healthy food alternatives are absent or located far away – a phenomenon popularly known as living in a ‘food desert’ (Cummins and Macintyre 2006; Inagami et al. 2006; Morland et al. 2002). The majority of these studies conclude that food deserts disproportionately impact communities of color (for a review see Beaulac et al. 2009; Smoyer-Tomic, Spence, and Amrhein 2006). Additionally, research suggests that there may be a “poverty penalty” (Mendoza 2011:1) such that food that is sold in poor neighborhoods is more expensive and of lower quality.

Figure 1: Graph of Diet Quality By Socioeconomic Status

The diet quality gap

In the U.S., the gap in the quality of diets has widened between the haves and the have-nots.



Source: *National Geographic Magazine* (McMillan 2014).

However, these studies present mixed results about whether neighborhoods and access to grocery stores result in different food procurement practices or different health outcomes (see, for example: Cummins and Macintyre 2006; Holsten 2008). For example, in a recent article, Thomas (2010) challenged the food desert hypothesis by measuring the distance of food secure and food insecure households to the closest food retailer in an urban, Midwest neighborhood. He found that there is little to no difference between the two groups in terms of distance to a healthy, nutritious food supply. He also found that neither group was more likely to indicate that distance from home, work, or bus influenced their store choice. Similarly, in a study of children and obesity in California, Lee (2012) found that while there were twice as many fast food restaurants and convenience stores in low income communities compared to wealthier ones, there were also twice as many supermarkets and full-service grocery stores. Likewise, some studies have shown that those who live in neighborhoods with greater access to grocery stores eat better overall (Cummins and Macintyre 2006; Inagami et al. 2006; Morland and Evenson 2009) and that low access to grocery stores is associated with higher body mass index and rates of obesity (Ahern, Brown, and Dukas 2011; Gibson 2011; Howlett, Davis, and Burton 2016; Inagami et al. 2006; Morland and Evenson 2009; Rose and Richards 2004; Tang et al. 2014), while others find little to no correlation between neighborhood, food access, and health outcomes (Burdette and Whitaker 2004; Pearson et al. 2005). Also, efforts to address food access and food related health concerns both at the neighborhood and national level – such as opening grocery stores in ‘food desert’ communities or building edible schoolyards – have not yielded significant results.

These mixed results suggest that structural analysis can only take us part of the way in understanding the relationship between food consumption practices and health outcomes in America. Social scientists suggest that this is because this public health paradigm focuses too narrowly on promoters and barriers to health (Frohlich and Potvin 2010), a shallow focus that “acts to silo health as somehow separate from the political, economic, social, and cultural realm” (Page-Reeves et al. 2014:202). Indeed, recent studies in sociology, anthropology and geography have shown us that structuralist accounts of food consumption are too rigid and miss out on the nuanced meanings and feelings that also drive people’s food procurement and consumption practices. While we know, then, that objective factors and subjective experiences both contribute to this ‘food gap’, we still do not know how objective factors and subjective experiences work together to produce people’s daily relationships to food. Therefore, researchers and public health policy makers have called for more comprehensive investigations of the local food environment, the sociocultural factors that contribute to everyday food consumption practices, and how structural and sociocultural factors work together to produce stratified patterns of food consumption (Cannuscio et al. 2014; Frohlich and Potvin 2010; Page-Reeves et al. 2014).

My dissertation investigates how race, class and place shape food consumption and procurement practices. I presents a qualitative study based on research conducted at two field sites in Oakland, California: the Oasis, a multi-racial, class diverse urban neighborhood with a variety of grocery stores and restaurants within a 1-mile radius; and the Turf, an inner city, Black and Hispanic neighborhood with a high concentration of poverty and no grocery stores within a 1-mile radius. In the context of these neighborhoods, I examine the meanings that people attach to the food options available around them, how they organize their practices within the set of choices available to them, and how they feel about themselves as they succeed and fail at approximating their health and eating aspirations from day-to-day.

I argue that neighborhood shapes food consumption practices through what I call *local logics of accomplishment* – relational belief systems constructed vis-a-vis the opportunities, constraints, and resulting interaction orders of local environments that define what constitutes accomplished daily practice. I further argue that these local logics of accomplishment are configured on a spectrum of what we might think of as ideal states of being through food: aspirations of health and wellness on the one hand versus fears of illness and abjection on the other. These are potential states of the body, racialized, classed categories, and ways that people map the social and physical geography of the city.

Amongst mounting fears of unclean, unsafe, disease-producing food, respondents across neighborhoods expressed a desire to regularly eat “clean,” fresh, and home cooked food purchased in places where they felt cared for. However, socioeconomic status, racial group membership, and neighborhood mediated respondent's ability to do this successfully. In the middle-class neighborhood of the Oasis where care, beauty and abundance were prominent, respondents measured the value of their daily food consumption practices against their aspirations to easily eat fresh, local, “clean” and ethically produced foods while distancing themselves from food practices associated with need and disease. They therefore felt accomplished when they both could purchase and desire to eat fresh foods from day-to-day.

In the poor neighborhood of the Turf where neglect, abandonment, and struggle characterized daily life, respondents measured the value of their daily food consumption practices against the abject, dehumanizing conditions of poverty and disease. They therefore felt accomplished when they were able to either survive within this struggle or create any modicum of space between their practices and these abject conditions.

However, because only the upper-middle class respondents were truly able to approximate their aspirations through their practices. Everyone else experienced distress as they often lacked the resources needed to eat the way that they associated with wellness and health. However, unlike Bourdieu would predict, only the upper-middle class internalized and took on the tastes for what they could afford. Everyone else was acutely aware that their practices were not in line with their aspirations. As people perceived that their failure to align their aspirations with their practices led to illness and abjection, this caused distress that needed to be resolved, negotiated, and managed.

I show how these local logics of accomplishment with regards to food and eating produce different sets of emotions in these two neighborhoods that need to be managed. I explore how people engage in both positive and corrective emotion-work to manage these emotions from day-to-day such that they feel accomplished regardless of their opportunities and constraints that they have to purchase wellness through food. In this way, I argue that, approximating these food related health aspirations on the one hand and distancing from the abject conditions of poverty on the other was externalized through capitalism as a game through which people received emotional and symbolic rewards or penalties. These emotional rewards and penalties resulted in respondents experiencing their ability to align their practices with their aspirations not as simply a result of an objectively exploitative social structure and its patterns of domination but rather as an internal and individual quality of the self through which they could become happy and healthy, or abject and ill.

I organize these ideas into five empirical chapters based on five relationships to food and eating that emerged during my fieldwork – relationships of ease, struggle, and distress constructed against aspirations of wellness in the Oasis; relationships of survival and accomplishment constructed against abject conditions of poverty in the Turf. I conclude by suggesting that neighborhood, race, and class matter not just for what people can purchase among alternatives or where they feel comfortable shopping, but also for what people feel they can accomplish with regards to their health through food. Further, what people feel they can accomplish impacts both their practices and how they feel about their practices. The implications of these findings for public health policy on food related health disparities are considered.

ASPIRATION VERSUS PRACTICE

In this dissertation, I argue that to understand stratified patterns of food consumption, we must look at the alignment or misalignment between people's food-related health aspirations and their daily practices as well as how they make sense of space in between. There is a rich but underdeveloped overlap between conversations in the public sphere about food access and food procurement practices of people living in low-income communities with larger conversations about ethical eating. There is an unspoken moral argument embedded within these concerns around the food consumption practices of the

poor. This is made visible when we look at the interventions that have been made in low-income communities. Efforts such as the school garden programs and gourmet chefs serving quinoa to low-income school children are efforts to re-socialize the poor to eat “correctly.” These interventions make the assumption, then, that better education will lead the poor to eat like the middle class and that middle class food and eating ideals are the correct ideals (Biltekoff 2013; Mason 2012). In fact, Mason (2012) shows that in order for low-income mothers to receive WIC benefits, they are forced to go through a process of “learning” the correct ways of feeding themselves and their families. This correct training often necessitated that WIC recipients reject their cultural foodways as bad in favor of a more standard American middle-class diet. The uncomfortable question, then, that I believe lays at the foundation of these studies on food access and the food built environment but that isn’t fully articulated, is what do people in different communities think of as the good and bad or the correct and incorrect ways of eating, and how does neighborhood, race, or class mediate both the food and eating aspirations of their residence as well as their abilities to achieve these aspirations? This question is especially apropos given that increasingly over the past 10 years ethical ideas about what is good versus bad, clean versus contaminated, and moral versus immoral food consumption practices have been used to try to solve the issues around the so called obesity “epidemic” and food related diseases. Do people’s tastes for foods (or dispositions as Bourdieu calls them) line up with their racial and class positions or what they can afford? Or, put another way, have people’s racial and class positions been internalized and naturalized through their tastes for certain foods over others?

RACE, CLASS AND PLACE

While many of the studies on people’s food preferences interview a racially diverse group of respondents – and while they all recognize that race and class matter – they do little to help us understand how racism and classism are operating within local neighborhoods and the cities in which these neighborhoods are located to shape people’s relationships with food and eating. In order to understand more deeply the structural and sociocultural factors that contribute to stratified patterns of food consumption, we must be attentive to how racism and classism contribute to people’s understanding of where health and illness are located within the built food environment, and who truly gets to take up the ideal of wellness through food. I posit that this goes beyond looking at where people feel that they belong or are excluded to looking at how people have internalized feelings of belonging and exclusion born out of race and class in such a way as to inform what they believe they deserve and can achieve.

This is especially critical given what writers in the urban sociology and food justice literatures have shown us – food deserts and poor neighborhoods are not that way by accident. They are rather produced through what McClintock (2011) terms “demarcated devaluation” or complex histories of purposeful segregation, abandonment by the formal economy, and increased surveillance by the state overtime undergirded by classism and racism (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; McClintock 2011). As such, the built-environment “reflects existing social relationships and political-economic dynamics...more than it creates them” (Guthman 2011 22). We also know from environmental sociologists and political ecologists that where you live determines

exposure to health or illness. As Guthman (2011) writes “different environments can produce differential life chances since groups marginalized by their race, class, gender, or citizenship status tend to be disproportionately exposed to health-depriving conditions in their jobs, neighborhoods, and home environments or have less access to healthy-giving environmental amenities” (11). In this dissertation, I argue that what is missing from the sociology of food is a deeper and more deliberate engagement with people’s understandings of how race and class shape differences in objective differences in food access and cost as well as how race and class shape differences in food consumption practices. Does race, class, or neighborhood influence how people make sense of their ability or inability to actualize their food related health aspirations? Studies talk about how individuals “self-sort” while shopping for groceries – going to those stores where they can shop among people with similar racial and socioeconomic status markers as themselves. My data suggests that there is more at stake in the practice of self-sorting than simply the segregation of people to different grocery stores. Rather, grocery stores held symbolic value for people marking off cleanliness, wellness, and white middle-class status versus dirtiness, illness, and racialized poverty. As people self-sorted, therefore, they did so with these imbricated and complex understandings around what kind of health, wellness and status they felt they could achieve for themselves.

EMOTIONS

The literature on people’s subjective experiences procuring and consuming food provide convincing and poignant evidence for how food is an emotional experience as well as a physical and symbolic one. However, the psychic war that people repeatedly articulated to me during my preliminary fieldwork is strikingly absent from current studies. Food, poverty, and privilege all elicit emotions that may conflict, need to be managed, and are constantly produced and reproduced as people interact with others and places from day-to-day. In this dissertation, I show both how food procurement and consumption practices *elicit* emotions as well as how people *manage* and *work* on these emotions in significant positive and negative ways as they navigate opportunities and barriers to eating how they would ideally want to eat. This is especially important given what I will discuss in the following section that eating “right” is imbricated with happiness and wellbeing and eating wrong is imbricated with not just potential illness but also moral failure.

The respondents in my study engage with the daily practice of eating and purchasing food as a game of approximation through which they attempt to align what they eat with what they believe is the best, moral, clean, and right way to eat. When they can approximate their food and eating aspirations through their daily practices, they receive emotional and symbolic awards such as feelings of happiness and wellbeing, the sense of health, and the self-righteousness and status that comes with moral consumption. When they fail to align their practices with their aspirations, they receive emotional and symbolic penalties such as fear of becoming ill and contaminated by the food that they do eat, as well as being made to shop in places where they feel degraded, dehumanized, and uncared for. These emotions had to be managed from day-to-day. In this dissertation, I discuss both the positive emotion work that people did to produce themselves in alignment with their aspirations as well as the reparative emotion work that people did to

neutralize shame, guilt and distress for making choices they thought of as wrong or – worse – potentially leading towards disease.

I further argue that the game of approximation and emotion work that it entailed, in particular this system of emotional and symbolic rewards and penalties, mystifies the objective reality of class exploitation and the accumulation of profit for the food industry that occurs as a result of people’s consumption practices. This process of mystification also contributes to the reproduction of these racialized, classed stratified patterns of consumption. Most respondents across class, race, and neighborhood understand that objective differences in material resources give them an advantage or disadvantage when purchasing “good” food in a stratified marketplace. Still, they see their ability to successfully or unsuccessfully play this game as a matter of some personal, intrinsic, or racial quality of the self. For those with the highest levels of material and symbolic resources, this meant naturalizing their success at playing this game of approximation as a matter of having the correct tastes and values. For everyone else, this meant resigning to the set of choices that they can afford given their level of material resources and location within the city.

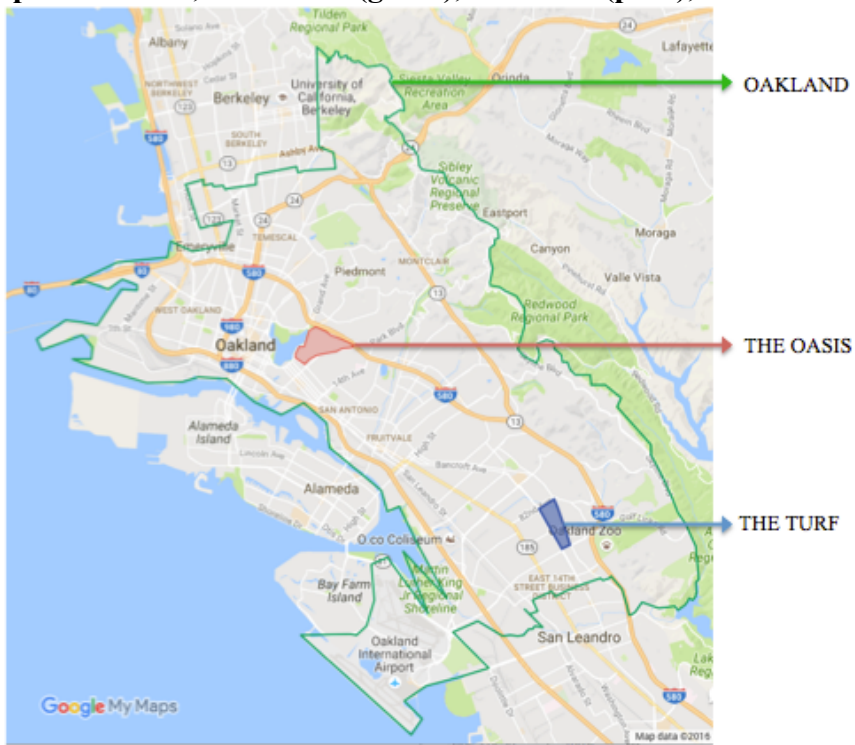
THE STUDY

This project is based on relational qualitative fieldwork conducted between 2012 and 2016 in two neighborhoods of Oakland, California that I call the Oasis and the Turf (see Figure 2). From fast food restaurants to farmers markets, the Bay Area accommodates a wide range of food consumption options and philosophies. It is also heralded as unique in its cultural, racial, and class diversity, therefore allowing me to recruit respondents across a range of social structural locations. A hub for alternative philosophies and activist movements around food, it provides an interesting field site for examining how social inequalities are mapped by people’s relationship to the food that they eat.

Yet stark inequalities in access to food make this an interesting field site for examining the relationship between social inequalities and everyday food choices. On the one hand, Oakland is situated approximately 80 miles to the west of the 400-mile long Central Valley, an area that has become known as the breadbasket of America because it is responsible for producing over ¼ of the food that Americans consume across the country (see Figure 3). This location means that, for some communities, food is fresher, cheaper, and more widely available than in other parts of the country.

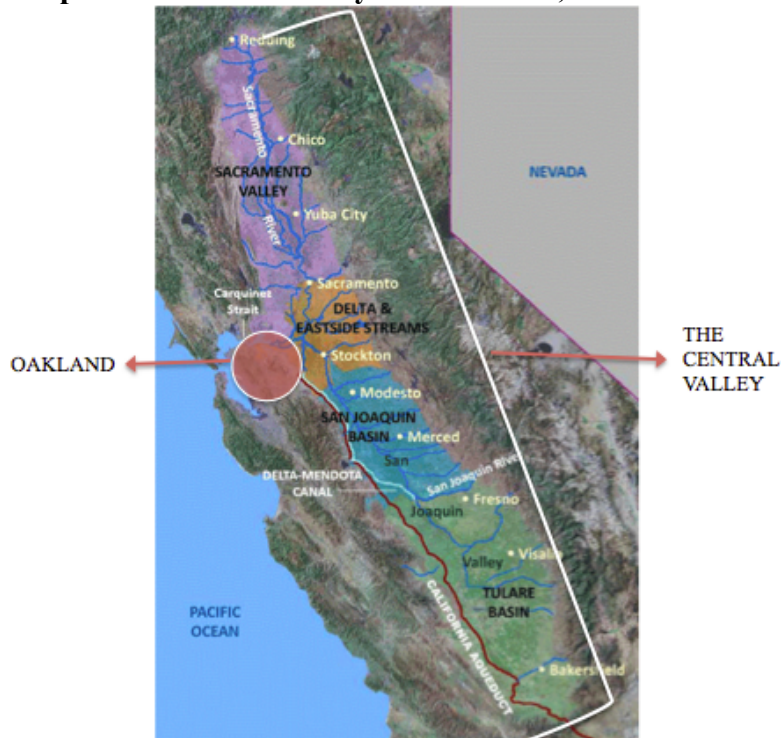
At the same time food insecurity in Oakland – the condition of having limited or uncertain access to nutritionally adequate food – is higher than the national average and increasing (MkNelly, Kuyper and Nishio, 2006). In 2012 across the nation, 14.5% of households were food insecure (Coleman-Jensen, Nord, Singh 2013). In Alameda county, where Oakland is located, 33% of individuals experiencing food insecurity. This rate has continued to rise since the recession hit and with the costs of living in Oakland increasing over the past years due to gentrification and flows of people into the city from San Francisco. Studies have shown that African Americans and Hispanics have higher rates of food insecurity than Asians and Whites, as they historically have lower annual incomes. To this end, Oakland has become a hub for food activist organizations that aim to make fresh food available and affordable to low-income communities.

Figure 2: Map of Oakland, California (green), the Oasis (pink), and the Turf (blue)



Source: Google Maps (2017), modifications by author.

Figure 3: Map of the Central Valley and Oakland, California



Source: U.S. Geological Survey (2017), modifications by author.

While some argue that these statistics make the Bay Area an anomaly compared to the rest of the country, I suggest that The Bay Area shows an intensification of what is happening in the rest of the country as communities are increasingly - though unevenly - adopting discourses and practices around organic, fresh, local and sustainable food.

The Oasis

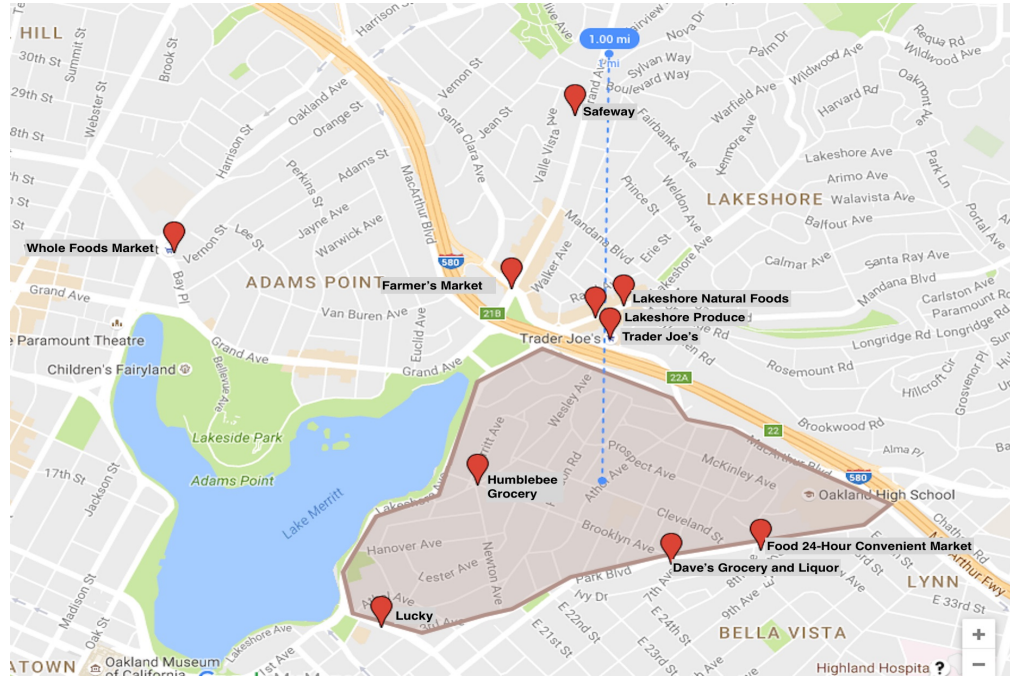
Two miles from the city center sits a neighborhood that I call the Oasis (see Figure 8)¹. This area is home to a class diverse group of residents with an average annual income of approximately \$60,000. 14% of these residents have incomes below the poverty line (compared to 25.5% for the city of Oakland) and 48% of residents graduated from college. Driving through the neighborhood, one is struck by the arrangement of million dollar homes, duplexes, apartment buildings, and public housing often on the same street. That said, the class diversity of the neighborhood is not fully spatially integrated. Upper-middle class residents who live in houses populate the north and northeastern sections of the neighborhood bordering MacArthur Boulevard. The neighborhood becomes progressively poorer with more apartment buildings the closer one gets to East 18th street. Additionally, this is also a multi-racial community. At the time that I was conducting interviews, white, black, and Asian residents divided the population of the neighborhood almost equally (32%, 25%, and 30% respectively).

The streets of the Oasis are well maintained and manicured. Lush trees and gardens surround the homes, which showcase a variety of architectural styles and colors. A five-minute walk away sits a tree-lined walking trail that serves as a gathering place for many residents throughout the city. On any given day, one can easily grasp the rich diversity of residents in the Oasis, as people can be seen riding bicycles, sitting in one of two neighborhood coffee shops, taking walks and playing outside. This is a place that people come to visit and want to live.

Beyond the diversity of its residents, this neighborhood serves as an interesting field site due to its rich variety of both grocery stores and restaurants close by (see Figure 4). In the neighborhood are four food retail establishments – one organic pop-up farm stand (Humblebee Grocery), one full service grocery store (Lucky) and two convenient stores that sell fresh produce (Dave’s Food and Liquor and Food 24-Hour Convenience Market). Over the highway to the north are a Trader Joe’s grocery store and a small grocer called Lakeshore Natural Foods. Within one and a quarter miles, there is also a Safeway Supermarket and Whole Foods Market. A local farmers market – one of the biggest and most loved in Oakland – takes place under the highway to the northwest every Saturday. Each of these stores looks different, sells different kinds of foods, and caters to a different clientele.

¹ The Oasis is comprised of two census tracts but considered one neighborhood by City-Data.

Figure 4: Map Of Grocery Stores (Red) And Convenience Stores (Blue) Within 1-Mile Of The Oasis.



Source: Google Maps (2017), modifications by author.

Lucky is a large box warehouse store with bright florescent lights and tall ceilings. When you enter, you walk around checkout counters and come to a row of 15 long aisles. The store is set up to emphasize bargain shopping and packaged food and has weekly deals that it highlights in its coupon magazine or circular. Deals are prominently displayed both at the beginnings of each aisle and food items that are on sale are labeled with special “bargain” labels. The fresh fruits and vegetables take up the first aisle. There is no organic food at this store. The patrons are largely working class and people of color.

Dave’s Food and Liquor is a typical corner convenience store. It sells drug store items and household supplies, beer and liquor, tobacco products, canned and packaged food and a refrigerator worth of cheeses, yogurt, hot dogs, and bacon. Food 24-Hour Convenience Market sells the same supplies as Dave’s Market except that it also has a dozen white plastic baskets filled with fruits and vegetables including lemons, oranges, cabbage, tomatoes, garlic, peppers and onions among others.

At the time of the interviews, there was also a small store called Humblebee Grocery in the center of the neighborhood, though it has now gone out of business. This “pop-up farm stand” specialized in bringing farmers market quality food to the Cleveland Heights neighborhood and referred to themselves as: “A neighborhood bike-up grocery store”². The inside of the storefront was set up with wooden tables on which sat wicker baskets and wooden crates full of fresh vegetables, fruits, jams, honey, eggs and pastries. Product information was written on small rectangular chalkboards leaning against the crates, giving the store a shabby chic feeling. The establishment was open two days a week and mostly catered to the middle-class and upper-middle class.

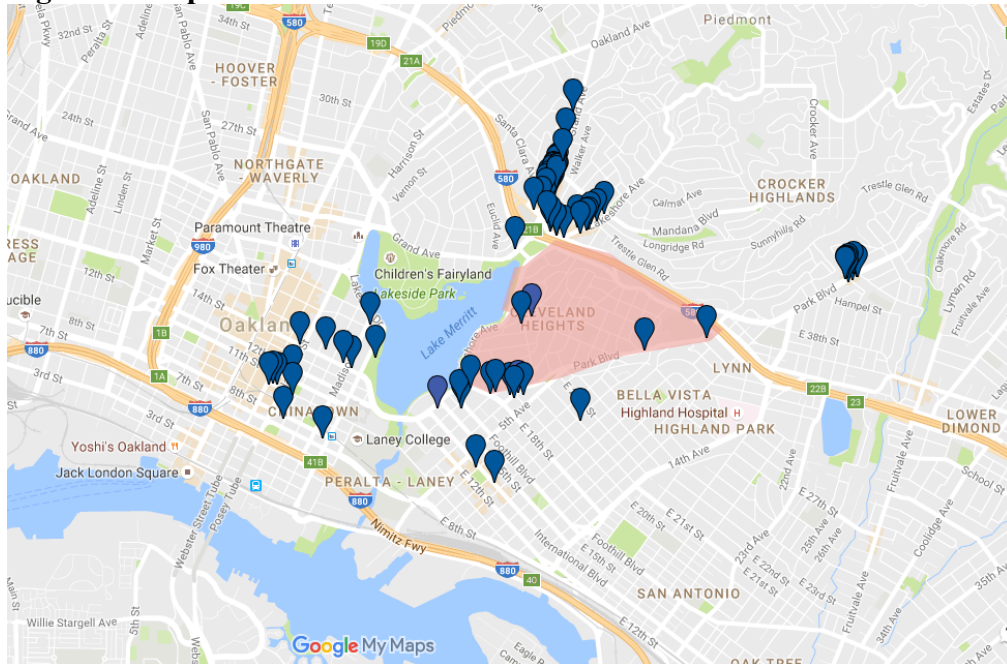
² “Humblebee Grocery,” <http://humblebeegrocery.com/>, (January 10, 2015)

Across the highway is a Trader Joe's. This store specializes in relatively inexpensive foods, all under the Trader Joe's label, packaged in colorful and fun ways. It is a very small store with only four long aisles. The front aisles are frozen and refrigerated foods. Towards the back of the store are aisles with dry goods. Along one wall are fruits and vegetables, dips and sauces. Along the opposite wall are wines, beers, and alcohols. A racially diverse cross-section of people shops here, although they are mostly middle and upper-middle class.

The weekly farmers market is an outdoor event that takes place every Saturday underneath the highway. During the market, local farmers and artisans set up tents and display their goods for people to come and buy. Here, shoppers have access to different varieties of whatever fruits and vegetables are in season. There are also hot food vendors and two live acoustic bands playing in opposite areas of the market. The farmers market at Lake Merritt is one of the most diverse in the Bay Area, attracting shoppers from all racial and ethnic backgrounds. It is unclear what the class makeup is of the average farmers market shopper, though the market has made an effort to be more accessible to low-income residents by accepting CalFresh – the food entitlements program in the state of California.

This neighborhood also sits next to two commercial thoroughfares with restaurants running the gamut from fast food restaurants, diners, dive bars, ethnic food restaurants, artisanal pizzas, high-end American cuisine and upscale lounges (see Figure 5). Given this, the Oasis is ideally suited to get at the question of how, in the face of a multiplicity and diversity of food retailers, people choose to eat what they eat among alternatives.

Figure 5: Map Of Restaurants And Cafes Within 1-Mile³



Source: Google Maps (2017), modifications by author.

³ To create this map, a group of undergraduate research assistants conducted a visual survey by foot of restaurants and cafes within a 1-mile radius of the Oasis.

In sum, the Oasis represents the physical and symbolic center. First, it is a setting where many worlds coexist and “collide” making it an excellent place to study the configurations of relations, “subtle correspondents,” boundaries, and tensions that comprise the field of food and eating (Desmond 2014). I also suggest that we might view the Oasis as a representation of a sort of public health utopian vision: the sheer diversity of options and people and the easy access to walking trails makes this the kind of neighborhood that public health policy makers seek to create. How do race and class shape food consumption in a neighborhood where there are a plethora of options for purchasing fresh and processed food close by? What meanings do people attach to the food and food spaces around them? How do they organize their practices within the set of choices available to them? And how do they feel about themselves buy and eat food from day to day?

The Turf

On the other side of town, ten miles to the east of the Oasis, sits a neighborhood I call the Turf⁴. The Turf is in many ways the picture of an urban ghetto. Signaling to passersby the capital that has left, yellowing and faded banners hang on storefronts that are now abandoned or boarded up. The houses, many of which show signs of deterioration, have tall fences with locking gates and bars over their windows protecting them from the streets.

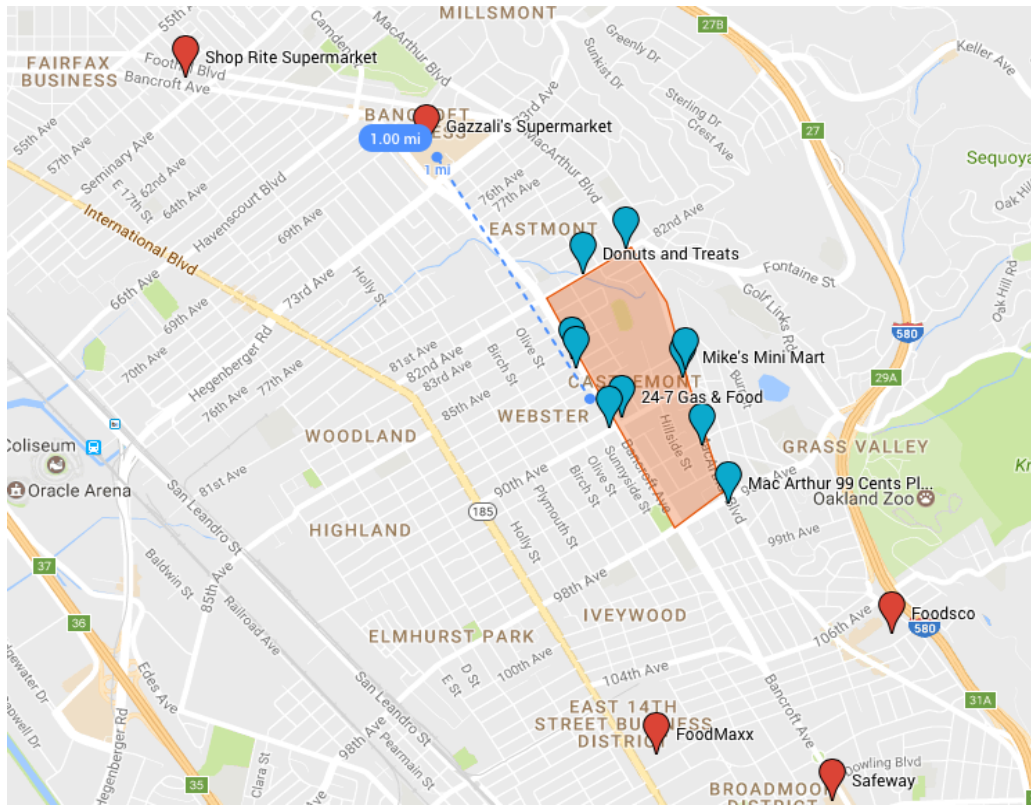
Whereas housing in the Oasis showed a multiplicity of architectural styles, the houses in the Turf are nearly identical single-family homes with small front yards. Despite the relative housing shortage in the city, almost every block on the Turf has a lot sitting empty, overgrown with grass and littered with trash. This is a place where jobs disappeared. The residents are predominantly African-American (65%) and Hispanic (25%) (see Figure 8). Most people do not complete high school (57%). Those who do, rarely go on to college (32%). The crime rate is high and grocery stores are far away.

In fact, the USDA has labeled this community a “food desert” – a neighborhood with low access to transportation where the closest full-service grocery store is further than ½ mile away (United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service). In the case of the Turf in particular, the closest grocery store is 1-1/3 miles away, a 32-minute walk (see Figure 6). Instead of grocery stores, ten convenient stores sit almost as anchors planted every few blocks on the major avenues surrounding the residential streets. These storefronts, which look like they used to be painted white, are now browned on the outside. Bars cover the windows and graffiti tags paint the sides. Perhaps because of the non-descript and somewhat aged look of these buildings, the colorful advertisements for cigarettes and energy drinks taped to the windows and doors seem to pop. Inside, the stores typically sell snack foods, beverages, alcohol, cigarettes, and toiletries. Two of the six stores also sell some fresh produce, canned goods, and meats. However, as my respondents in this neighborhood and I confirmed, prices in these stores are almost double the prices at full-service grocery stores.

⁴ The Turf is comprised of one census tract and considered one neighborhood by City-Data.

The closest full service grocery store is a place called Foods Co. This store is relatively new. It was built in 2007 as the result of a public campaign spearheaded to address the growing public awareness around the issues of food deserts. This store was the solution and has brought fresh and affordable fruits and vegetables to the neighborhood all while creating jobs for the community. The store is a huge building located in a shopping complex. Walking on, one is immediately confronted by a wall of items on sale and items in bulk packages of 10s and 20s. The high ceilings and wide aisles make it feel like the wholesale outlet store Costco. The store forefronts its sale pre-packaged and canned foods. However, along the left wall there is a large display of fresh fruits and vegetables including a small refrigerator of organic produce. Interestingly, shortly after this celebrated store opened, it was in the news again when the workers went on strike.

Figure 6: Map of grocery stores (red) and convenience stores (blue) within 1-mile of The Turf.

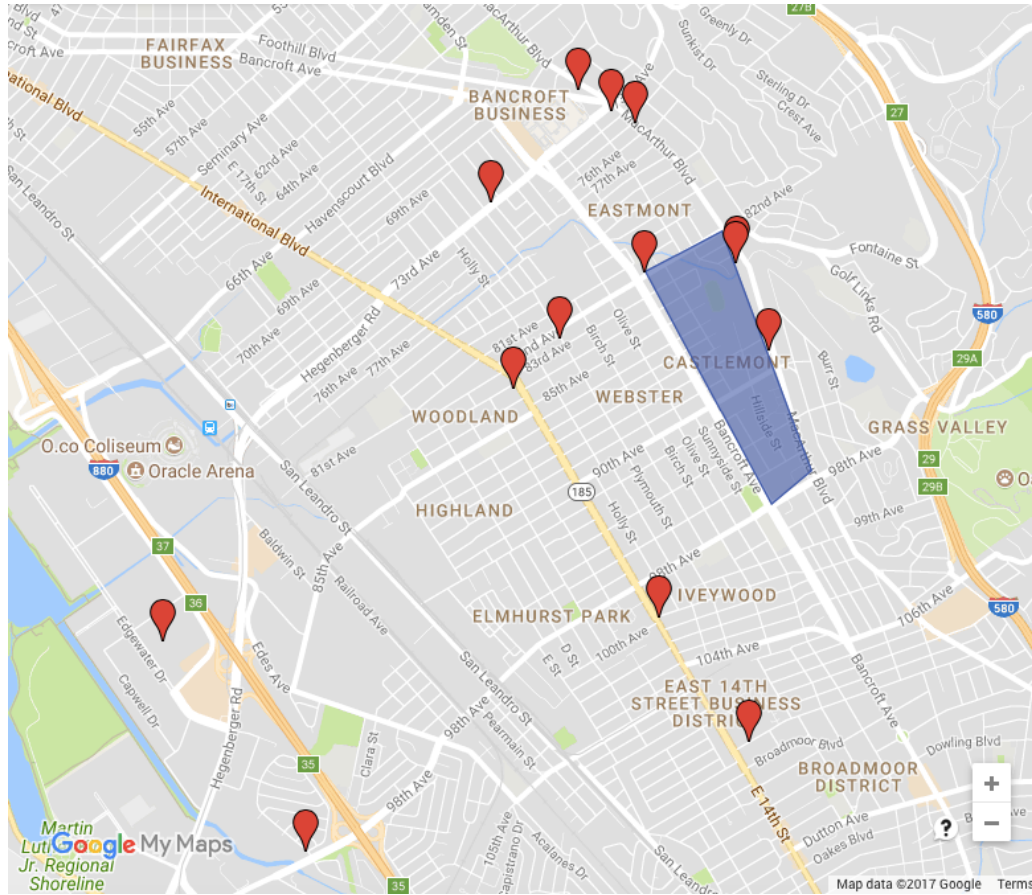


Source: Google Maps, modifications by author.

As jobs are hard to come by in the Turf, rates of food insecurity are high. This means that along with corner stores and grocery stores, there are also opportunities to procure food outside of the market in the form of free food giveaways at local church's and community centers (see Figure 7). In fact, there are more free-food giveaways in the Turf than full service grocery stores. While Oakland has been raised up for decades for spearheading major and innovative community food justice initiatives to solve the issues of "food deserts," most of them happened on the other side of town in another low-income

community called West Oakland. During the time of my fieldwork, East Oakland was still marginal even to community interventions.

Figure 7: Map Of Free Food Services In The Turf



Source: Google Maps (2017), modifications by author.

Therefore, the Turf represents the physical and symbolic margin. Hard to get to and easy to pass over, the Turf sits at the edge of the city, close to the dividing line with the suburb of San Leandro. The fresh fruits and vegetables grown in the Central Valley are not shipped here but sweet and salty snacks are in abundance. In many ways, the Turf represents the simultaneously hyper visible and invisible blighted urban ghetto in every city where structural deficits, unemployment, and surveillance by the state characterize daily life. How do race and class shape food consumption in a neighborhood where fresh food is far away? What meanings do people attach to the food and food spaces that are present here? How do they organize their practices within the set of choices available to them? And how do they feel about themselves as they buy and eat food from day to day?

Together, these two field sites as well as the mixed-methodological approach is my attempt to document what Desmond (2014) refers to as the “ecology of the field” of food and eating: “focusing on the internal logics of distinct but interconnected social worlds” and then placing them within “a larger social and spatial ecology” (557).

Figure 8: Demographic Information for the Oasis and the Turf

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION	THE OASIS	THE TURF
<i>*General Demographics</i>		
Population	7487	3710
% People below the poverty level	14%	27%
Median Household Income	\$61,834	\$35,106
Less Than High School Graduate	28%	57%
High School Graduate	23%	32%
Bachelor's Degree or higher	48%	10%
Median Age	37 years: Men 36 years: Women	30 years: Men 31 years: Women
White persons	32%	3%
Black persons	25%	65%
Asian persons	30%	3%
Persons reporting two or more races	3%	2%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin	9%	25%
**Food Desert? (Y/N)	No	Yes
**Low Vehicle Access (Y/N)	No	Yes

**Source: City Data, 2011*

***Source: USDA Food Access Research Atlas*

RESEARCH DESIGN, SAMPLE AND DATA

I conducted twenty months of fieldwork for this project between 2013 and 2016. Data includes 80 in-depth interviews, 15 hours of respondent-collected video footage of daily shopping and eating practices, 25 hour of direct observation with respondents, and 20 hours of observation at grocery stores, restaurants, informal and formal gathering places in these two neighborhoods. Each of these methods was designed to explore a different dimension of people’s daily shopping and eating practices. The in-depth interviews allowed me to get a sense of what people thought was healthy and unhealthy, how they navigated the choices or lack of choices they had, what they typically ate, and how they felt about their choices and themselves as they made those choices. The video and photo ethnographies allowed me to see several days of shopping and eating patterns without my physical presence there to intervene. In the direct observations, I accompanied people to grocery stores that they regularly patron and those where they refuse to go. This let me understand the symbolic, cultural, and moral boundary work that they were doing as they made sense of food choices in their local environments. The indirect observations allowed me to observe people interacting with food and each other in these

neighborhoods and to talk casually to people about their lives. In what follows, I discuss the methods that I used to recruit respondents in both sites, the demographic information of my sample, as well as details of the interviews and extended observations.

Participant Recruitment

Between 2013-2015, I conducted in-depth interviews and extended observations in the Oasis. To recruit respondents in the Oasis, a team of undergraduate researchers and I distributed a participation letter to residents in three phases. During the first phase (October—December 2013), letters were distributed in three different areas: one area of only houses, one area of houses and apartment buildings and one area of just apartment buildings. This method was chosen to solicit a class diverse cross section of the neighborhood. Additionally, flyers about the study were posted at fifteen food and retail establishments around the borders of the neighborhood. During the second phase (February—May 2014), a second letter was distributed to these same respondents reminding them about the study. During the third phase (May—August 2015), 200 additional letters were distributed to a new class diverse section of the neighborhood.

This method solicited 40 respondents. The sample includes respondents from varying racial backgrounds. Thirteen of the respondents identified as Non-Hispanic white, eleven identified as African American, eight identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, one as Hispanic, and one as Mixed-Race Black. These respondents were also class-diverse. Five respondents reported combined annual household incomes between \$75,000 and \$200,000. These respondents were mainly Caucasian. Eight respondents reported combined annual household incomes between \$40,000 and \$74,999 and were either Asian/Pacific Islander or Caucasian. Nine respondents grossed between \$25,000 and \$39,999 per year. These respondents were the most diverse category, comprising respondents who identified as Caucasian, African American, Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander. Lastly, twelve respondents made less than \$25,000 a year. This category was mainly comprised of African-American respondents as well as one respondent who identified as white and two as Asian/Pacific Islander. Individuals in this sample ranged in age between 27 and 79 years old.

There are limitations to these recruitment methods. First, soliciting respondents through letter invitations meant that people could select in and out of the study depending upon how they felt about the topic. My sample in the Oasis is biased towards those who were already willing to talk about their relationship to food – a topic that can be quite personal. Additionally, despite the fact that my recruitment materials were in both Spanish and English, Hispanic/Latinos were underrepresented in this field site.

Between 2013-2015, I conducted in-depth interviews and extended observations in the Turf. With the help of an undergraduate research assistant, I began my recruitment of respondents by distributing 50 letters down one residential street that sat in the middle of the neighborhood. From this letter distribution, I received one interview. My plan initially was to go back and flyer again on this street before moving on to flyer at two additional areas of the neighborhood. However, this one respondent told his neighbors about the study and word quickly spread. Out of 40 interviews, 30 came to me via snowball sampling from this first interview. This ended up being to my advantage. Three-fourths of these respondents arrived for their interview with little to no prior

knowledge of what the interview was about. Instead, they were enticed by the \$20 token payment that I offered in exchange for their participation.

The rest of the interviews were solicited with help of a woman named Shania who worked for a non-profit in the neighborhood. When I was first doing interviews in the Turf, I reached out to one of the community centers in the neighborhood. A woman who worked there at the time put me in touch with Shania, who ended up sitting for an interview and being a fierce ally to me in my project. She accompanied me on several interviews, introduced me to the residents that she knew in the community, and set me up to table at the back-to-school night at the local high school where I recruited five additional respondents.

With the exception of two Hispanic respondents, one white respondent, and one biracial respondent, participants in the Turf were all African American. These respondents ranged in age from 18 to 72 years old. These respondents' average monthly income was \$1,525, or \$18,300 per year. Out of 40 respondents that I interviewed, fifteen reported that they made \$1,000 or less per month or \$12,000 or less per year. Most of these respondents' income came from a combination of government subsidies including Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Women Infants and Children (WIC), and CalFresh benefits, or short-term disability benefits. Four of these seventeen respondents had no income and did not receive government subsidies. Eighteen respondents made between \$1,001-\$2,000 per month, and five made between \$2,001 and \$4,000 per month.

Interviews

Each interview lasted between 1-2 hours and was audio recorded. The interviews conducted in the third phase of interviewing were also video recorded. I met respondents at a variety of locations including respondents' residences, two public libraries, coffee shops and the public park in the neighborhood. In these interviews, I inquired about each respondent's food histories (what, where, and how they ate growing up); where they shop and how they choose to shop in these locations; what they eat from day to day; how they feel about the choices that they have, and how they feel about themselves as they shop and eat. I solicited my respondent's deeper emotional connections with food through unstructured probing into the responses that each person gave to my general questions. For this reason, my interview guide was fairly open ended, as I wanted to provide room for each interview subject to be reflexive about their "common sense" practices as well as how they learned to eat the food that they eat and do not eat.

Extended In-Person and Video Ethnographies

Beyond the in-depth interviews, I employed several extended ethnographic methods meant to fill out and add texture to the stories provided to me by my respondents. I began these extended observations in the summer of 2015 when I spent one full weekend day with two respondents whom I had previously interviewed. During this time, I went with each respondent to the grocery stores and farmers markets that they usually patronize as well as to those stores where they refuse to shop. I then spent an additional full day with one of these respondents. These respondents were chosen using theoretical sampling where each was chosen for how they could help me flesh out main

themes. I was ultimately unsatisfied with this extended method of observation because I, the interview, was still there asking questions and mediating their experience. I was interested in finding a way to remove myself as much as possible from the observation process. Through research, I discovered a precedent in visual sociology for having respondents videotape or photograph their lives and then conducting follow up interviews with them about what they recorded. This research suggested that this method both provided detailed visual accounts of people's lives while giving them a more active role in the research process. I therefore turned to video and photo ethnography for five additional respondents whom I had previously interviewed – two in the Oasis and three in the Turf. As a trail run, I started by giving one respondent in the Turf a disposable camera and asking him to document one full weekday and one full weekend day of his life through food. I then purchased a small video camera and repeated this exercise with two more respondents in the Turf and two respondents in the Oasis. This method provided rich documentations of these respondents' daily lives. But what was more important about this method were the kinds of conversations that the videos and photos allowed us to have. It seems that in the process of agreeing to this project and documenting their lives in these ways, respondents became invested in seeing their lives in more detail and came back with many stories to share about things they realized about their neighborhoods or daily practices.

Lastly, I spent 20 additional hours observing on my own in grocery stores, corner stores, restaurants and cafes, and farmers markets in these two neighborhoods. I documented the kinds of people that tended to patronize these places and the kinds of things that they bought from each. I also documented the ways that people moved through these spaces and interacted with others around them in order to tap into the visceral and emotional aspect of procuring food as well as the racial and class tensions occurring within food spaces, and the kinds and quality of foods sold at each.

Data Analysis

I make no claims to generalizability to other populations; instead, I build on Small's (2009) sequential interviewing method and analyze each interview as a case for how it can help me develop theories and evidence about the relationship between emotions, social inequality, and food choice. I examined each interview after it happened in order to understand how it helped me to make sense of my main research question before moving onto the next interview. In so doing, I also reevaluated my interview schedule to better hone in on the patterns that were emerging. While this study is not generalizable to other populations, I follow Yin (2010) to suggest that it is analytically generalizable to other theories.

Finally, the patterns discussed here were inductively identified after a first round of coding in which an undergraduate student and I coded the complete data set for where each respondent typically shopped for food and refused to shop for food in the neighborhood; why they shopped or didn't shop in these places; and how they felt as they shopped for food. Upon reviewing the data collected from this round of coding, I identified a strong pattern of respondents assessing positive or negative emotions to food stores based on a sense of belonging to a caring imagined community on the one hand or a sense of contamination and disgust on the other. I also identified patterns of

respondents using coping mechanisms to justify purchase inferior products at stores that they didn't particularly like. With this theme in mind, my research assistant and I then reviewed each interview one more time, modifying and engaging in a second round of coding specifically around these themes. In what follows, I outline my theoretical framework and summarize the chapters to follow.

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation examines the relationship is between food related health aspirations, material resources, daily food consumption practices and identity for individuals in two neighborhoods of Oakland, California – one with a variety of options for purchasing food close by and one with few. Within these local contexts, I examine what people desire to eat from day to day, how people understand what it takes to achieve their aspirations and what it means to fail.

In **Chapter 2: “Eating Aspirations and Eating Abjections,”** I outline the arguments around ethical food consumption that have been increasingly dominating national ideas about what is good and right to eat. I show that these arguments are often used to address the issue of food related inequalities. I then review the literature that shows how what we think of as healthy and what we think of ethical food consumption practices are themselves socially constructed and relational categories that often serve the interest of the state and capitalism. I then connect this literature to broader literature on food and culture that looks at food as a symbolic system of communication and, as Counihan and Van Esterik (2013) write, “an index of power relations” (11). I explore Bourdieu’s theory of dispositions and positions and explore its usefulness for this study. I then outline my conceptual framework “eating aspirations, eating abjections.”

In **Part I**, I described how respondents in the Oasis center their logic of practice on an upper-middle-class set of eating *aspirations*. With an abundance of fresh food close to home, they felt accomplished and a sense of wellbeing when they could use their material, symbolic, or emotional resources to approximate these aspirations from day to day. However, when they assessed that they had failed to approximate their aspirations, they experienced distress and anxiety in part because living in this neighborhood meant that they were regularly confronted with the gap between their aspirations and their practices. Each chapter in Part I traces a different relationship between eating aspirations, material resources, daily food consumption practices, and identity that emerged as central in the Oasis – relationships of ease, struggle and distress. In the three chapters that make up this part of the manuscript, I provide a discussion of what this group of respondents typically ate and where they purchased food, what they aspired to eat and thought of as good, and where they learned these aspirations. I then discuss what they reported actually eating from day to day and how well their daily food consumption practices lined up with their aspirations. I then discuss how they made sense of their ability to approximate their aspirations from day to day and how they navigated the local food built environment of the Oasis. I show the salience of race and class in these relationships with food.

In **Chapter Three: “Ease,”** I focus on how food related health aspirations, material resources, daily food consumption practices and identity are imbricated for respondents such that they experienced food as a relationship of ease. I show that these

respondents desired to eat local, sustainably grown, “clean” food; to eat this food in moderation paying attention to nutrition guidelines; and to do so with pleasure and ease. I argue that, although these respondents saw the taste for unprocessed, fresh foods as natural, they still had to work to produce themselves in alignment with these aspirations from day to day. I argue that their symbolic and material resources allowed them to carefully curate their experience within the local built food environment. They shopped at grocery stores and restaurants that they believed to be allied with this eating ethos, and maintained social distance from food stores and people they believed to be connected to wrong or bad choices. Through this self-segregation, these respondents were relatively buffered from interacting with the food stores and food choices that they perceived as bad and from their neighbors that they felt made poor choices. Third, I argue that these respondents shaping their internal self in alignment with their aspirations and curated choices through positive emotion work, performing care and pleasure as they shopped and ate. And because they had the material resources and the external opportunities to eat in alignment with their aspirations, the act of choosing and eating food contained many opportunities to practice pleasure and experience wellbeing through food.

In **Chapter Four: “Struggle,”** I trace how food related health aspirations, material resources, daily food consumption practices and identity are imbricated for respondents such that they experienced food as a relationship of struggle. I argue that these respondents had a similar set of food related health aspirations to those who ate with ease. They desired to eat local, sustainably grown, “clean” food; to eat this food in moderation; and to easily and effortlessly align their tastes and desires with these ways of eating. However, when these respondents set out to organize their daily shopping and eating practices to align with these aspirations, they struggled to do so because they lacked material resources. They also didn’t believe that they always had the correct desires or tastes, leading them to make choices more often that they saw as bad choices. However, they did believe that they could use knowledge to discipline the body in line with the structure of accomplishment set by the upper-middle class. Because of this, they worked to approximate these aspirations the best they could from day to day. I discuss how these respondents understood and placed themselves within the local food built environment of the Oasis. Unlike those who ate with ease, these respondents didn’t always have the money to allow them to “opt-out” of the spaces that they associated with low-quality food and poor choices. They therefore found shopping for groceries to more often resemble work than pleasure, as they had to put their knowledge and self-discipline to use in navigating hidden ingredients or cravings. I posit that, whereas those respondents who ate with ease experienced shopping and eating as a pleasure-filled experience that allowed them to accumulate experiences of wellbeing, those respondents who ate with struggle experienced shopping and eating as a task that needed to be managed. They did this by managing their consumption practices and managing their expectations. But despite these various strategies used to resolve the gap between their aspirations and daily food consumption practices, respondents’ emotions around their daily choices revealed that distress was never fully resolved. Instead, those who struggled always felt that they were on the verge of losing control either by eating something contaminated or making a poor choice. This led to shame and guilt as respondents internalized these as “weaker moments of the self,” as one respondent names

it, symbolizing that they had failed to live up to this structure of accomplishment around what they had come to internalize was right versus wrong to eat.

In **Chapter Five: “Distress,”** I trace on how food related health aspirations, material resources, daily food consumption practices and identity are imbricated for respondents such that they experienced food as a relationship of distress. I argue that these respondents, too, had similar aspirations as those who ate with ease. However, despite these aspirations, there was a most irresolvable gap between their reported food consumption practices and their aspirations. living in the Oasis allowed these respondents to regularly come into contact with different food consumption practices than they witnessed growing up. This regular witnessing along with conversations with friends, doctors, and television shows taught them that their tastes were wrong and that breaking through the cycle of poverty required correcting their tastes. They believed this was due to their lack of material resources and their incorrect tastes. I then illustrate three experiences of distress that occurred because of this gap between aspirations and practices: marginalization, fatalism, and powerlessness. Finally, I illustrate how these respondents used emotion work to manage this gap between their daily food consumption practices, identity, and aspirations. While often unsuccessful at approximating their aspirations through their consumption practices, these did have their emotions at their disposal as a resource to work with.

In **Part Two: “The Turf,”** I describe how respondents in the Turf tended to center their logic of practice around *abjection* – a low or downcast state. Whereas the logic of accomplishment that emerged in the Oasis was in relation to ease accomplishing health and wellness, the logic of accomplishment that emerged in the Turf was in relation to daily survival in the face of overlapping scarcities. This orientation towards abjection was in part because respondents lacked the material and symbolic resources needed to practice their health aspirations through food. Just as importantly, living in the Turf meant that they were *not* bumping up against their aspirations like those in the Oasis. On the contrary, they were surrounded by food they considered to be low quality, and they lived in an environment that taught them that they didn’t have the right to flourish to the fullest of their potential. Quite the opposite, they were made to feel that accomplishing their aspirations was impossible and that wellness through food was the purview of the white middle class. I break this part into two chapters – survival and accomplishment. Each chapter traces a relationship between eating aspirations, material resources, daily food consumption practices, and identity that emerged as central to daily life in the Turf.

In **Chapter 6: “Survival,”** I focus on how food related health aspirations, material resources, daily food consumption practices and identity are imbricated for respondents such that they experienced food as a relationship of survival. I show that, like those in the Oasis, these respondents desired to eat three home cooked meals a day consisting of a balanced plate of fruits, vegetables, starches and meat. They believed that eating too much fried foods and drinking too much soda was a sure path to illness. They were either struggling with illness or had family members or friends who had developed diabetes or high blood pressure. It was in the context of illness that they talked about the importance of healthy eating. I then discuss what these respondents reported that they ate from day to day. Because there were so many barriers to wellness, their ideas and aspirations for healthy eating didn’t get them very far in the Turf. Instead, they negotiated among available options in order to eat as much food as they could eat for as cheaply as

possible. It was typical for respondents to eat two meals a day and fill themselves up with snack foods in between. It was also typical for them to run out of food towards the end of the month. Next, I outline what the experience was like procuring food from day to day. I argue that respondents didn't trust the foods for sale at the corner stores and were often treated with disrespect there. They experienced similar treatment at the food giveaways. They appreciated the full service grocery stores in East Oakland and San Leandro when they could get there, but with so few respondents owning cars, these trips were infrequent. This added up to a generally negative experience procuring food in the Turf, which respondents understood as a result of racialized poverty. I then use these reports of what it was like procuring food in the Turf to give context to how respondents felt about themselves as they ate from day to day. In the last part of this chapter I show that respondents approached food as function because they had made peace with being survivors and in fact found ways to feel quite accomplished as they went through their days as survivors. With necessity all around them and wellness a world away, any incremental step above the extremes of having no food or eating only sweet, salty and fried foods every day made my respondents feel that they were doing a good job caring for themselves and their families.

Finally, in **Chapter Seven: "Accomplishment,"** I focus on how food related health aspirations, material resources, daily food consumption practices and identity are imbricated for respondents such that they experienced food as a relationship of accomplishment. I argue that these respondents shared very similar eating aspirations to the respondents that I discussed in chapter 6. They desired to eat three, home cooked meals a day made with fresh ingredients. They knew that they should watch their sugar, salt, and fat consumption and that in general their food should be baked not fried. They also shared unfavorable experiences procuring food in the Turf. They found the food to be unacceptably low in quality and the service to often be disrespectful. I then posit that what stood out about these respondents was that they rejected the frame of survival adopted by their friends and family to justify being treated poorly. They associated it with the degraded conditions that arose from systemic, racialized, poverty. They witnessed friends and family refusing to think about their food consumption practices and becoming ill. Many had witnessed members of their close networks being hospitalized or dying from food related diseases. So, they worked to distance themselves from this state of abjection through their food procurement strategies and their daily eating practices. They tried not to patronize the neighborhood stores and instead made their way to wealthier parts of town where they could take distance from the abject practices that were born of poverty. I argue that because they measured their practices against this state of abjection, they felt relatively good about their food choices and eating practices. In other words, they didn't perceive that there was a gap between their aspirations and their practices. This stands in contrast to similarly situated respondents in the Oasis who would feel a great deal of anxiety for eating the foods and the ways that these respondent in the Turf ultimately ate. I posit that this difference was due to the logic of accomplishment in the Turf versus the Oasis. These respondents in the Turf felt accomplished because they oriented their self-assessment against abjection and the worse practices of their close ties rather than against aspiration and the perceived better practices of their neighbors.

In the **conclusion**, I end the manuscript by suggesting that neighborhood matters for what people feel they can accomplish with regards to their health through food, and

that what people feel they can accomplish impacts both their practices and how they feel about their practices.

CHAPTER TWO

Eating Aspirations, Eating Abjections

In 2014, The New York Times launched an annual conference called “Food For Tomorrow” with the purpose of bringing together “top chefs, policy makers, innovators and leaders of the food industry to uncover and assess the most important issues and trends affecting the nourishment of our nation and the world.” A major topic on the table was how to reverse “poor eating habits⁵” in America. Armed with statistics on rising rates of diet related and preventable diseases, speakers explained the gap between healthy and poor eating habits through structural, educational, and policy deficiencies – explanations that predominate an explosive public debate on food choice.

During an afternoon panel, investigative reporter Michael Moss posed the question of “what is a healthy diet” to Dr. Marion Nestle, professor at New York University. She responded, “a healthy diet couldn’t be *easier* (emphasis hers)... [it consists of] a wide variety of relatively unprocessed foods eaten in moderate amounts so you’re balancing caloric intake with expenditure. It’s not very hard to do.” Highlighting the pleasure of eating fresh vegetables, she went on to describe a formative moment during her childhood when she tasted a delicious string bean freshly picked from a local farm. The experience awakened her. According to her, moving everyone closer to this easy and pleasurable experience with healthy food takes more edible gardens in schools and better access to fresh food. However, embedded within the matter-of-factness of Dr. Nestle’s comments was a moral and emotional imperative that loomed over the conference in binary opposition to the “poor habits” that the attendees were in part there to address: that there is a right and wrong way to eat and that eating right should feel both easy to do and pleasurable.

When I first began fieldwork in 2012, the debate around ethical consumption and production of food was sparking national conversation along side the debates on food deserts and health disparities. Critical of the industrial food system, the “alternative foods movement” argued that our food is being produced using unsustainable and unjust farming practices that strip foods of their nutritional value at great cost to the planet. They urged consumers to make a different set of more ethical choices that center consumption of fresh, organic and seasonal foods, produced using ecologically sound methods and traveling the shortest distance possible from farm to table (Biltekoff 2013; Guthman 2011). This alternative way of thinking about food was catching steam. Books on ethical food consumption such as Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivores Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food* both rose to #1 on the New York Times best seller list, celebrity chef Alice Waters made headlines with her initiative to put school gardens in public schools to teach children to love vegetables, and a slew of food related documentaries such as *Super Size Me* (2004), *King Corn* (2007), and *Food, Inc* (2008) hit the national film circuit.

Scholars studying the alternative food movement have suggested that alternative movement claims that eating organic, locally sourced, non-GMO foods is the most ecologically and ethical consumption practice is “partial and constrained by social privilege” (Alkon 2012, 2013; Guthman 2008; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2010;

⁵ This phrase is a direct quote from the Food for Tomorrow Conference website, which has since gone offline.

Johnston and Baumann 2009). Supporters of these “foodways” often see this alternative engagement with the market as a solution to the problem of industrial agriculture. In so doing, they remove themselves from a “more critical engagement with industrial agriculture” and the social inequalities produced and reproduced in the current capitalist based market system of food production and procurement. For example, in her article on what she calls the “citizen-consumer hybrid,” Johnston shows that grocery stores such as Whole Foods Market employ ethical messaging “that is organized around sentiment” to make consumers feel like good citizens as they shop. She concludes, however, that while this makes people feel good about their food choices, in actuality these consumption practices do little to truly affect systemic change. Additionally, Alkon (2012) writes that alternative food movements often frame inequality as damaging to our ecological systems without recognizing the unfair labor practices that farm owners use for their mostly migrant farmworkers or the effects of their higher cost alternatives on the market in general. Furthermore, scholars such as Guthman (2008) and Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010) have shown that these movements are often comprised of white, middle-class and upper-middle class participants who tend to moralize others as bad eaters at the same time that they frame their food choices as self-righteous. Guthman writes that these associations of alternative food with white privilege create a “chilling effect” that prevent others, especially people of color and low-income individuals, from joining in.

Figure 9: Cartoon Featured in *The New Yorker Magazine*, October 6, 2014



Still, increasingly the tenants of the ethical food movement are being used to address the problems of food inequality. In 2009, with the help of local school children, Michelle Obama planted the “White House Kitchen Garden⁶” on the South lawn of the White House. In this 2,800 square food education garden grew twenty-five varieties of fruits, herbs, and vegetables. It was there to teach children how to eat right and that eating right could be both fun and delicious. Biltekoff suggests that “the garden evoked the ethos of alternative food, establishing a model for good-food citizenship that entailed using the senses to reconnect with food, knowing where food came from, and taking pleasure in fresh, local sustainably produced fruits and vegetables” (111). This campaign worked to anchor these alternative food ideals into the national imagination of what it meant to eat right as it simultaneously offered up these ideals as a solution to the “obesity epidemic” and the rise of food related-diseases.

These aspirations or ideals around food and eating seem to be, as one of my respondents said well, “seeping into the collective consciousness.” More and more, grocery stores and restaurants are offering organic options, gluten free and vegan sections, and labels signaling to a different measures of quality in people’s food choices (for example: local, humanely raised, antibiotic free, hormone free, all-natural, non-GMO). Take for instance, this commercial for the national grocery store chain Albertsons/Safeway that has been broadcast on prime time television since 2014⁷. The commercial begins with a multicultural, multigenerational group of people joyfully pushing full shopping carts down a city street at dawn. In their carts are white, cloth bags with the colorful emblem “O Organics” on the front. As the sun gets brighter, people begin to run, laughing as they rush to join a growing group of food consumers marching in the streets with their carts. The commercial then cuts to a woman holding a bag of organic baby carrots in the grocery store. At first she furrows her brow as if deep in thought. But then she smiles as she realizes that she, too, can afford to eat organic foods. She throws the carrots into her cart and begins to gallivant down the aisles of the grocery store grabbing other organic produces off the shelves to purchase. The woman half walking, half running moves through the parking lot with her full cart of organic food. She eventually merges with other consumers who are running from all directions with full shopping carts and laughing with one another. As this is happening, a woman’s voice narrates: “Grocery shoppers of America. Take your O Organic baby carrots. Take your eggs. Even your O Organics chips and join the organics movement. Organic food is no longer just for the privileged few. Now everyone can afford to go organic.” Meanwhile, in the background, upbeat music plays and the singer declares “happy day people” emphasizing the connection between organic food and happiness. The commercial ends with a birds-eye-view of hundreds of people walking down the street between skyscrapers attempting to evoke this right to organic food as a social movement that everyday people can now belong to as the words “Organic for all” appear on the screen

⁶ This garden was soon renamed the First Lady’s Garden at the White House.

⁷ This commercial can be viewed in full here: <http://www.adforum.com/creative-work/ad/player/34530312/rally-campaign/o-organics>

(see Figure 10)⁸. The message of the commercial is clear. It is a new day. And that new day is one in which the joy of eating healthy, organic food has been liberated from its elitism and made accessible to the masses.

These vignettes showcase the common sense logic that the ethical consumption movement has instilled in the national imagination around correct eating: armed with the right knowledge and given access to affordable options, eating fresh and unprocessed foods becomes irresistible both because fresh food tastes superior and because eating this way was couched as a matter of social justice. Having experienced the bodily pleasure and delicious taste of a fresh string bean or strawberry harvested straight off the vine, how could one resist eating this way from day to day? And if making this choice supports a more sustainable and just world, then by making this choice one is a just person. The correct body, then, desires fresh food over processed foods. The person with correct sensibilities and intelligence easily aligns their aspirations with their knowledge about what is right versus what is wrong to eat. And eating correctly naturally and pleasurably provides protection from obesity and food-related diseases. The conversation about what is right and wrong to eat, then, has predominated the conversation about how to solve the issues of food access and food related diseases rather than the larger racialized classed capitalist system in which we are forced to procure our food in this country. These two national discourses around food relay to American citizens that food can be either a path towards health, wellness, and righteousness or illness, suffering, and abjection. Despite these discussions of structural barriers, the discourse of individual choice and voting with our forks is ever present and very compelling. With the correct desires, any individual can find ways to achieve infinite wellbeing through the market.

Figure 10: Final Scene Of The “Rally” Campaign Commercial For Albertson/Safeway Grocery Store



Source: Youtube.com, screenshot by the author.

⁸ Another example of this is a 2017 Hellmann’s Mayonnaise commercial which shows clips of chickens, farmers, and a group of friends eating at a picnic table while a man narrates: “We care about cage free eggs, and we care about amazing taste. Because at Hellmann’s, we’re on the side of food.” Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzmPYMzmAUk>

In Alkon's ethnography of the most African American Farmer's Market in West Oakland, California, she finds that the managers, customers, and farmers market venders emphasize issues of racial identity but fail to emphasize issues of poverty and how poverty affects people's food procurement strategies. The result is that those who participate in the market feel that the poorer residents in West Oakland just need to learn about organic foods and they will want to attend the market.

CONSTRUCTION OF MORAL CITIZENS THROUGH FOOD

Social scientists have argued that both the obesity "epidemic" (Biltekoff 2013; Guthman 2011; Kwan 2009) and national dietary guidelines around "right" eating (Biltekoff 2013; Nestle 2002) are socially and politically constituted moral categories presented to the public as facts. As such, they work to create sites of surveillance through which individuals monitor how well they measure up to the ideals of health with the threat of stigma if they fail. For example, Kwan (2009) writes that the measure of what is considered "normal" body mass index is a politically constructed category that favors ideals of Eurocentric bodies and thinness. The obesity category is a medical and a moral category. Therefore, how obesity is defined has implications for who is marked as healthy versus unhealthy as well as who is seen as self-controlled versus gluttonous and lazy. She concludes that "overweight and obesity are not just medical facts; they are social issues that various groups, industries, and "moral entrepreneurs" vie to define" (25). How an issue is defined has important implications for how we think about solutions and construct interventions.

Likewise, in her book *Eating Right in America*, Charlotte Biltekoff explores the relationship between social ideals and dietary reform movements in the United States since World War I. She provides powerful archival evidence that shows how dietary health extends beyond a "physiological relationship between food and the body" (6). Rather, dietary ideals are "cultural, subjective, and political" class making projects. Biltekoff writes, "while its primary aim may be to improve health, the process of teaching people to "eat right" inevitably involves shaping certain kinds of subjects, and citizens, and shoring up the identity and social boundaries of the ever-threatened American middle class" (4). This was accomplished in part by middle-class elites defining what was right and clean to eat against the slovenly, and "dirty" food preferences of the lower class and immigrants. Being a good citizen, then, involved distancing oneself through food choices from the gluttonous practices of the poor. She concludes that present day concerns about eating right do not stem from "an increased incidence of diet-related diseases or because of growing knowledge about the role of diet in preventing such diseases, but because of ongoing expansions in the social significance of dietary health and the moral valence of being a "good eater" "(5). In other words, dietary guidelines tell us more than just what is good to eat but what it means to be a good, middle-class person.

Likewise, in her book *Modern Food, Moral Food*, Veit (2013) traces the roots of our modern ideas about food to the first two decades of the 20th century. During this time "the ways Americans bought, produced, ate, and thought about their food and their bodies all changed dramatically." Food and morality were strongly linked together partly to compel Americans through choice rather than coercion to take up the project of fashioning themselves as ideal citizens. Shaken by rising food prices at home and quickly

diminishing food supplies in Europe, the newly formed United States Food Administration created a national campaign using the slogan of “Victory Over Ourselves” in which it compelled citizens to restrict their diets and conserve food. They did this by instilling in citizens a patriotic, moral obligation to downplay food choices based on pleasure and tradition in favor of food choices based on self-discipline and rational scientific knowledge. “Ascetic self-control” was framed as a pathway towards “enlightened”, “mature citizenship” and away from base animal instincts that characterized gluttony and indulgence (4).

These studies are in the lineage of Conrad’s work on the “medicalization” of society (Conrad 1992, 2007) and Crawford’s (1980) work on “healthism.” Conrad argues that society has seen an increase in the medicalization of the human condition that has “transformed the normal into the pathological.” In so doing, “medical ideologies, interventions, and therapies have reset and controlled the borders of acceptable behavior, bodies, and states of being” (13). Conrad argues that medicalization “focuses the source of the problem in the individual rather than in the social environment” and “expands medical social control over human behavior.” Along these lines, Conrad shows how people internalize socially constituted medical categories of health and illness as “taken-for-granted subjectivities” and use them to police their own behaviors rather than questioning the social and political-economic dynamics that created the categories of health or illness around which they define their actions.

Several qualitative studies have documented this phenomenon through in-depth interviews with different populations around their food choices. Counihan (1992), for example, analyzes the food journals of 250 college students in order to better understand the food rules that inform their decisions about what to eat. Much like Veit’s analysis of individuals during the Progressive Era, Counihan’s college students saw their food choices as “personal expressions of willpower” and self-control (118), with the belief that self-control would lead to being “thin, moral and admirable” (55). She additionally found that these often unconscious food rules worked to uphold class, race, and gender stratification as students felt strongly that worth was determined by hard work and “right” choices which were often choices that aligned with upper-middle class, white sensibilities and neoliberal ideology. In this way, discourses about the right and good choices signified ideas about the disciplined and controlled choices.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF FOOD AND EATING

While food was not taken up as its own object of sociological inquiry until the 1960s, sociologists recognized the role of food and ways of eating as important reflections of social norms. Emile Durkheim, for example, talks about the importance of food as one marker of the sacred from the profane. Certain foods were forbidden to the profane because they were considered sacred and vice versa. Similarly, in his theory of the civilizing process, Norbert Elias looks at how the social etiquette of eating changed from medieval to modern times, suggesting that the move from eating from a common plate with one’s hands to eating on individual plates with utensils was part of the shift to a more individualized, self-monitoring society. These studies set the precedent for social scientists such as Mary Douglas, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Roland Barthes to take up the exploration of food as its own object of study in the 1960s. These foundational texts

showed us that food is a language or system of signs that we can read as texts to better understand social dynamics. For example, in Douglas's essay "The Abomination of Leviticus" from her book *Purity and Danger*, she analysis Jewish dietary laws and prohibitions to show how food and ways of eating serve the symbolic function of helping people develop self-control and a sense of belonging that was based on holiness (Counihan and Van Esterik). As she writes, "holiness was given a physical expression in every encounter with the animal kingdom and at every meal" (58).

Critiques of these foundational texts suggests that authors like Douglas are overly structuralist and give too much value to the symbolic over the material forces determining food customs and choices. Nonetheless, these studies show us that beyond a basic human need, food items, places, and eating practices are themselves social, reflecting and translating the values, rules, and power struggles of the larger society. As Caplan (1997) writes, "food is never 'just food' and its significance can never be purely nutritional. Furthermore, it is intimately bound up with social relations, include those of power, of inclusion and exclusion, as well as with cultural ideas about classification...the human body and the meaning of health" (3).

Since the 1960s, an extensive body of literature across academic disciplines has emerged that looks at food and culture from a variety of perspectives. This literature offers three important insights that can aid in our analysis of stratified patterns of food consumption in America: that food, eating and notions about health are socially embedded and constructed, expressions of valued identities, and indexes of power relations.

FOOD, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY

Studies on food in the social sciences also show us that people see food as a means through which to "express valued identities" (McLeod et al. 2014: 729). Scholars find that food consumption is an expression of belonging to gender, class, ethnoracial, and national identities (Counihan and Van Esterik 2013). This literature takes into consideration the relationship between food items and ethnic or national traditions (citations), or what the history or use of a particular food can tell us about a larger cultural or state context (citations). This literature provides evidence that people ascribe meanings to the foods that they eat and see these foods as important to their sense of self or their belonging to a certain ethnic, racial, or national group. To this end, Oyserman's (2007) identity-based motivation model suggests that when a behavior is infused with identity-based meanings, individuals will see this behavior as positive only when defined as appropriate and accepted for members of their in-group (also Oyserman et al. 2007). This model predicts, therefore, that individuals will eat foods that they see as congruent with their in-group identity. This has implications for inequality. As Oyserman et al. (2007) write, those occupying higher socio-economic status positions are "likely to have an advantage in claiming valued characteristics as in-group identifying" (1012).

Through this lens, inequality affects food consumption through differences in the practices, dispositions, and cultural meanings that individuals ascribe to food objects and practices (Bourdieu 1984; Counihan 1992; Veit 2013). Actors pull on cultural meanings to make sense of their choices and practices beyond structural constraints and opportunities.

FOOD AND INEQUALITY

Studies show how food consumption practices reinforce and shape social inequality (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Bourdieu 1984; Cairns and Johnston 2015; Cannuscio et al. 2014; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2013; Slocum 2011). It is Bourdieu's theory of tastes in his renowned study *Distinction* (1984) that has dominated theoretical framings on this topic for more than 30 years. Bourdieu looks at how structural positions like class get internalized and expressed through cultural dispositions such that class disappears from people's understanding of their cultural practices. In this book, Bourdieu surveys the lifestyle preferences and practices of the professional and working class in France in order to understand how class gets reproduced. In this work, Bourdieu discusses his concept of the habitus – practices and judgments about practices – as a structure that undergirds and “translates” economic position into the signifying cultural sphere of lifestyles. Because the habitus is internalized as an unconscious disposition, the influence that this mutual constitution of economic position and cultural preferences has on practice is hidden and misrecognized as natural. This misrecognition enables class inequality to reproduce itself. As Gartman (1991) summarizes, “culture and economy are intricately related in a web of mutual constitution. The class distinctions of the economy inevitably generate the symbolic distinctions of culture, which in turn regenerate and legitimate the class structure” (421). Together, this creates a universe of classed sensibilities signified differences in taste.

This can be seen with regards to tastes for different kinds of foods. As Bourdieu writes, taste “governs all forms of incorporation, choosing and modifying everything that a body ingests and digests and assimilates. . . . It is in fact through preferences with regards to food. . . . that the class distribution of bodily properties is determined” (190). The “legitimate” and “dominated” classes concepts of food and eating are constructed against one another through a system of distinctive signs. The dominant or bourgeoisie eat with attention to form, pause, restraints, stylization and quality. The dominated or proletariat eats with a concern for function, plenty, freedom, and the impression of abundance. Additionally, Bourdieu suggests that these are antagonistic worldviews that define themselves against one another such that “the taste of the professional class defines the taste of the populous by negation”. The dominant class understands their preferences as a sign of refinement, cultivation, order and distinction that sets them apart from the vulgar, natural, slovenly practices of the dominated class. Oppositely, the dominated class proudly embodies their practices as a sign of a working class identity that rejects the stylized and form obsession symbolized in the dominant classes preferences for food. As the tastes and dispositions of the professional or legitimate class are seen as more highly valued in society, tastes produce and reproduce social inequalities. In this way, taste for different types of foods and ways of related to, cooking, and eating those foods are both a classified and a classifying practice that reflect and reproduce a symbolic hierarchy.

Critics of Bourdieu have pointed out that his theory of cultural production is ahistorical and thus leaves little room to account for changing relations of production and consumption. Also, because his conception of culture is a structuralist one, it “reduces cultural choices to passive reproductions of structural necessities.” In other words, while Bourdieu allows us to think about the role of taste in the reproduction of inequality, he

does not give us much in the way of theorizing how people are struggling with, navigating, subverting and transforming their relationship to taste.

Additionally, despite Bourdieu's impressive theorization of social space, he remains vague about the role that physical place plays in shaping tastes: does the proximity of socio-economic classes or ethnoracial groups to one another or the proportion of different groups within a neighborhood influence individual practices and judgments about their practices vis-à-vis one another and the larger field of consumption?

Bourdieu's work, especially in regards to tastes for food, assumes that one's unconscious dispositions correspond to one's position in social space. But what happens when this breaks down? What happens when people are aware of how social structures shape their food choices in ways that are potentially harmful to their health but cannot make a different set of choices?

This dissertation looks at what happens when there is a break between disposition and position such that preferences and practices do not align.

Building on Bourdieu, this dissertation forges a new path in thinking about how practices, judgments about practices, and social space work together to reproduce stratified relationships with food.

FOOD, EMOTIONS, AND VISCERALITY

A number of recent studies have explored the social dimensions of shopping for food, suggesting that attending to the social dimensions of food shopping behavior can help policy makers better understand how to improve health (Cairns and Johnston 2015; Cannuscio et al. 2013, 2014; Cannuscio, Weiss, and Asch 2010; Travers 1996; Webber, Sobal, and Dollahite 2010; Williams et al. 2001). Among these studies, several have highlighted the way that people feel when they shop for food and how this helps us to understand why people shop and eat the way that they do (Cairns and Johnston 2015; Williams et al. 2001).

For example, in their ethnography of consumption practices in Coventry, UK, Williams et al (2001) explore the social factors that shape consumption with particular attention to the emotions that people experience in different food stores. They find that convenience and access, the value for the price and quality of food, the ambiance of different food stores, and dealing with difference while shopping provoked emotional responses for their participants. Respondents discussed pleasure while shopping at places where inconveniences such as crowded parking lots or locations out of the way of normal routines were minimized. They also felt pleasure when they could find a bargain but disgust when they associated that bargain with low quality foods. Additionally, many respondents felt 'out of place' at certain types of stores or in stores in certain neighborhoods. Some felt excluded from grocery stores based on their stigmatized ethnoracial or socio-economic status resulting in feelings of embarrassment or anxiety. Some felt out of place because of feelings generated from prior experiences with low quality food items or cleanliness of a store. They suggest that these emotions are shaping consumption practices and highlight the "need to extend consideration of what is material in studies of 'material culture' to encompass the emotions that are a necessary accompaniment to the interactions between people and things" (218).

Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2013) important theory building essay “Veggies and Visceralities,” though not about procuring food, speaks directly to this issue of emotions and food choice. Through ethnography at school garden and cooking programs in Berkeley, California and rural Nova Scotia, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy document the different visceral responses – often patterned by race – that different students have while engaging with and eating foods from their school gardens. They suggest that in order to understand why some students find pleasure and some find disgust in eating these vegetables, we must be attentive to the affective dimension of foods. Motivation to eat certain foods over others arises from a matrix of “social relationships, intellectual engagements, and material attachments, which give rise to explainable but not predetermined affective/emotional encounters” (82). Where Cairns and Johnston focus on emotions as they help us to understand the performance of gender and class, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy are concerned with the embodied gut feelings that students have that lead them to be open or closed to trying certain foods.

These findings echo studies done in public health that signal to the importance of emotions in the study food shopping but do not directly theorize emotions as an important factor in people’s daily shopping routines. For example, Cannuscio et al. (2014) find that interview respondents in Philadelphia chose to shop at certain food stores over others based on social needs. Their data suggests that people feel “uncomfortable” and “awkward” at food stores where they feel over or under resourced compared to the shoppers around them, “annoyed” when stores couldn’t correctly process their social benefits such as WIC, “sophisticated” shopping at elite food stores, uplifted by caring social interactions with staff, and “fearful when shopping at stores in places they perceived as dangerous.

These findings fit in with studies that show food labeling and store marketing are constructed to elicit feelings from shoppers alongside other material considerations. For example, Johnston (2008) shows that grocery stores such as Whole Foods Market employ ethical messaging “that is organized around sentiment” to make consumers feel like good citizens as they shop.

All together, these authors show that consumer choice is not determined only by individual material circumstances or structural factors and that the meanings that people attach to one store or another is culturally mediated and socially situated. They convincingly demonstrate the importance of studying the kinds of emotions people experience while shopping for groceries and eating food This dissertation extends these studies by theorizing not only how food elicits emotions but also how people manage and work on their emotions. People feel a range of positive and negative emotions while shopping for and confronting food. But what happens after they feel these emotions? Do these emotions impact future practice in meaningful ways?

EATING ASPIRATIONS, EATING ABJECTIONS

Taken together, these literatures tell us that what we desire to eat and think of as good versus bad is not objective fact but rather politically constructed and culturally prescribed. This literature further shows us that food and eating are moral categories and ways for people to express their valued identities such as race, ethnicity and national citizenship. And it shows us that eating food as well as how and where we confront and

procure food are emotional and visceral experience as well as symbolic and physical ones. Scholarship has also shown us that the pathways to realizing ones food related health aspirations are mediated by structural inequalities such as income, access, and transportation. In fact, these literatures contend that these emotional, symbolic, and physical experiences with food both reflect and reproduce the political-economy of contemporary American society as well as the racism and classism that are at its foundation. Lastly, scholarship shows us that it is productive to look at people's food consumption practices in relation to their neighborhood level food environments, though there is a debate about how exactly neighborhoods matter.

This dissertation examines the relationship is between food related health aspirations, material resources, daily food consumption practices and identity for individuals in two neighborhoods of Oakland, California – one with a variety of options for purchasing food close by and one with few. Within these local contexts, I examine what people desire to eat from day to day, how people understand what it takes to achieve their aspirations and what it means to fail.

This study extends studies on the relationship between local food environments and stratified patterns of food consumption by suggesting that local environments in which people are embedded also matter in defining the dominant frameworks through which individuals assess how well they are doing and what it means to be doing well.

I argue that neighborhood shapes food consumption practices through what I call *local logics of accomplishment* – relational belief systems constructed vis-a-vis the opportunities, constraints, and resulting interaction orders of local environments that define what constitutes accomplished daily practice. I further argue that these local logics of accomplishment are configured on a spectrum of what we might think of as ideal states of being through food: aspirations of health and wellness on the one hand versus fears of illness and abjection on the other. These are potential states of the body, racialized, classed categories, and ways that people map the social and physical geography of the city.

Amongst mounting fears of unclean, unsafe, disease-producing food, respondents across neighborhoods expressed a desire to regularly eat “clean,” fresh, and home cooked food purchased in places where they felt cared for. However, socioeconomic status, racial group membership, and neighborhood mediated respondent's ability to do this successfully. In the middle-class neighborhood of the Oasis where care, beauty and abundance were prominent, respondents measured the value of their daily food consumption practices against their aspirations to easily eat fresh, local, “clean” and ethically produced foods while distancing themselves from food practices associated with need and disease. They therefore felt accomplished when they both could purchase and desire to eat fresh foods from day-to-day.

In the poor neighborhood of the Turf where neglect, abandonment, and struggle characterized daily life, respondents measured the value of their daily food consumption practices against the abject, dehumanizing conditions of poverty and disease. They therefore felt accomplished when they were able to either survive within this struggle or create any modicum of space between their practices and these abject conditions.

However, because only the upper-middle class respondents were truly able to approximate their aspirations through their practices. Everyone else experienced distress as they often lacked the resources needed to eat the way that they associated with

wellness and health. However, unlike Bourdieu would predict, only the upper-middle class internalized and took on the tastes for what they could afford. Everyone else was acutely aware that their practices were not in line with their aspirations. As people perceived that their failure to align their aspirations with their practices led to illness and abjection, this caused distress that needed to be resolved, negotiated, and managed.

I show how these local logics of accomplishment with regards to food and eating produce different sets of emotions in these two neighborhoods that need to be managed. I explore how people engage in both positive and corrective emotion-work to manage these emotions from day-to-day such that they feel accomplished regardless of their opportunities and constraints that they have to purchase wellness through food. In this way, I argue that, approximating these food related health aspirations on the one hand and distancing from the abject conditions of poverty on the other was externalized through capitalism as a game through which people received emotional and symbolic rewards or penalties. These emotional rewards and penalties resulted in respondents experiencing their ability to align their practices with their aspirations not as simply a result of an objectively exploitative social structure and its patterns of domination but rather as an internal and individual quality of the self through which they could become happy and healthy, or abject and ill.

Structure, Culture And Agency

One of the major debates in both the food studies literature as well as in sociology is how social structure, culture and agency intersect and inform one another. Therefore, it is useful to conceptualize these terms. For this, I turn to Sharon Hays and her article, *Social Structure, Culture and the Sticky Problem of Culture*. Hays (1994) suggests we think about social structures as consisting of systems of social relations and systems of meaning. Systems of social relations include “patterns of roles, relationships, and forms of domination according to which one might place any given person at a point on a complex grid that specifies a set of categories running from class, gender, race, education, and religion, all the way to age, sexual preference, and position in the family” (65). Systems of meanings “are what is known as culture, including not only the beliefs and values of social groups, but also their language, forms of knowledge, and common sense, as well as the material products, interactional practices, rituals, and ways of life established by these” (65). Social structures are both enabling and constraining. They are the basis for our conception of our actions and ourselves. Within this context, Hays conceptualizes “choice” or agency not as individual decisions made from individual freedoms but as always socially shaped within the territory of structurally provided possibilities (64). She writes,

Although structural constraints absolutely preclude the possibility of making certain choices, they also provide the basis of human action, and therefore offer the very possibility of human choice. A sociological understanding of agency, then, does not confuse it with individual, subjectivity, randomness, absolute freedom, or action in general, but recognizes it as embracing social choices that occur within structurally defined limits among structurally provided alternatives.

In other words, sociologists view agency as made possible by the enabling features of social structure while simultaneously being constrained by these same conditions. Though Hays does not directly theorize the role that social psychology or emotions play in people's socially patterned choices, she does theorize that social structures "lend us our sense of self." Therefore, purposive action is fed through – and mostly ends up reproducing – the durable systems of patterned rules that comprise the social structure because these rules are where we get our sense of who we are and what we can accomplish. In other words, our sense of self and our sense of choice must be understood as inseparable from the power relations of the social structures in which we are embedded. In this manuscript, I tell the stories of the people with varying levels of privilege and disadvantaged. In each case, I attempt to show how people used the socially structured options around them to create meaning and feel accomplished for their choices. I also attempt to show the emotional stratification that occurred as people grappled with which way to move in fields of opportunity and fields of scarcity. Because of this, I depart from discussion of "food choice" to a discussion of daily food consumption practices and people's relationships with food and eating. This is done to be attentive to Hays conception of agency presented above. With these definitions in mind, the next section I discuss my conceptual framework in three parts: eating aspirations, eating abjections, and local logics of accomplishment. I then end this chapter for an outline for the chapters that follow.

Eating Aspirations

In sociology, aspirations have mainly been studied in relation to education attainment or career goals. In these contexts, one's aspirations has been linked to stratified outcomes such as level of education pursued. Especially in literature on educational aspirations, scholars argue that aspirations matter because they contribute to the reproduction of class. While there is no consensus on how this term is operationalized, for the purposes of this study, I use Hart's (2016) definition of aspirations as "future-oriented, driven by conscious and unconscious motivations and... indicative of an individual or group's commitments towards a particular trajectory or end point" (326). Hart (2012, 2016), Ray (2006), and Appadurai (2002) argue that aspirations are relational, dynamically constructed and formed in social contexts. They serve as "lode stars for action" by providing "guidelines and navigational reference points" while they also act as "precursors of many important capabilities which support human flourishing" (Hart 2016; 336). Aspirations are often plural and overlapping rather than singular. Ray points out, for example, that one may simultaneously have aspirations to increase one's material and economic standing while also having aspirations around "dignity, good health, recognition, political power, or the urge to dominate others" (2). As such, aspirations are rooted in emotion and sentiment as they help us to imagine certain kinds of futures for ourselves, ways to manifest our desires, or achieve greater well being. At the same time, Hart emphasizes that aspirations are often "born out of unequal power relations that constrain humans to mould themselves in ways that suit perceived expectations of normalcy and acceptability" (327). Ray further suggests that in order for us to understand how aspirations affect behavior we must pay attention not to the aspirations

themselves per say, but to what she calls the “aspirational gap” – the difference between one’s aspirations and one’s current “standard of living”. Regardless of the content of the aspirations themselves, research shows that when it comes to food, people’s health aspirations serve as signposts help them determine what to consume and what to avoid. Research also concludes that when people do not eat in alignment with how they believe they should be eating, it causes guilt and shame.

In this dissertation, I examine the food related aspirations for my respondents and how they felt they were measuring up to these aspirations from day to day. My data revealed that respondents in these two neighborhoods were interacting with three interlocking aspirations as they make decisions about what to eat from day-to-day: aspirations around food quality, aspirations around balancing nutritional guidelines, and aspirations about the correct desires of the body. These aspirations were not simply self-serving. Given the connection between eating and preventable disease, in today’s world eating was for my respondents a risky and uncertain endeavor. Beck’s (1992) concept of the ‘risk society’ is apropos here. Beck suggests that whereas in a traditional society, capitalism produced goods and people could secure themselves against potential harm, our modern society is a ‘risk society’ where capitalism produces ‘bads,’ the consequences of which are impossible to foresee or to protect ourselves against. The result is ‘reflexive modernization’, what some have referred to as a ‘culture of fear’ (Derbyshire 1997; Glassner 1999), where constant self-monitoring and a sense of individual versus communal responsibility becomes central for managing and protecting against perceived risks. Approximating this set of aspirations, then, was a way to buffer against risks of immediate or prolonged food-related illness. When people are able to align themselves with their aspirations around food and eating, they feel protected against these risks of contamination. When they failed to do so, had to grapple with the fear and anxiety of potential illness and contamination. These were not just fears of physical illness: they were also fears of *abjection*.

Eating Abjections

Social scientists, especially feminist writing about embodiment, have conceptualized the abject or the ‘abject other’ as a classificatory notion that denotes bodies that transgress (Adelman and Ruggi 2008). As Ettorre et al (2010) write, “being abject emphasizes that one had failed as an acceptable member of society and confirms the essential monstrosity of one’s body – their abjection.” Abjection is “a kind of sickness” or contamination of the physical and social body that must be contained.

Sara Ahmed (2004), suggests that disgust for the abject is critical to power relations because it works to maintain boundaries (88). Some forms of contact between objects and bodies is “felt as sickening invasion.” This is because these objects, bodies, and spaces stand in as symbols for the very porous and delicate borders of the body itself that must be protected: “an act of substitution that protects the subject from all that is ‘not it’. Abjection is bound up with the insecurity of the not; it seeks to secure ‘the not’ through the response of being disgusted” (86). We may conceptualize the disgust for and rejection of the ‘abject other’ as representative of a type of border anxiety. Just as countries rally to close off their borders to intruders that threaten the fabric of their ideals, so too ideas of correct citizenship include practices that can protect the borders of the

body, the city, and the nation from bad or abject others, places, and objects that threaten to intrude and contaminate.

But Ahmed writes, the abject threat may come from without or within. Furthermore, the threat out there is only a threat because it already exists within. Distancing from the ‘abject other,’ then, necessitates close watch over tastes or desires that arise from within as well as from without and tempt one to act in ways that bring the body into contact with the abject. Conrad argues that the increasing medicalization of society is exactly a means through which society attempts to control and monitor the abject body or create protections against potential of abjection (Ettorre 2010).

This idea of the ‘abject other’ is useful in theorizing food in two ways. First, scholars conceptualize obesity as a signifier of the ‘abject other’. Second, scholars conceptualize blackness – black poverty in particular -- as another signifier of the ‘abject other.’ This concept of the ‘abject other’ that arouses disgust is part and parcel of the overlapping logics of anti-black racism and classism in America. The making of the segregated and abandoned inner-cities was in large part a project of containing the abject black subject from contaminating the rest of the city. In this manuscript, I trace how fears of the fat, sick, black, poor ‘abject other’ showed up in my interviews as a powerful logic that shaped respondents sense of self and sense of health. Respondents made sense of their local built food environments through these logics – pinpointing where to locate aspirational food items and ways of eating and where to located abject food items and ways of eating.

In this manuscript, I move from thinking about ‘abject others’ as objects or people to *abjection* as the downcast state of degradation, revulsion, and contamination against which people measure their actions, their internal sense of self, and their possibilities for wellness. Taken together, aspirations and abjections constitute two guideposts or ideal states that structured people’s daily relationships with food. Both were potential states of being. On the one hand, to approximate ones aspirations was a path to happiness, health, wellbeing, joy, and longevity. On the other hand, to get too close or give into abjection led down the path of stigmatization, contamination, illness, and deprivation. These potential states were physical, bodily, emotional and symbolic states mediated by social structural and spatial resources.

Local Logics of Accomplishment

In this dissertation, I look at the eating aspirations and the daily practices of individuals in two neighborhoods of Oakland, California – one with a variety of options for purchasing food close by, and one with few. In the chapters that follow, I outline five relationships with food that emerged during my fieldwork. The three relationships that I document in the Oasis - ease, struggle, and distress – were relationships that centered eating aspirations as the north star against which practice was measured. The two relationships that I highlight in the Turf – survival and accomplishment – were relationships that centered distance from or survival *despite* proximity to abjection as the guidepost against which practice was measured. These relationships are not autonomous ideal types. Rather, I see these as relationships between practice, material reality, aspiration and abjection that differed by degree.

Furthermore, these different orientations led to different *logics of accomplishment*. Rao, Monin & Durand define logics as “belief systems that furnish guidelines for practical action” (795-6). Logics of accomplishment, then, are belief systems constructed in relation to the opportunities, constraints, and resulting interaction orders of local environments around what constitutes accomplished daily practice. In the Oasis, people felt accomplished insofar as they were eating in alignment with their set of aspirations – this usually meant eating local, unprocessed, organic, non-GMO fresh foods in moderation and with ease. When they experienced a gap between these aspirations and their daily relationships to food they experienced distress that they needed to manage. In the Turf, people felt accomplished when they survived in the struggle. The Turf represents the location of abjection within the city and the residence the abject others eating in abject ways from the position of the proverbial center. Unlike Bourdieu’s hypothesis, however, as well as the moral imagination of the subject who is joyous in their abjection, these respondents knew very well that they were looked at as abject. They also knew well that their socially structural location meant that the food available to them was low quality and could make them sick. Faced with routine degradation, they learned to manage and make peace with what they could eat, minimize shame and maximize identity verification by identifying themselves as accomplished survivors.

Lastly, while material and to a lesser extent symbolic resources governed how well people could align opportunities in their external environment with their local aspirational framework, internal resources were also necessary to actualize these opportunities in practice. In other words, people had to work on the self to maintain alignment with external opportunities, to make sense of the self in the face of constraints and misalignments, and to prevent being contaminated by wrong desires. Emotion work “by the self on the self” (Hochschild 1979, 562) was central to this task. Hochschild defines emotion work, as “the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling” (561). Traditionally this concept has been used to refer to instances where actors are, as Hochschild writes, “feeling the “pinch,” or discrepancy, between what one does feel and what one wants to feel (which is, in turn, affected by what one thinks one ought to feel in such a situation)” (562). However, my fieldwork reveals that respondents did emotion work both to cope with misalignments between practice and aspirations (i.e. recodifying the situation, blaming the self, repressing emotional responses) as well as to (re)produce themselves in alignment with their aspirations (i.e. practicing joy and pleasure in shopping for groceries, justifying spending more for food items, and feeling disgust for spaces and eating practices that they considered “bad”). In other words, whether respondents were eliciting positive emotions or working to quell unfavorable ones, they were privately engaging in continual work to “make feeling and frame consistent with the situation” (563).

All in all, the white middle-upper class was the only group of respondents who articulated an easy time both aligning daily food consumption practices with their aspirations and “successfully” shielding themselves from the threat of abjection. Everyone else struggled to do so to varying degrees. Curiously, those who lived in the Oasis were deeply oriented towards these aspirations, even if their material and symbolic resources made it nearly impossible to approximate them in any real way. Still, I argue because they lived in the Oasis where they were surrounded by others that they perceived to be aspiring with ease, they used their aspirational hunger to attempt, sometimes at

great odds, to discipline themselves ever more towards these aspirations. In the Turf, on the other hand, it was not part of everyday life to watch people achieving their food related aspirations. Quite the contrary, this was a place where every institution and interaction with the state was characterized by struggle, stigma, and hardship. Though those in the Turf had a similar set of food related aspirations, they were not orienting their logic of practice towards achieving their aspirations. Rather they were attempting to distance themselves from struggle and the state of abjection.

In sum, stratified patterns of food consumption are not just a result of structural constraints or opportunities. Fine (2010) aptly notes that local contexts are the sites where processes of stratification are “generated, reproduced, and transformed...Through maintaining boundaries, local settings become the site for exclusion or segregation, suggesting why members of social categories have differential access to knowledge, resources, or relations.” (359).

PART I
THE OASIS

CHAPTER THREE

Ease

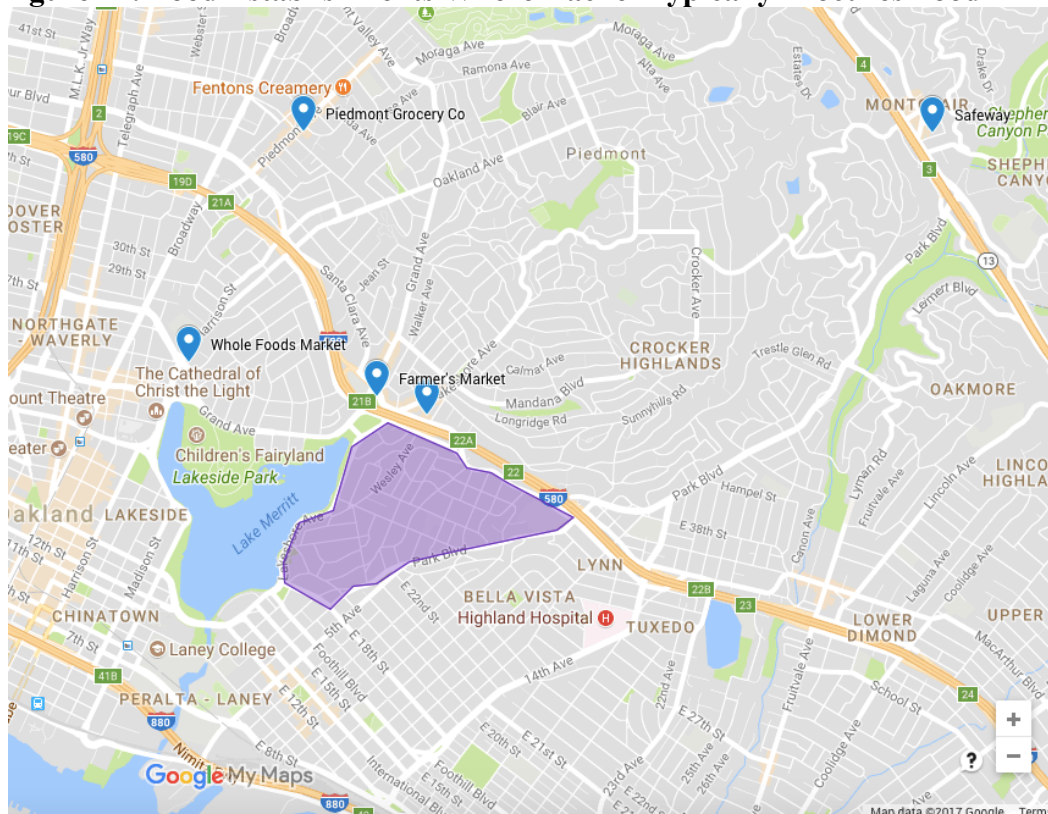
Rachel is a short, white 64-year-old woman with wavy shoulder-length blond hair, and a slim build. She lives on a street of single-family homes in the Oasis and makes \$50,000 per year as a journalist. She grew up in a wealthy family in San Francisco, earned her Master's degree in a STEM field, and left her 9-5 several years ago to pursue her passion of being a writer and working for herself. Rachel's days are busy with work and full of local, organic food. The only processed food that Rachel eats is a special kind of gluten-free, vegan cracker that she describes as "basically ground nuts and seeds." A typical day begins with coffee and a protein smoothie made with organic ingredients and fresh fruit from the farmers market. Sometimes she will make toast from her favorite local bakery and eat it with a free range, cruelty free fried egg on top. Lunch includes a French brie from Trader Joe's with her nut and seed crackers, hummus, or a half-sandwich. While she tends to rush through meals during her busy workday, she takes her time with dinner, drinking wine and enjoying the process of cooking for herself. She eats a different kind of salad every night that she makes from scratch, including the dressing. Additionally, she typically cooks vegetables, salmon, chicken breasts, beans or pasta.

In the neighborhood, she buys her food from Whole Foods Market, the weekly Farmer's Market under the highway and Trader Joe's. Occasionally, she will drive ten minutes north to patronize a locally owned grocery store or ten minutes northeast to the Safeway in the richer part of town (see Figure 11).

While she does drive to the grocery stores outside of her neighborhood, when she buys food close by, she prefers to walk. The streets are well manicured and not too hilly, and it gives her an excuse to exercise. She estimates that between these food markets, she typically spends about \$150 to \$200 a week on food, although she is clear that she does not pay attention or keep track of her spending. She values quality food, and quality food is not cheap.

With every choice she makes, she strives to center locally and sustainably grown, organic, fresh foods, free of pesticides and additives. She eats this way to protect and distance herself from perceived and hidden health risks produced as the byproducts of industrial farming practices such as obesity, high-blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes. "No one is ever *really* safe" Rachel tells me one Saturday as we walk to the weekly farmer's market. "But you feel safer because of the choices you make?" I ask her. "But I feel safer," she tells me. In this way, approximating her set of food related health aspirations and protecting herself from food-related risks from day to day becomes like a game that she plays with herself. Because of this, she particularly loves living in the Oasis; there is a plethora of options for purchasing food that align with her values. Beyond feeling that she is protecting herself by organizing her practices and navigating the neighborhood in this way, eating fresh foods fills Rachel with pleasure. In fact, Rachel experiences her relationship to food as one of *ease* – there is an alignment between her aspirations around food and eating, her resources to accomplish these aspirations, and her daily food consumption practices. "Clean" food is delicious and,

Figure 11: Food Establishments Where Rachel Typically Procures Food



Source: Google maps (2017), modification made by author.

because it is delicious, it is, as Rachel frames it, “easy.” She rarely has cravings besides for the “sweet, succulent, flavorful and gorgeous” fresh fruits and vegetables that she buys weekly from the Farmer’s Market. As she plays the game of approximating her aspirations, she receives emotional and symbolic rewards. Framed as a freedom practice, this local logic of accomplishment mystifies the objective reality of exploitation and accumulation of profit for the food industry that occur as a result of her practices. This is part made possible because her position within this local field – a racial and classed position of privilege that allows her to opt out of practices she considers bad and instead just concentrate on accumulating these emotional and symbolic rewards for her daily food consumption practices.

Based on these principals, she doesn’t buy any food at Safeway, only toilet paper and occasionally wine. When she does go to Safeway, she chooses the location ten minutes from her house despite going to physical therapy every week across the street from the Safeway in the Oasis. Shopping for groceries is an experience of pleasure because she gets to be surrounded by beautiful things, healthy choices, and other shoppers who are making similar choices. While the two Safeway locations are similar in many ways, the Safeway by Lake Merritt is a bit larger and caters to the working class people of color and to college students in the neighborhood. She notes that this detracts from her enjoyment of the experience and makes her feel “accosted.” Thus, when she does go to Safeway, she prefers to make it an outing and go to the location in the wealthier and whiter neighborhood. Here, she gets to walk down a street of quaint stores

with other middle-class presenting consumers and shop for paper products and wine with clients who she describes as “more spoiled.”

Though Lucky Supermarket is slightly closer to her house and a flatter walk than Trader Joe’s or Whole Foods, she refuses to go in there as well. She groups stores like Lucky and Safeway together as big supermarket chains that do not support her values and stock choices that “horrify” her. Plus, Lucky is located on the less beautiful, south side of the neighborhood. To get there, she would have to cross 18th avenue, which marks the racial and class boundary between the safe and hip Oasis and the notorious East Oakland where working class brown skinned people, drug use, poverty, and stories of gang violence mark the social imagination about this part of the city. Shopping at Lucky or Safeway is associated with need, and Rachel’s life is about care and pleasure. Part of caring for herself is creating physical and symbolic distance from risk and necessity, which she associates together: those who shop for food out of need are at great risk of disease because foods that are cheap are full of hidden contaminants. In other words, Rachel makes meaning of her practices through a deep, internalized racialized, classed misrecognition that imbricates dirty food and food related disease with “dirty”, denigrated people that are to be avoided. This shows up in her visceral, emotional responses to the grocery stores where working class people of color tend to shop in the neighborhood, her choice to avoid these places, and her imagination of the food consumption practices of these neighbors. One summer afternoon, Rachel and I visit her preferred Safeway location. As we walk passed the pre-packaged beef and chicken in refrigerated shelving against the wall, she crinkles up her face, makes a sound of disgust, and remarks, “I don’t even want to *look!* I think that factory farmed is the most horrific thing in the whole *universe!* I wouldn’t eat that stuff unless I was starving.”

In this chapter, I discuss a group of race and class privileged respondents in the Oasis who, similar to Rachel, experienced their relationship with food as one of ease. I organize this chapter around four main themes. First, I provide a discussion of what this group of respondents typically eats and where they purchase food, what they aspire to eat and think of as good, and where they learn these aspirations. I show that respondents like Rachel have an logic of accomplishment that is comprised of three parts: to eat local, sustainably grown, “clean” food; to eat this food in moderation paying attention to nutrition guidelines; and to do so with pleasure and ease. To this end, I argue that respondents like Rachel express delight aligning their daily food consumption practices with these aspirations as their position with this local field allows them to reap symbolic and emotional rewards as they procure and consume food from day to day.

Second, I posit that, although these respondents see the taste for unprocessed, fresh foods as natural and intuitive, they still have to work to produce themselves in alignment with these aspirations. In this section, I provide a discussion of the strategies of action that they use to accomplish this, particularly how they view and navigate the local built environment. I argue that their material resources allow them to carefully curate their experience within their neighborhood and the larger Bay Area. They shop only at grocery stores and restaurants that they believe to be allied with this eating ethos, and maintain social distance from food stores and people they believe to be connected to wrong or bad choices. To this end, they buy groceries and dine on the north, wealthier

side of the neighborhood or drive to wealthier, whiter parts of town and rarely cross the neighborhood line of 18th Avenue. In this way, I posit that grocery stores act as symbolic places where people's identities are affirmed or called into question. Through this self-segregation, these respondents remain relatively buffered from interacting with the food stores and food choices that they perceive as bad and from their neighbors that they feel make poor choices. Furthermore, these respondents define inequality as that which comes from unjust farming practices rather than economic and racial inequalities. This allows them to naturalize the inability of others to align practice to aspirations through these flattened frames of income disparity and lack of education.

Third, I argue that these respondents shape their internal self in alignment with their aspirations and curated choices through positive emotion work, performing care and pleasure as they shop and eat. And because they have the material resources and the external opportunities to eat in alignment with their aspirations, the act of choosing and eating food contains many opportunities to practice pleasure and experience wellbeing.

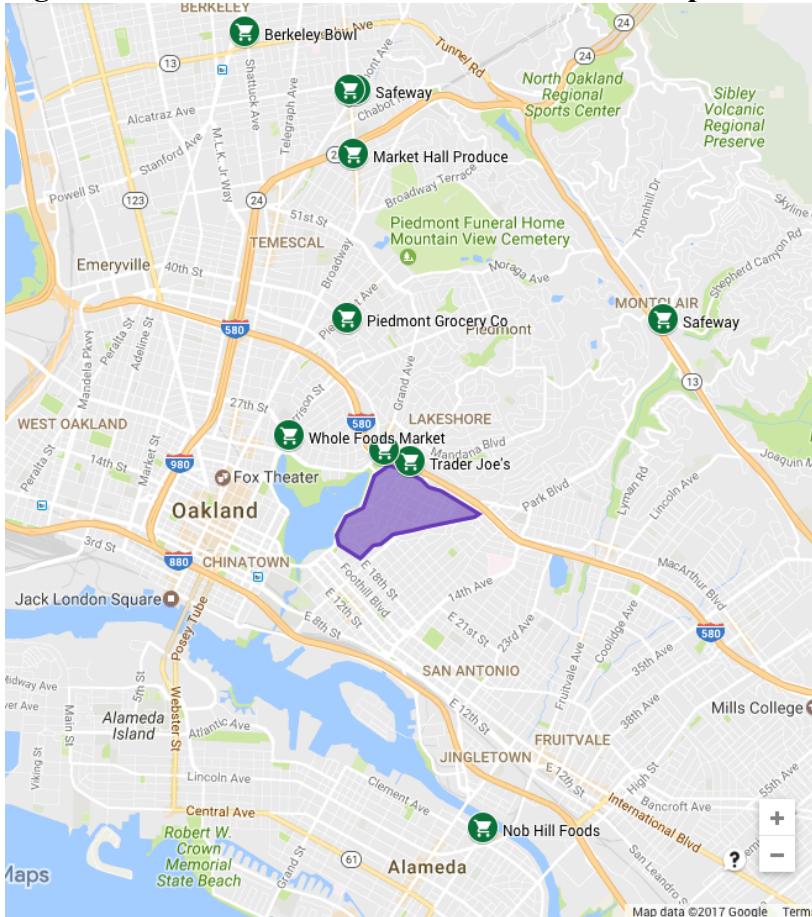
Finally, I illustrate that aligning their food and eating aspirations with their food consumption practices generates pleasure but it also generates anxieties. Respondents did have fears about eating contaminated or unhealthy foods. However, they were able to pull from this relational local logic of accomplishment to resolve their anxiety, highlighting for themselves how well they were doing in relation to both this framework and to others who were less fortunate.

The symbolic and emotional rewards that they receive through their daily relationship with food – which includes segregating themselves from the food spaces of the working class people of color – along with their limited definition of inequality maintain their misrecognition about the consumption practices of their poorer neighbors while at the same time mystifying the objective reality of exploitation in which they are engaged through their food consumption practices.

DAILY ROUTINES AND LOCAL CHOICES

These respondents ate mostly fresh vegetables, meats, seafood, grains and fruits. They all drank wine. Some of them drank beer. They also purchased pastries and coffee, usually from upscale coffee shops a couple of times a week. When they did not cook, they bought meals at sit down restaurants close by. These restaurants ranged from pizza and Greek food to the chic Oakland restaurants serving California cuisine. They bought their food at the weekly farmers market, specialty butcher shops, Whole Foods, Trader Joes, and other high-end grocery stores outside of the neighborhood (see Figure 12). Like Rachel, these respondents mostly chose to shop north and east of their homes in the whiter and wealthier neighborhoods, avoiding the working-class communities just south of them. The majority of these respondents owned cars. Still, all of them walked some of the time to get their groceries and felt that living in this neighborhood made getting the foods that they wanted easy and convenient.

Figure 12: Food Retail Establishments Where Respondents Typically Procure Food



Source: Google Maps (2017), modification made by author.

EATING ASPIRATIONS

Each of the thirteen respondents who expressed ease in their relationship with food articulated a similar set of food and eating aspirations against which they negotiate and makes sense of their food choices and the local food environment in which they are embedded. For Rachel, to eat well means to eat high quality “clean” food produced in a socially just way, to eat a balanced diet, and to do so with ease and pleasure. First, Rachel aspires to stop supporting the corporate agriculture industry. She says:

I want to support sustainable agriculture and I want to vote with my fork. That’s higher consideration for me than health concerns although you’re also putting healthier food in your body. The overarching reason for it is to support a different model around agriculture. That’s how I like to shop and do things. I do spend more time around purchasing and preparing and

selecting my food than most people do, but to me, that's a part of life. It's life itself. If you don't eat, you aren't!

This aspiration to support “a different model around agriculture” translates into eating what Rachel calls “clean” foods: fresh, organic, pesticide-free foods from farms she identifies as using humane or sustainable farming practices. Like Rachel, those who most easily align their aspirations and their practices take concerns about the quality of their food very seriously. Sophia, a 33-year-old white computer engineer defines quality as putting a “premium on local, organic food” and “conscious labeling.” Jane, a 56-year-old white college professor sees it as “sustainably harvested fish humanely raised meats, organic fruits and vegetables, non-GMO foods, whole grains.” Liam, a 60-year-old white plumber reflects, “If I’m going to buy meat and stuff like that I really want good quality. I don’t want something that’s full of hormones.” For these respondents, eating any other way supports destructive corporate practices and puts them at risk for ingesting hidden contaminants that could lead to illness. Good food, then, was responsibly produced and clean of contamination. To eat this way was to protect and distance oneself from perceived, hidden health risks produced as the byproducts of industrial farming practices. During our trip to the Saturday farmer’s market in the Oasis, Rachel provides me with an example to illustrate how, despite her best efforts, she understands that she is constantly in danger of ingesting contaminants. “I was reading about phthalates the other day.” Phthalates are a type of salt that are used as a plasticizer in vinyl flooring, building materials, and Tupperware. “It turns out its in all kinds of plastic, and it leeches into our food so we’re never going to be uncontaminated. But the choices that I make do make me feel safer.” This particular aspiration to eat clean, local, organic food is the signpost that Rachel uses to both make choices and to make sense of her choices given her sense that there is contamination all around her. Take, for example, her description of what she purchases at Whole Foods Market:

I buy my poultry there and I either buy Mary’s [Organic Chicken] or some of their packaged chicken that comes from Petaluma. I know that the animals are to some extent free range and *certainly* not caged. And I buy organic eggs there. I buy Mary’s Crackers and canned things that are organic like Amy’s chili and organic garbanzo beans.

As she runs through the list of things she typically buys, she reveals how she judges what to buy based on these principals around quality food production: “organic,” “free range,” “certainly not caged.”

The second aspiration that these respondents used to guide their consumption practices regarded rules about what a balanced diet consisted of and the correct proportions that one should eat to maintain good health. “I’m very aware of what I put in my body,” Rachel shares with me. “If you balance your meals enough with proteins, fibers, complex carbs, you’re satisfied, psychologically and biologically. It gets you through.” Rachel also reveals these rules about nutrition in our conversation about how not to eat. She says, “I mean you don’t want to eat nothing but *high* fat, *high* animal product, meat product, and no fruit, and no vegetables, and no fiber. **THAT’S** not good.”

Steve, a 38-year-old online editor, echoes this point as well, commenting, “You have to moderate what you do.”

As the above quotations illustrate, respondents explicitly articulated their aspirations around the quality of their diets and the right proportions of foods to eat from day to day. However, there was a third, implicit aspiration that respondents articulated: the desire to naturalize these rules such that they could be unconsciously achieved without struggle. In other words, ease itself is an aspiration that signals to a shared perception about what correct desire *feels* like in the body. Ease signals that one’s bodily desires are naturally aligned with these first two aspirations. And having an easy relationship with correct ways of eating is easy because it is full of pleasure. Where struggle or craving might exist for others, these respondents have pleasure, excitement, and indulgence. During our first interview together, Rachel declares, “I don’t get cravings.” Instead, Rachel experiences pleasure and excitement for unprocessed, fresh foods. Many respondents who share Rachel’s typical food and eating practices also made comments connecting ease and pleasure in the process of achieving their aspirations, signaling that they had correctly and fully embodied these aspirations and didn’t crave to eat in any other way. Sophia, for example, also links her easy relationship to food with love for the food she eats. She shared, “I know a lot of people have guilt associated with foods because of their calorie content or whatever, and I don’t have that at all,” she shares with me. “I get excited because I love food, and I love going to the grocery store and it’s a really big way for me to express myself.” Jill, a 35-year-old mix-raced black graphic designer, agrees: “I mean I’m trying to be good like everyone else and, you know, buy foods that are more local. And partly because I want to do the right thing, but also because they’re not as delicious when they’re not in season, I think. It’s like really healthy, but delicious.” Respondents who ate “correctly” with ease suggest that this ease is natural because it originates from their innate desire for delicious healthy foods eaten in balanced ways.

LEARNING ASPIRATIONS

Respondents like Rachel learned these aspirations in many ways: by reading about food in newspapers and books, watching documentaries, dining out, and talking with like-minded friends. Rachel frequently reads articles in the New York Times and The New Yorker about how “small farmers were getting screwed out of their money because most of the money was going to big agricultural corporations.” She learned about the inhumane way that poultry and cattle were treated, how monoculture farming was depleting the soil, how pesticides were killing the bees, and this made her angry.

Julie talks about how she and her husband started learning about what she refers to as “conscious” choices in New York City when the trendiest restaurants started featuring information about where they sourced their ingredients.

We dined out a lot in New York and seeing that shift on menus where suddenly the thing was not just chicken, but this chicken, it’s like raised just 20 miles north of here, and all the produce suddenly being what’s in season and being totally whether it’s trendy or not. But that was *the* thing,

and that's what we were seeing. And it just starts to seep into your outlook on food choices.

All respondents in the category spoke about doing reading of their own. “I know it sounds cliché,” said Emma, a 28-year-old white software engineer, “But I read Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivores Dilemma* and it really changed my life.” That book held special significance for Linda, Frank and Donna as well. For Sam it was *Fast Food Nation*.

That scared me away. I didn’t really eat a lot of fast food but it pretty much killed it for me except for In-N-Out Burger. But he has those chapters about factory beef and that really put me off. And we’ve ended up doing a lot of reading about like, okay you know like I’m not going to be going vegetarian, that’s not in the cards for me, so what are the healthiest things? So that’s why we eat a lot of pork tenderloin, a lot of chicken breasts, because those are the ones that are lowest in cholesterol, lowest in fat, lowest in all the bad stuff that you associate with meat but then have the highest protein and all that kind of stuff. So it’s like I can have my meat and not feel guilty, like I’m eating something *horribly* unhealthy, you know?

As Sam articulates well, by educating themselves, he and his wife are able to identify the “right” choice, which is both the healthiest choice and the choice that does not support inhumane farming practices. This allows them to also assuage themselves from any guilt that comes from eating meat products that they assess to be unhealthy and inhumane. Successfully taking up aspirations around clean eating is a pathway to deliciously meeting goals to eat balanced, healthy meals. And since clean eating is seen as delicious and pleasure-filled, it is also used to tame any temptations for “unclean” foods that the body might desire.

ACCOMPLISHING ASPIRATIONS

Once these respondents learned what was right versus wrong or moral versus immoral to consume, they suggested that they had a relatively easy and effortless time incorporated these different choices into their daily food consumption practices. We may not be surprised that Rachel feels that she was easily able to actualize her food related health and wellness aspirations. In fact, the literature on food choice would predict that Rachel would make these choices. With no children, making \$50,000 a year, Rachel does not express financial difficulty making ends meet from month-to-month. Also, living in this neighborhood makes shopping for food easy and pleasurable. She both has a car to travel if need be and lives close enough to her preferred food stores to walk. Additionally, she grew up in an upper class household in San Francisco where eating fruits, vegetables, and fresh baked bread were the norm. In fact, her step-mother was a chef and her grandparents had full time cooks. In other words, she has money, access, transportation, and cultural capital on her side in actualizing these aspirations. This group of respondents shared many of these characteristics. As a group, they were mostly white and highly educated (see table 3.1 and 3.2). The outliers had some association with wealth, cultural

capital, or both – those like Rachel, who makes \$50,000 but has a Master’s Degree and grew up in a wealthy family and Frank, who has a High School Diploma and a minimum wage job, but is married to a college professor. This means that, in general, this group of respondents was easily able to align their everyday food and eating practices with this local aspirational framework by spending more money on food at grocery stores and restaurants that they believed to be allied with their eating ethos.

Still, eating in alignment with these aspirations was a daily project, and respondents like Rachel had to actively produce themselves in alignment to these aspirations through their practices and in relation to the local food environment in which they were embedded. They did this in four ways: by being able to talk intelligently about why these aspirations were correct; by only shopping and eating food in places that affirmed their eating ethos; by maintaining strict social distance from grocery stores, restaurants, and people that they associated with “poor” choices; and by practicing ‘positive emotion work’ of care and pleasure while shopping and eating food. These ways of practicing “correct” ways of eating created an apparatus for a positive identity feedback loop. Validating their identity through their relationship to food, they expressed positive emotions such as self-righteousness about their food choices, believing that these choices made them morally superior citizens who were helping to wage a war against poor choices and immoral industrial farming practices.

In the sections that follow, I outline these four ways in which these pleasure-filled respondents practice aligning their daily food consumption practices with this local aspirational framework. I show how the Oasis in particular contains many opportunities for them to accrue emotional and symbolic rewards for playing the game of approximating their daily food consumption practices to these aspirations. Accumulated positive emotional and symbolic rewards help them produce their internal sense of self in alignment with their external opportunities to eat “correctly.”

THE KNOWLEDGEABLE GASTRONOME

Diet-related illness risks are not always easy to detect. As the above sections illustrate, respondents who eat with ease feel that contamination is hidden within the fabric of everyday life. Because of this, knowledge is an important pathway that these respondents use to fulfill their aspirations. Learning allows them to make informed decisions and decipher deception in food packaging. Because the mainstream media as well as the alternative media and academic community is constantly raising concerns and revealing malpractice in food and farming industries, being a knowledgeable consumer is something that takes work.

During our interview, Rachel is filling out a pre-interview survey. “Oh!” she says, and laughs. “How about this!” She reads one of the questions out loud as if announcing it over a loud speaker! “ ‘Where do you typically read about *food* and *health*.’ UC Berkeley Diversified Farm Systems List Serve! Center for Food Safety email list. And (*laughter*) Smart DC. That listserv is *fabulous* because they often site the New York Times and the New Yorker. Its just....and you know Mark Bittman⁹ is now a visiting scholar [at UC

⁹ Mark Bittman is a famous food journalist who writes for the New York Times and the New Yorker.

Berkeley]. Oh! You haven't seen...You should...I should show you my inbox! (*laughter*) You should take a picture of my inbox! (*laughter*)." We go to her office and she opens her email account. Out of the 32 emails that we can see, nineteen have to do with climate-change, food, farming, farmworkers, or protecting the health and welfare of animals and bees. "So basically this is what I live, breathe, eat, sleep," she emphasizes as we go back into her living room.

Having bought into this knowledge regime around what constituted a moral, good choice and an immoral or uneducated one, the challenge was to organize daily eating and shopping practices to center good choices and create distance from bad ones. Armed with the right knowledge, these respondents could produce themselves in alignment with their aspirations. Doing so entails practicing pleasurable and careful consumption on the one hand and maintaining strict social distance from food spaces and people that they considered risky or gluttonous on the other.

HEAVEN IS PROBABLY LIKE WHOLE FOODS

One way that respondents do this is by navigating their local food environment to only interact with food stores and food spaces that they saw as aligned with this local aspirational framework. They view these stores as projections of their food values by attributing positive motives to their favorite stores on the basis of social cues that these stores care about the health and wellbeing of their clientele. The people that I interviewed frequently referred to the signs and labels posted around the stores that describe the fair trade and sustainable farming practices used in manufacturing and growing the products found there. Karen, a 52-year-old white college professor, shared the following about why she chose Whole Foods for most of her food shopping:

I just think they do it better than anybody else. I think that other places you have options. Whole Foods has a philosophy as a business and as a store to really emphasize sustainably harvested fish, humanely raised meat, organic fruits and vegetables, locally sourced produce, non-GMO foods, whole grains. That's what they offer you. You don't have to sit there and wonder, is this something that is compatible with my values or not?

In this regard, respondents experience ease aligning their aspirations with their daily food practices by only shopping at grocery stores and restaurants that they assess as supporting their eating philosophies and placing great trust in these stores to make healthy decisions for them. The payoff for spending more money was positive emotional accumulation and identity verification. Jane, for example, talks about going into Whole Foods as the highlight of her week. "I feel great in there," she says. "I go in there; I see the flowers, the fresh fruit; I feel happy. I sometimes think heaven is probably like Whole Foods. To be surrounded by beautiful fresh things. So it is a peak experience going to Whole Foods."

The idea that their favorite food stores care about them and their well-being extends to the kinds of people who work and shop at these stores and the values that my respondents assume they hold. Respondents love shopping among others whom they

believe to be choosing to live healthy lifestyles, using such words as “happy,” “healthy,” “fit,” and “cool” to describe the other customers. Theresa, for example, is a 33-year-old Filipina-American nurse practitioner. She tells me, “[The people at Whole Foods] look like they tend to eat healthy. That they’re active, busy people. They look like they eat in moderation too. I love them.”

Respondents also saw themselves soaking up these values and orientations towards health and the body through osmosis as they shopped at one set of grocery stores or another. By surrounding themselves with others whom they believe to hold similar moral health values as themselves, they verify their own identities as people who are making safe food choices that lead to vibrant health. Theresa shared, “[The shoppers at Whole Foods] make you wanna eat healthier. Sometimes you’ll see them in their workout clothes and you’re like I wanna be that slim, or I want to eat healthier so I can look that good, you know?” For these respondents, shopping for groceries, then, became a way to consume a different, idealized and desired for version of themselves. In Theresa’s case, this was a slimmer, active, “good” looking person who always ate in moderation. And whether my informants interacted with the other customers in the grocery store or not, during their time shopping for food, they experience themselves as embedded in an imagined community of people who care about their bodies, appearance, and health.

It is not surprising that respondents feel this sense of elation and good citizenship in places like Whole Foods and Trader Joe’s. As Johnson (2008) theorizes in her citizen-consumer hybrid model of consumption, grocery stores such as Whole Foods Market employ ethical messaging “that is organized around sentiment” to make consumers feel like good citizens as they shop for their vegetables. In this way, these stores play a central role in fortifying and legitimizing this local aspirational framework. Solidify a boundary between “good” and “bad” food (see Figure 13), these stores offer their customers a guarantee that they have their healthiest selves in mind when making every decision about what to stock and what not to stock.

In other words, these places, which forefront beauty, health, wellness, and care, prime their customers for a certain definition of good food and certain vision of social inequality. Inequality comes from the heavy hand of big agricultural corporations and food industry giants who privilege profit over the health and wellbeing of their customers or the planet. The solution is “conscious capitalism,” where consumers can, as Michael Pollan (2006) terms it, “vote with your fork.” He suggests that through making different decisions and supporting local, organic food vendors, individuals can change the food system

Take, for example, this assessment that Rachel makes about Whole Foods and what it means to take inequality into consideration.

I do go [to Whole Foods] even though the CEO was kind of a crazy jerk. The people he employs really seem to try to do a good thing, and I know people complain that they're not in a union and there are other issues surrounding [labor] but when I go there, if I buy seafood, I know they've made their best effort to get the most sustainably farmed fish. I know they've screened for the pesticide free foods. I don't have to worry about some of the stuff I don't want in my food. They have a great selection of beer; I definitely get my beer there and they're nice. They take anything back if you don't like it.

Figure 13: Whole Foods Market Grocery Gag



Source: Photo by author, March 2015

Rachel brushes aside concerns about how the CEO treats his employees. The psychic capital that Rachel accumulates as she shops for groceries outweighs any concerns she has about whether the employees are treated well.

SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES AND SOCIAL DISTANCE

The positive feelings of pleasure, pride and excitement that respondents felt at their food stores of choice were defined in relation to and heightened by a set of negative feelings that they attribute to the other stores in the neighborhood. Going to or thinking about these stores generated negative emotions such as displeasure and disgust. For Sophia, the pride about making the righteous choice exists in a binary with deep disgust when considering the food choices available at less “conscious” food retailers, as she describes them. When Sophia recalls the time her cousin told her that he purchased groceries at Target, her voice got higher and her body tensed: “He was like – ‘Yeah we went to Target for some grocery shopping’ and I was like ‘That’s disgusting! Who buys their groceries at Target?!’” And then I was like oh my god I am such a judgmental asshole. And I looked around and was like there’s probably someone walking behind me who buys their groceries at Target because that’s what they can afford but I was completely disgusted.”

Some respondents were vague about their reasons for holding such strong negative feelings towards these stores. For example, one respondent simply said with disdain in her voice, “I don’t like anything about it.” Another respondent noted, “It, ugh, it feels yucky. It’s just yucky.” Many respondents echoed findings from Cairnes and Johnston (2015), Cannuscio et al. (2010), and Wilson et al. (2001) that respondents feel

displeasure or stress from the social experience at the stores in general. They talk about crowded parking lots and stores that are hard to navigate. They spoke of encountering rude shoppers and unhelpful workers. When asked why Theresa doesn't shop at Lucky Supermarket, she replies, "I don't know, it's just a feeling." As we talk more about this feeling, she begins to catalog what is actually an accumulation of many feelings: being overwhelmed, anxious, annoyed, and an absence of desire. As she imagines herself going through the aisles of this store, she recounts,

[Its] always crowded and the people kind of have attitudes there and you don't see anyone there to assist you unless you're at the self-checkout and she's like "you're doing it wrong." People act like they can't drive in that parking lot. It's that and the store in general. Once I get in there, I want to get out, and it's hard to get out.

These negative emotions quickly became moral assessments about the motives of the stores and the people who shop there. Often respondents attribute their dislike to three factors: the perceived low-quality of the food sold at these stores, the perception that these store owners do not care about the health or wellbeing of their clientele because they are low-income, and the perception that people who shop there are making poor choices for themselves and their families.

First, respondents feel that the choices that they have at the supermarkets and discount grocery stores in the neighborhood are of poor quality. Take, for example, this exchange that I had with Theresa:

T: Sometimes I don't look at their produce but if I need to, I will look at it. You can tell when you go into Lucky too what's organic and what's not, as far as the freshness and stuff... it's not like you're noticing it. You're not like I have to get that.

K: But you feel that at the Whole Foods?

T: Yeah, I'll go at every section and I spend so much time there cause you find so much stuff.

Rachel echoes these themes in her assessment of Safeway.

R: I just don't like anything it about it. It's just this neon, plasticky—the whole feeling about the place completely repels me. My friend Jim, he likes Safeway because it's union. If you go to the paper products, I don't think they have a recycled paper towel you can buy. Maybe they have brown ones, which I don't like because it imparts a smell. You have very few options and maybe for toilet paper... but I would never buy produce there.

K: Not even organic produce?

R: Probably not. You know, there's a big range of organic, right? And so not all organic comes from farms that use diverse farming practices. You can have a monoculture of lettuce or tomatoes or whatever. It's not really where I'm trying to go. I'm trying to support local farmers.

Respondents who ate with ease also hated going into the big box supermarkets and discount grocery stores in the neighborhood because they perceive that the other shoppers are making poor choices. Ann suggests,

Walmart, I have a very negative feeling about. I associate Walmart with cheap, poorly made things that have travelled a long way at great environmental cost and have been made by people that are abused and exploited workers. I do know, at least I have read, that Walmart has made a great effort to expand their organic food offerings, I think they are trying to expand their range of food products they offer but that's not enough to get me there. I see a lot of people who don't look healthy to me and that bothers me. It must be related to some way in what they're buying there and also because I'm surrounded in those places by choices that I consider to be poor choices. Lot of packaged food, lot of soda, lot of sweetened food. I just don't like being around it.

As these quotations illustrate, the easy and pleasure-filled relationship with food articulated by these respondents was produced by interacting with food only in grocery stores that they assessed to be in alignment with their eating ethos and creating social distance from places they saw as stocking "contaminated" foods. Interestingly, the types of foods that are stocked in one store or another in the neighborhood get imbricated with ideas of the kinds of people who work and shop in these places. This orientation towards the neighborhood is part of the game of approximation that respondents play as they work to approximate their food and wellness aspirations with their daily food consumption practices. To do so allows them to reap emotional and symbolic rewards as they eat from day to day. The more they could insulate themselves from contaminated food items, uncaring employees, and people making immoral food choices, the more emotional rewards they experienced.

SWEET, SUCCULENT, FLAVORFUL AND GORGEOUS

Still, surrounding oneself with the "correct" types of choices did not guarantee "correct" practice or "correct desire." For this to happen, respondents needed to shape their internal predilections through practice such that their internal selves could come into alignment with their external opportunities for food consumption. The work of producing the internal self in alignment with this local aspiration framework constitutes of a type of positive emotion work. In what follows, I offer two pieces of empirical evidence to show how respondents did positive emotion work during their daily food consumption and procurement practices in order to naturalize their sense that consuming these types of foods is easy.

It is a typical Saturday morning for Rachel. She sleeps in and then has a leisurely homemade brunch of fresh toast, eggs, and coffee with her friend Tim at the wooden table in her backyard. Her enclosed, private garden is full of flowers and fruit trees that highlight her well maintained one story craftsman house. On the particular Saturday morning, the skies are bright blue and the sun is the kind of humid free hot that was particularly intense during the drought stricken California summer of 2015. Rachel is wearing a tank top and cut off jeans and talking to her friend about Obama's trade policies. After finishing her coffee, around 1pm, Rachel says goodbye to her friend and gathers her things for her weekly trip to the Farmer's Market: two cloth bags, her bright yellow purse, and large red metal folding cart with wheels. It takes her 15-minutes from her house up and down winding hills, under a highway and through a major intersection to walk there. She has chosen this path in particular because it allows her to stroll down the beautiful, tree-lined streets in her neighborhood. At that time, the market is alive and full of a diverse group of shoppers all there to buy fresh vegetables, fruits, merchandise from local artists, and pre-made food from food trucks. Out of the 15 farmers who are there, Rachel shops religiously at four. First item on Rachel's shopping list is baby gem lettuce. "Once you go baby you never go back," she says to me and chuckles. Resembling a small version of Romaine lettuce, these dark green, light green and purple lettuces are slightly wet and covered in dirt here and there to signal that they are freshly harvested from the farm. Rachel is particular about her lettuce. She spends five minutes carefully picking through the crate, showing me those bunches that pass her quality test, and placing them in a large plastic bag until it is full. As she is making her selection, I ask her what it is about this variety of lettuce that she likes in particular. "Oh!" She smiles at me and closes her eyes for a second as if tasting them in her mind. "They're sweet, succulent, flavorful and *GORGEOUS!*" she exclaims drawing out the word gorgeous for extra punch.

With that, she turns around and starts to walk to the other side of the market. Have you ever had a early girl tomato?" she asks me with a look of excitement in her eyes. "No," I tell her. "Oh my GOSH!" she says "Oh you are missing out! They are the most delicious, most incredible tomatoes you will ever taste in your life. They are so juicy you just want to eat them by the handful." At the next stand, she grabs a dozen or so tomatoes, two bunches of cilantro, a bag full of green beans, and about five zucchini. She hands me a tomato to eat as she eats one herself. "Yum. Aren't they amazing?" She pays for these vegetables and then proclaims, in a tired yet accomplished voice, "OK! I'm done. I have enough food for the whole neighborhood." She laughs and we begin our walk home. With every carefully curated choice that Rachel makes at the farmers market, she feels pleasure and gets to practice this pleasure through tasting samples, and engaging in the sweet and flavorful ritual of finding the best fruit in the basket. This ritual, Saturday afternoon practice is one of positive emotion work where she experiences immediate emotional rewards for consuming in alignment with her aspirations. This makes her feel both self-righteous, proud, and accomplished. She has done something good for the earth and those who grow our food, while also cultivating herself as one who easily eats in alignment with her aspirations. This is both a procurement practice as well as a consumption practices. As she eats the fresh tomato, she feels ecstatic.

Likewise, Sophie expresses how her choice of where to purchase her food make her feel differently as she consumes the food that she eats. Sophia is a 64-year-old low-

income tax practitioner who identifies as half Caucasian and half Native American. Despite the many options for purchasing food close by and the fact that Sophie has a hard time walking, her grocery store of choice is a place called Nob Hill located 15-minutes away by car in the neighboring city of Alameda. During our interview, Sophie spoke at length about the different experiences that she has at the pleasurable Nob Hill versus places such as Safeway and Grocery Outlet echoing the themes discussed above. During our interview, she spoke about the other shoppers at Nob Hill:

People seem to be pretty careful about what they are putting in their baskets. They have kale in there, healthy snack choices. They're not buying fat. They make you feel like you are buying good food.

Sophie suggests that health is a feeling as well a state of the body and that this feeling is bolstered in part through social interaction with others. These feeling of health infused the food that she bought at Nob Hill and subsequently made her feel that her body was happier for eating them.

With Safeway, I can get things that are kind of acceptable. I can make due with what I get from there. But when I go to Nob Hill its "Oh goodie I get to go to Nob Hill and I get to get yummy, yummy things to cook with." It's a completely different relationship. I feel more pleasure, healthier. I have found some foods lately where I eat them and they hit my stomach and my stomach just feels happy.

Instead of suggesting that she finds the food from Nobb Hill easier to digest, she describes her stomach as feeling *happy*.

ANXIETIES AND SLIPPAGES

Despite the rather large positive emotional dividend that these respondents accumulated through their food consumption practices, the daily practice of producing themselves in alignment with their aspirations was a two-sided coin. On the one side was plenty, pleasure and pride. Rachel's relationship with food, for example, was one that centered pleasure and abundance. By nutrition standards, she did seem to eat a relatively healthful diet. On the other hand, however, she, too, experienced anxieties that came up as she produced her eating practices in alignment with this local aspiration framework from day-to-day. These anxieties were revealed almost as confessions slipping out through her discourse around what she ate and why she ate these things. Take for example, this vignette regarding Rachel's struggle around eating too much French cheese. In it, Rachel reveals struggles between knowledge and the desires of the body that must be resolved. To do so, she, perhaps selectively, uses knowledge in order to assuage herself from anxiety about the potentially negative consequences of eating delicious but high cholesterol foods. During our interview, I ask Rachel to recall for me what she had eaten over the last 24 hours. "So there's this French cheese called St. Andre from Trader Joe's. This stuff is *amazing*, oh my god! One friend calls it Brie on steroids." She laughs. "It's so good. Oh my god I *love* this stuff. I'm sure that my arteries are *quite* clogged." More

laughter. Then a brief pause. The choice to eat this cheese is one where pleasure and health are at odds for Rachel and thus in talking about pleasure, anxiety slips out and must be resolved. She loves a cheese that might clog her arteries. She continues: “But you know that they also say that if you get good *exercise* and you have a pretty balanced diet, that some of the stuff that they’re saying about cholesterol being *so* related to food is *not*... The correlation is not as strong as they thought it was. I mean you don’t want to eat nothing but *high* fat, *high* animal product, meat product, and no fruit, and no vegetables, and no fiber... **THAT’S** not good. Buuuuut, if I want my cheese everyday. You know, it’s probably not the end of the universe.” She pauses, laughs again, and then says with almost comic indignation, “I’m old enough, and I deserve it!”

What is interesting to note, here, is that, despite her struggle between eating cheese that doesn’t quite fit into her framework around what good eating means, she is nevertheless working to validate this choice through a series of knowledge based, relational justifications. First, she has already chosen this cheese selectively based on an assumption that French cheese companies use more socially just farming practices. Second, she knows what a truly bad diet looks like – it’s a diet absent of fruits, vegetables, balance, and moderation. She calls upon this idea of a bad diet to relationally place her own choices as good through comparison. Still, after putting her choices in conversation with her aspirations, she isn’t quite able to resolve her angst. What she has left is an indignant sense of personal desire: “I’m old enough and I deserve it.” While this angst of the pleasure-filled eater may seem insignificant or diminutive in the grand scheme of things – what true difference will it make for Rachel’s overall health and well being to eat or not to eat French brie cheese – these quotations illustrate how profoundly food is a site of struggle. Even those who have the material resources to generally align their practices with the aspirations, still feel at risk and unsure. Also important to note that when she is unsure, she pulls meaning from her local aspirational framework. She highlights for herself the ways in which she is daily succeeding to meet her aspirations and this allows her to justify her choices to herself.

Thus, Rachel illustrates how psychic capital gets traded with the self. She is able to pull on her accumulated experiences of wellbeing in order to justify these small consumption practices that fall out of alignment with her aspirations. In this way, the accumulated psychic capital buffers against risk of the self failing. She has the privilege of defining these consumption practices as just this – a consumption practice rather than a failure to be a correct and moral citizen. The psychic capital gives her an out – it allows her to mostly resolve her angst.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the daily food consumption practices and aspirations for a group of relatively privileged respondents living in the Oasis who experienced their relationship to food through ease. As the previous sections illustrate, those who ate with ease navigated the local, built environment to maximize their emotional and symbolic rewards, surrounding themselves with opportunities to consume what they defined as “good,” “moral,” and “clean” food in a way that made them feel good about themselves. Eating and shopping for food brought them pleasure and was a way for them to protect against risks of diet-related illness. In fact, they structured their practices so that they did

not have to confront choices that they saw as poor choices. Part of reaping the most emotional and symbolic rewards for their practices included distancing themselves from choices they consider to be contaminated and the imagined immoral consumer who would make those choices. In doing this, they accumulated experiences of wellbeing and positive notions of the self as they ate from day to day. Still, they had to produce their internal selves in alignment with their external opportunities to eat well and protect from risk. They did this by working on the self and working on their emotions. They performed care and pleasure for themselves as they bought groceries and ate the food they bought. Despite this, they did express anxieties. To relieve their anxieties they pulled on meanings from their local logic of accomplishment to highlight how well they were doing in relation to both this framework and to others who are less able to achieve these aspirations. Lastly, being easily able to align their practices with this local aspirational framework created blind spots. They defined inequality as that which comes from big capitalism rather than economic and racial inequalities. This allowed them to not see labor, to not see hunger, and to naturalize the inability of others to align practice to aspirations through these flattened frames of income disparity and lack of education. The symbolic and emotional rewards that they receive through their daily relationship with food – which includes segregating themselves from the food spaces of the working class people of color – along with their limited definition of inequality maintain their misrecognition about the consumption practices of their poorer neighbors while at the same time mystifying the objective reality of exploitation in which they are engaged through their food consumption practices. In what follows, I contrast this experience of shopping and eating with ease to the experience of shopping and eating as struggle.

CHAPTER FOUR

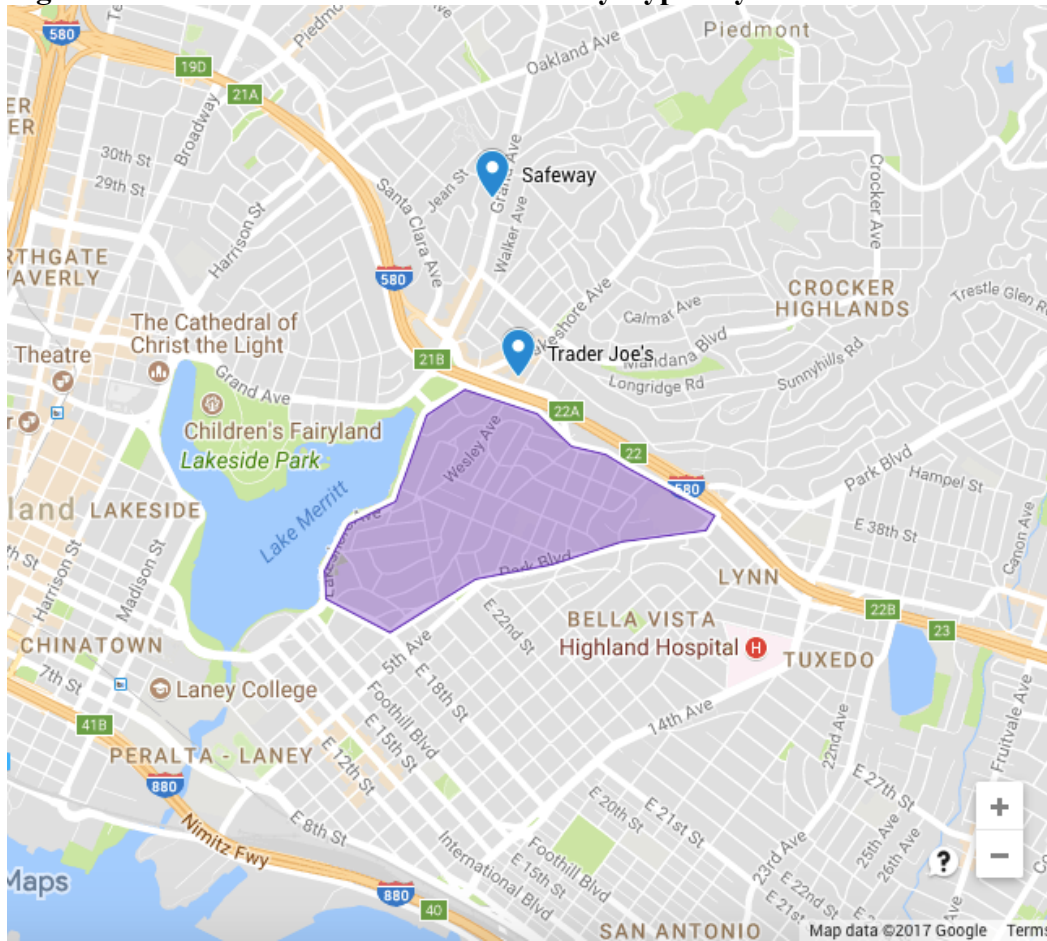
Struggle

Lilly is determined. Every night before she goes to bed, she takes out a little red notebook the size of her palm and makes a note of everything she has eaten during the day. She takes stock of where she digressed from her plan, and makes a goal for the following day. In the morning, she reads a passage from a daily motivation book called *Daily Cornbread: 365 Ingredients for a Healthy Mind, Body and Spirit*. Full of inspirational stories and quotations, these short meditations help Lilly stay steadfast in her goals to eat healthy, clean, fresh, foods and stay away from foods that she has learned are bad for her.

Lilly lives down the street and around the corner from Rachel in an apartment with three roommates. A 23-year-old Nigerian-American schoolteacher, Lilly grew up in Fremont, California – a suburb about 40 minutes away from Oakland. She typically shops for her groceries at Trader Joe’s and Safeway (see Figure 14), although she aspires to shop at Whole Foods Market. Additionally, the school that she works for in San Francisco runs a weekly food bank where she typically gets free fresh vegetables such as apples, onions, and broccoli. She occasionally eats at fast food restaurants such as Jack In The Box and McDonalds, although she tries to order salads at these places instead of burgers and fries. Like Rachel, Lilly has a car but prefers to ride her bicycle to the grocery store. She has fastened a basket to the front that is perfect for carrying groceries, and living in the Oasis makes biking to the grocery store pleasurable and easy. She typically spends around \$100 a week on food, although her economic security is transient and towards the end of the month she tends to run out of money. Still, her income is too high for her to qualify to receive government assistance. This meant that when money ran out, she had to utilize creative strategies in order to eat from day to day. These strategies included eating smaller portions and canned soups, and drinking more water to create the illusion of being full.

Like Rachel, Lilly has a defiant aversion to big supermarket chain stores such as Lucky and Safeway. She shared with me during our interview, “I don’t like to promote those places...Like Safeway, Lucky. I don’t like to promote them. I don’t like to spend my money there. Just the personal fact that they don’t really have a good selection of what I want. When they start having better food then I will be a part of it.” Also, that feeling of wellbeing that she was able to tap into at places like Whole Foods was absent for her at Safeway and Lucky. “It’s hella corporate. They don’t care about what I’m eating,” she continues, describing Safeway. Despite the fact that she perceives the food at these stores to be of lower quality than she desires to consume, Lilly often finds herself shopping there or going through the Jack In The Box drive through when money gets tight. In other words, Lilly lacks the material resources to fully protect herself from these risks and align her daily food consumption practices with her eating aspirations. She also often finds herself craving foods that she was trying to avoid or making choices she considered to be bad choices.

Figure 14: Food Establishments Where Lilly Typically Procures Food



Source: Google Maps (2017), modifications by author.

Because Lilly aspired to eat like Rachel, she was painfully aware of the gap between her aspirations and her practices. The day before Lilly and I met for our first interview, she had eaten three meals and three snacks. She started her day with a meal replacement shake. Several hours later, she ate a peanut butter cookie and drank a cup of green tea. For lunch she had lentil soup, two vegetarian sandwiches with cheese, and a juice box. Dinner consisted of a burrito that was left over at her job. Beyond the cookie, Lilly ate four apples in between her meals. When I asked her how she felt about these choices, she expressed distress, cataloging all the ways in which the choices she made were the wrong ones. “I shouldn’t have done that,” “I felt nasty,” “of course I didn’t feel good,” “I’m gonna pay for it,” she reflected. Still, she, unlike Donald, was resolved to use knowledge and work to tame her tastes and manage her practices. She might not always have the correct taste, she might not have the enough resources, but she has the willpower. Lilly experienced her relationship with food through *struggle* – the misalignment of practice with aspirations with forceful effort to reach alignment.

Curiously, Lilly nonetheless frames eating healthfully is easy. Next to the checkout counter at Sprouts Farmer’s Market grocery store there is a display of healthy lifestyle and cooking magazines. These magazines have titles such as “The Good Life,” “Gluten Free Baking,” and “Eat This.” Next to the organic chocolate bars, sugar-free

gum, and hemp nutrition supplement, these magazines draw customers in by offering readers information on “exactly what to eat to get slim,” “101 fast and healthy summer recipes,” and “25 top summer super foods.” It was a Friday afternoon in late July of 2015 when Lilly and I encountered these magazines while waiting in line for Lilly to pay for her groceries. Lilly pointed out the magazines to me, particularly the magazine “The Good Life” on the cover of which a white middle-aged man stands in front of a refrigerator full of fresh fruits and vegetables, holding an apple in one hand and an orange in the other. “You see how much money people are making trying to help people slim down? It’s really not that hard. Just stop eating hella crap,” she says shaking her head slightly with a gesture that seems to emphasize that what she is saying is common sense.

In this chapter, I discuss a group of racially diverse middle and working class respondents in the Oasis who experience their relationships to food as struggle. I organize this chapter around four main themes. First, as in Chapter 3, I provide a discussion of what this group of respondents typically eats and where they purchase food, what they aspire to eat and thought of as good, and where they learned these aspirations. I show that respondents like Lilly had a set of aspiration that was similar to those who ate with ease. They desired to eat local, sustainably grown, “clean” food; to eat this food in moderation; and to easily and effortlessly align their tastes and desires with these ways of eating. These respondents came to adopt these aspirations through conversations with friends, books, documentaries, classes or through conversations with their doctors.

Second, I illustrate that when these respondents set out to organize their daily shopping and eating practices to align with these aspirations, they struggle to do so both mainly because they didn’t have enough money to do so. However, they did not frame their struggles through economic disparity alone. Instead, they subjectively experienced themselves as struggling because they did not always have the correct desires or tastes, leading them to make choices more often that they saw as bad choices. They did believe that they could use knowledge to discipline the body in line with the logic of accomplishment set by the upper-middle class pleasure-filled consumers. Because of this, they work to approximate these aspirations the best they can from day to day.

Third, I discuss how these respondents understand and place themselves within the local food built environment of the Oasis. As I argued in Chapter 3, grocery stores act as symbolic and emotional places where people’s identities are affirmed or called into question. Similarly to those who eat with ease, these respondents perceive a great deal of stratification in their local built food environment around both the quality and price of food. Most respondents attempt to position themselves in the middle of this stratified local food environment, rejecting places like Whole Foods as elitist and places like Lucky as too low in quality. However, unlike those who eat with ease, these respondents did not always have the money to allow them to “opt-out” of the spaces that they associate with low-quality food and poor choices. They therefore find shopping for groceries to more often resemble work than pleasure, as they put their knowledge and self-discipline to use in navigating hidden ingredients or cravings.

Final, I posit that, whereas those respondents who eat with ease experience shopping and eating as a pleasure-filled game that allows them to accumulate emotional

and symbolic rewards, those respondents who struggle while eating experience shopping and eating as a task that needs to be managed. In the final section, I highlight two types of strategies that emerged as central to the daily lives of these respondents. First, respondents managed their consumption practices in the grocery store, spending time reviewing ingredients, looking for the best quality foods at the best price, and enacting strategies to get through the grocery store without giving into temptation. Second, they managed their expectations, shifting the way that they framed their choices so that they could find pride in the set of constrained choices that they had. This entailed emotion work to neutralize their shame and anger about not being able to eat better food.

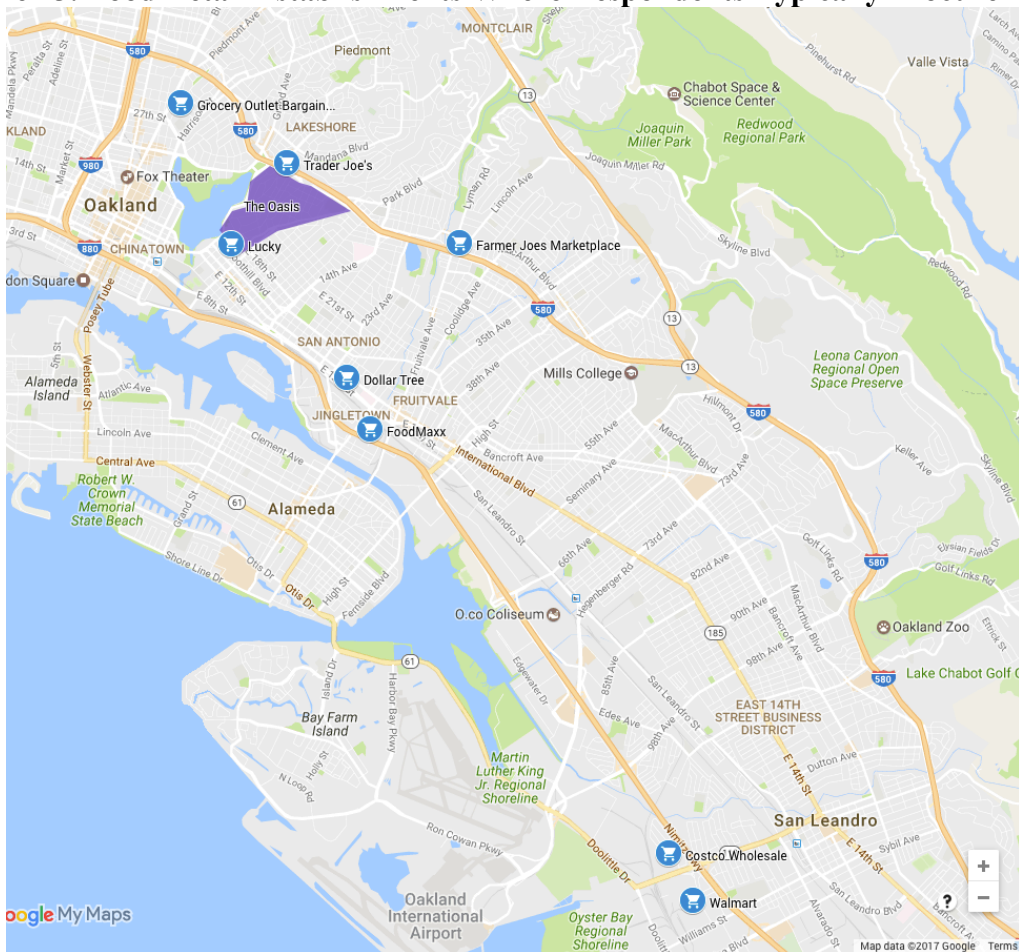
I close by suggesting that despite these various strategies that they use to resolve the gap between their aspirations and daily food consumption practices, respondents' emotions around their daily choices reveal that distress is never fully resolved. Instead, those who struggle always feel that they're on the verge of losing control either by eating something contaminated or making a poor choice. This leads to shame and guilt as respondents internalize these as "weaker moments of the self," as one respondent names it, symbolizing that they fail to live up to this local logic of accomplishment around what they had come to internalize as right versus wrong to eat. I suggest that this is due to eating with limited resources in a stratified local food environment where the highest quality food was the most expensive. However, this was equally due to the fact that they organize what it means to eat well against the upper-middle class logic of accomplishment that imbricates correct choices with correct tastes and prescribes an emotional sense of ease, safety and wellbeing at the intersection of the two. This means that the emotional dividend that was paid out to their better resourced neighbors was unavailable to these respondents. At the same time, this relational measurement of their own practices as well as this overriding sense that they could use knowledge to discipline their bodies into "right" action, mystified the objective truth of capitalist exploitation and domination over the food related pathways towards wellness in the Oasis.

DAILY ROUTINES

While those respondents who had relationships of ease were mostly white, well educated, and middle to upper-middle class, those respondents who had relationships of struggle were diverse on all of these indicators. Respondents identified racially as white, Black, Hispanic and Asian. They made combined household incomes between \$15,000 and \$75,000 per year and had acquired a variety of educational degrees from High School diplomas to Ph.Ds. They ate meals that contained more canned, pre-packaged, or pre-made foods along with more sweets and salty snacks than those who ate with ease. Typical breakfasts included eggs, cereal, oatmeal, and protein shakes. For lunch they ate sandwiches. Dinners consisted of pasta, chicken fingers, ramen noodles, canned vegetables and rice, stir-fries, salads, fish, or Lean Cuisines. They snacked on French fries, potato chips, and sweets such as cakes, cupcakes and donuts. They drank coffee and wine. Many of these respondents voiced going out to eat at restaurants very infrequently because of cost, while others went out to eat almost every day. When they did eat out, they ate meals under \$10.00 unless they decided to splurge and then they ate meals under \$20.00. Almost all respondents in this category made too much money to receive government assistance but not enough money to quite make ends meet from month to

month. Around the neighborhood, these respondents mostly shopped for groceries at Trader Joe’s, Safeway, and Lucky. However, given their limited incomes, they also travel outside of the neighborhood to shop at discount grocery stores such as Grocery Outlet, Food Maxx, Walmart, Costco, the Dollar Tree, and Farmer Joe’s (see Figure 15). Only a few of them had cars. The others walked, biked, or took the bus to get their food, though none of them saw this as an impediment to getting to the grocery store.

Figure 15: Food Retail Establishments Where Respondents Typically Procure Food



Source: Google Maps (2017), modification by author.

EATING ASPIRATIONS

This group of respondents shared the eating aspirations of those who ate with ease. They desired to eat quality food that was free of hidden contamination and grown in a sustainable way; to eat balanced meals that attended to nutrition guidelines; and to easily and effortlessly align their tastes and desires with these ways of eating. To illustrate this point, I return to my initial interview with Lilly. During this first meeting, Lilly spent a long time outlining in detail the knowledge that she had acquired around correct eating. Take for example, this long but illustrative excerpt from our interview:

I am a vegetarian, matter of fact vegan cause I don't intake dairy at all. I try to get like every single color food. I try to eat a lot of grains too. I don't eat fried foods, even healthy fried foods like fried tofu. I will bake my food. I try not to cook it. I don't use a microwave. I don't eat all those microwave "healthy" foods, that's garbage too. I try to eat a lot of fruits and vegetable but I make sure that they are not GMO or pesticide covered. For instance, this apple, on the sticker you can tell if it is pesticide or GMO because the number. If it has a 9 in front of it, it is completely organic. I learned hecka stuff about food. Going to school too, I learned a lot and doing a lot of research about what they put in our food. I like staying away from a lot of different stuff. Even healthy food that is processed is not good. I don't know if you have read this book its called *Just Food* by James McWilliam. He was talking about how organic food, too, causes problems for the environment because of the pesticide they use. It's organic, but when they break down into their byproducts it is harmful. And drinking soymilk, I stopped that. I just drink almond milk or coconut milk. So I started drinking coconut water cause it has more H2O in it. I started paying a lot of attention to my diet. I stopped eating all those microwave foods, I got rid of my microwave. Just started eating baked food. I stopped eating bread. I would eat like flaxseed bread cause I love bread sometimes. I stopped eating white sugar. Even brown sugar I am not even going to be eating a lot like that. Even like "healthy" cookies and crackers I stopped eating all of that stuff.

This rather long quotation highlights that Lilly, like Rachel, aspires to align her daily eating practices with this set of aspirations of quality, balance, and ease. Knowing what was right and wrong to eat is incredibly important to Lilly, and she feels proud of herself for what she has learned. But these eating aspirations are not superfluous. Quite the opposite, Lilly feels that if she fails to eat the right way, she will be consuming "harmful" byproducts and "garbage" food that put her at risk of becoming ill. Because of this, there is a lot at stake in making the right choices.

Cheryl, a 54-year-old Hawaiian retired investment banker, shares many of Lilly's ideas about what she desires to buy and why. She tells me,

I try not to eat anything canned, you know, but sometimes things get tight, but we usually go to the farmer's market and get the fresh food and, though we may have to pay a little bit more for it, but it's good food. And that's really what I'm into—no matter what ethnicity the food is, you want that food to be good food. That it's fresh. That it's fresh and doesn't have a lot of preservatives in it.

Sally, a 45-year-old white administrative assistant frames her choices in terms of balance and nutrition, stating:

[My food philosophy is] mostly balance in terms of having the macronutrients and the micronutrients. I feel like my food, if I'm being

balanced, should provide me with all the nutrients I need my whole philosophy is eating balanced and making sure if I don't eat vegetables for a day, that I supplement that. I try to eat balanced each day, if not because of circumstances, I try to balance it the other days.

In other words, these respondents have honed specific ideas about what constitutes good versus bad food choices and ways of eating. Good food was fresh, free of preservatives, and organic when possible. Good ways of eating include paying attention to balance and nutrients. And, because that way of eating is supposed to be the healthiest way of eating, eating that way was supposed to be easy (we return, as illustration, to Lilly's remark at the check out counter: "its really not that hard, you just gotta stop eating hecka crap"). This way of eating is not superfluous or meant strictly for the purposes of distinction. Quite the contrary, these respondents want to eat this way because they genuinely see it as the only way to ensure protection from food-related diseases and poor health.

LEARNING ASPIRATIONS

Respondents like Lilly, Sally, and Cheryl came to adopt these aspirations through conversations with friends, books, documentaries, classes or through conversations with their doctors. Living in the Oasis makes it easy to come into contact with this local logic of accomplishment, and this sense of indignation and distrust is prevalent throughout my interviews. John, a 28-year-old white construction worker, moved to Oakland one-and-one-half years ago from the Midwest for work. He moved into an apartment in the Oasis with two roommates whom he had not previously known. When he first arrived, he ate mainly at Kentucky Fried Chicken, which is how he had eaten growing up. However, he often had "stomach stuff" after he ate, and felt overall depressed about his food choices. When we met for our interview, however, he had just started to try out vegetarianism. He says of this shift, "Well I moved in with these guys and... yeah most of my friends here in Oakland are organic or vegetarian. So it's just all around me. I don't know. Just everybody is going organic now and everything it seems like [is organic]. It's worth a shot. Maybe it will make me feel better." Along with learning about organic and local eating from his new friends and roommates, John also started educating himself by watching documentaries about food and the food system on Netflix. These encounters generated the same kind of deep indignation and distrust that Mike and Lilly voice.

Still other respondents came to take up these aspirations and local logic of accomplishment because their primary care doctor warned them that they needed to change their diet. Huang, a 50-year-old Chinese janitor shares how a doctor at Asian Health Services warned him that if he did not stop eating rice and start eating more vegetables he would most likely contract Type II Diabetes. Sam, a 42-year-old African American man now on disability, was diagnosed with Type II Diabetes one year ago. After being diagnosed, he was sent to a nutritionist and a nutrition class for diabetics. There, he was armed with lists of what to eat and what not to eat as well as online resources to help him track his food intake and learn more about healthy eating. It was here that he learned what kinds of foods to buy and how to cook those foods. As he says to me, "the healthiest things that I found and what they told me in the class that diabetics could eat is mostly organic stuff...[I learned to eat] chicken, fish – baked or grilled not

fried. Fresh vegetables – not canned. And potato or rice. Brown rice, you know – no white rice.”

Regardless of how they came to learn these aspirations with regards to food and eating, each of them voice an understanding of the power of food to either create a pathway towards wellbeing or a pathway towards illness. Built on this foundation of distrust, indignation, impending threat of illness, or simply a sense of what was good and bad, these respondents set out to organize their daily shopping and eating practices to align with these aspirations whatever it took.

“GOOD AND CHEAP”

One of the ways that these respondents did this was by constructing symbolic boundaries to grocery stores in their neighborhood in an attempt to demarcate where good food existed and did not exist in physical space. In this section, I discuss how these respondents understand and place themselves within the local food built environment of the Oasis. As I argued in chapter 3, grocery stores act as symbolic places where people’s identities are affirmed or called into question. Similarly to those who ate with ease, these respondents perceive a great deal of stratification in their local built food environment around both the quality and price of food. Most respondents attempt to position themselves in the middle of this stratified local food environment, rejecting places like Whole Foods as elitist and places like Lucky’s as too low in quality. These respondents also draw symbolic boundaries fortified through the emotions of pleasure and disgust between their food store choices and other food stores in the neighborhood that they associate with low-quality foods. However, unlike those who eat with ease, these respondents did not always have the money to allow them to “opt-out” of the spaces that they associate with low-quality food and poor choices. They therefore find shopping for groceries to more often resemble work than pleasure, as they are forced to put their knowledge and self-discipline to use in navigating hidden ingredients or mounting cravings.

Because these respondents need to be thrifty when shopping for food, they look to buy good food cheaply, or “good and cheap” as one respondent told me. Some respondents articulate almost identical senses of elation while shopping for groceries as those who ate with ease, as they believe that certain stores care about them and their health while others do not. Nicole, a 24-year-old white administrative assistant spoke of the customers at Trader Joe’s with these feelings.

At Trader Joe’s, I feel like my choices will be safer. It’s more welcoming there; the employees are super happy most of the time. They are really nice. It seems like a happier environment overall... You tend to see a lot healthier looking people. Or I tend to. They are not slumped over. There’s just a more vibrant skin tone. Their skin looks better in terms of color for skin. Thinner in general, more muscle tone, looking like they have a little more energy. Happier, more content being there.

Other respondents attach meaning to shopping at grocery stores that they associated with thrift and working class people. For them, shopping is a proud symbol of either being a

working-class person of color or identifying with working-class people of color as well as not buying into elitist practices. Samantha, a 49-year-old Chinese-American graphic designer, loves to shop for her groceries at Lucky Supermarket for these reasons. She tells me that she goes there:

...because it's close to my home and because there are a lot of Chinese who shop there and a lot of people of color. So you get a lot of Chinese and African American and Latino and I love that. If it were all white, I think I would feel uncomfortable. I shop there because it is working class but there's a diversity and there's a lot of people of color who shop there and they don't look really rich.

Marta, a 30-year-old Latina PhD student, expresses similar sentiments. She loves going to Grocery Outlet for her weekly food shopping. She explains her love as follows:

It is the place where I feel most comfortable. It is just much more homey, because I love the thrill of the chase of a good deal and you never know what you are going to get there which is good. It is much more laid back and I see my students there. And it's important for my students to see me there shopping for groceries at places like Grocery Outlet. It's more accessible. And my housemates totally make fun of us but look we are getting the same groceries you're getting, it's all organic, non-GMO, you're getting at Whole Foods, at half the price. So we do a lot of our grocery shopping there.

Samantha and Marta provide evidence that pleasure and excitement is not reserved for those who shop at the more expensive stores such as Whole Foods in the neighborhood. Rather, respondents also find pleasure and excitement shopping for food at the big box supermarket and discount grocery stores, shaping their moral identities as those who proudly shop with working class people.

But on the other side of the spectrum, these respondents also reveal strong emotions of distrust and disgust for stores that they see as selling what Nicole describes as “crap” food. During our interview, Nicole portrays her experience going into Lucky Supermarket as “scary” and mentions feeling “guarded” and angry about the low-quality choices she perceives to be sold there. “When I go to Lucky Supermarket,” she says, “I’m like, ‘Be on guard! Make sure you have all the information, make sure you’re ready to deduce what’s in this product.’ Whereas at Trader Joe’s, I feel like my choices will be safer.” The comparative emotional and visceral experiences of shopping at one store versus another provide the foundation for a rigid boundary between what Nicole marks as good versus bad stores. The tone that she uses to discuss her experience at the supermarket is one of disgust. She shares,

It's a little scary going in those things. I just see a lot of crap in there, a lot of bad choices, a lot of things that are highly filled with chemicals. Yeah, there are a lot of bad choices and it concerns me knowing that a lot of people choose to buy these things. So those would be bad choices.

Furthermore, these respondents assume that markets catering to low-income clientele did not care about their clients health and therefore sold low-quality, expired, or mislabeled foods. John spoke of a similar assessment that the quality of the organic food at Grocery Outlet was not truly organic. He shares,

I was going to Grocery Outlet a lot but I don't really feel that great about that anymore. Just because they know it's all broke people that go there and I feel like, if they just give them anything, it will still get bought and I really don't trust what's there. And they made this organic section that still feels like it's so cheap that it's not really going to be organic. It could be a lie and not washed that heavily.

Annie also links class with quality and care:

It's kind of like being in the ghetto—the food ghetto, cause if you look at what's on the shelf and what they're selling, well maybe there maybe a few things you might get that might be worth it, you know? But they'd be few because --It's almost like going to the food bank. It's depressing. It's depressing and I pretty much stay out of there.

Believing that big box supermarkets and discount grocery stores did not care about their health or wellbeing, these shoppers fear that they are in danger of being contaminated by dirty foods or hidden ingredients. Regardless of the *actual* material difference in the quality of food stocked in one store versus another, respondents assess the quality as poor compared to the other stores in the area, the patrons who they saw there, and the prices for the food. As John says, “they made this organic section that still *feels* like it's so cheap that it's not really going to be organic.”

Also, these respondents assess that the other customers in these supermarkets and discount stores are making poor choices and do not care about their health or the health of their family. Cheryl articulates:

When I go into the supermarket, I see mothers with their carts, and they're filling it up with all this not good food, and it breaks my heart. It does because I realize they're going to go home and feed that to their kids, and they're overweight. And you don't want that for somebody, you don't want that for this generation coming up. What are we doing? So it makes me feel really sad to see that going on. And you're making addicts of them by taking them to these places.

Nicole describes supermarket shoppers as “looking depressed, overweight. Just looking unhappy. Darkness in the eyes. No vibrancy to the eyes. And [bad] posture.” This makes her want to educate those people in the supermarket, especially those whom she assumes to be parents. She reproaches,

I want to educate them or ask them if they've read the ingredients or if they've even thought about reading the ingredients, but obviously, you can't do that to people. But I have a concern, I have a deep concern for people and the choices they're making, especially young parents, who don't have any education on these things.

These respondents never directly stating that they hold disgust for the poor or poor people of color. However, time and again, these respondents refer to indicators of poverty such as the quality of cars in the parking lot, the quality of food in people's carts, and the quality of the clothes they see people wearing when describing grocery stores that they detest and as illustrations of why they desire to distance themselves from these stores in the neighborhood.

In sum, these respondents position themselves in the middle of this stratified field of food procurement. They shop at discount grocery stores emphasizing their working class identities; they reject stores like Whole Foods for being too expensive and the people who shopped there as being too trusting; and they reject stores like Lucky for offering "crap" products full of hidden ingredients and not caring about the health of their clientele. This position however, is tenuous. Despite their strong feelings about what kinds of foods to eat and where those foods are and are not sold, their lack of material resources made it so they are more often surrounded by choices that they consider bad choices and have to shop at stores they do not like. They therefore have to deploy strategies in order to align their aspirations with their practices.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Because they did not have the material resources to opt-out of contaminated food and spaces that they perceived to stock low-quality items, they have to manage their relationship with food and eating from day to day. This management regime took several forms. They manage their consumption practices in the grocery store, spending time reviewing ingredients, looking for the best quality foods at the best price, and enacting strategies to get through the grocery store without giving into temptation. They manage how they frame their choices so that they can eat foods that they consider to be low quality and shop in places that they associate with bad quality food. They also manage their internal self through self-discipline, chastisement, and using knowledge to subjugate their desires. In what follows, I detail these management strategies suggest that we read them also as a game of approximation that came with a promise – however hard to achieve of - emotional and symbolic rewards.

MANAGING IN THE GROCERY STORE

In order to deal with their struggles, these respondents enact management strategies around buying food at the grocery store. Victor's strategies include finding pride in looking for deals and cheapest options and creating lists before he goes to the grocery store. He says:

You can go to Safeway on a Friday and catch almost everything in the store on sale. It's learning how to shop. As you learn to eat, you learn to shop. It's a process to learn what to get. I mean as far as how much you're spending, what you're getting. Take for instance, you go on the store and you find a 7-oz steak, It might be marked up for 8 bucks. If you look up on the bottom of all the rest of the steaks, you might find the same steak in there, priced at 5 bucks, so it's all about knowing what you're doing. I look at everything when I shop, not just prices. I look at prices all the time, you know, but I look at calories, the carbohydrates, the sugar, the salt, everything.

Carefully choosing what to buy in stores full of deceptive choices is a typical management strategy for these respondents. While those who eat with ease are able to hand the burden of sifting through good and bad food items to their grocery stores of choice, these respondents take on the challenge themselves. They set aside extra time to shop for groceries so that they can read through labels and carefully think through whether the items they want to buy are good for them. In this way, they put the knowledge that they gained from friends, documentaries, and doctors to use in finding healthy, clean foods at a price that they can afford. Many respondents see their ability to manage their food shopping trips with care as a skill that they worked hard to hone. This makes them feel pride.

Diana and her mother typically shop for food together and tend to shop for sales. Typically, they find the best deals at Safeway and in Chinatown. She says “we go wherever is good and cheap.” She cannot afford to shop at Whole Foods and is critical of people who do because she says that they have the luxury of being able to trust what the stores tell them is in their food. She says:

People with higher-paying jobs have more leisure time and so might want to spend less time at the store and more time doing other things. These people are very trusting of what the store tells them. However, working-class people like me spend more time at stores and do more research, not completely trusting everything they are presented with.

However, despite her critique of Whole Foods, she admires how clearly they label their products and uses this clear labeling as a guide when she shops at other places. She refuses to purchase food items that have too many unpronounceable ingredients or labels that do not spell out what exactly was in her food. She also learned from Whole Foods and the farmer’s market that it is better to purchase foods that do not all look the same. Homogeneity is a potential sign that foods had been grown using genetically modified seeds. She therefore looks out for heterogeneous products while she shops.

In other words, these respondents feel pride around being able to carefully, and intelligently purchase clean and healthy foods while surrounded by choices that they perceive to be of low quality or dangerous to their health and wellbeing. However, this carefully monitoring and managing is not always easy. Quite the opposite, it is often a struggle. For Victor, “learning how to eat” means learning how to practice strict self-discipline, and the first key to self-discipline is figuring out a way to get through the

grocery store without giving into temptation. For Victor, this means creating set intentions before entering into the grocery store. Otherwise, Victor finds himself lost in aisles of temptation that are extremely hard to resist. He shares,

Half the time when I'm in [the grocery store], it's like what am I doing? I make a list before I leave the house, and I try now to go in and get everything off of the list and immediately leave. But if I leave that list at home, it's a terrible thing because I'm lost, I don't get nothing that I'm supposed to get out of the store, there's always something [I buy] that's not good for me, not healthy for me – pretty much totally bad for me.

Cheryl and her girlfriend speak of this same feeling of the grocery store being something of a battlefield. “I mean you go into the grocery store, you’re just bombarded by all this crap food, you know. It’s just like right up close, and all you can do is get by and no, I’m not having that pecan pie, I’m not having that cake.” She accomplishes this by writing down exactly what she was going to buy and at the top of her shopping list writing the phrase “No Impulse Buying Allowed!” This sense that poor choices are always right there amplify their pride when they are able to get through the grocery store without giving into temptation. In other words, they are also engaged in a game in which they seek out emotional and symbolic rewards. While those who eat with ease are rewarded for distancing themselves from the food procurement practices of necessity, spending more money for items they frame as better, those who experience struggle are rewarded for finding ways to eat healthy, uncontaminated food while being surrounded by choices that potentially lead to illness. They are rewarded for using knowledge and self-discipline to eat in alignment with the upper-middle class logic of accomplishment around what food items they should be consuming and how they should feel as they eat.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

These respondents also manage their expectations. Figuring out how to find pride in the set of constrained choices that they have sometimes required shifting the way that they frame the choices that they make. These shifts in framing allow them to affirm themselves as eating well when forced to eat foods that they consider to be low quality. In this section, I discuss how several of these respondents cope with this, making meaning within their set of constrained choices in order to neutralize their shame and anger about not being able to eat better food.

Sheila is a 40-year-old African American woman who is currently on disability. She is married to Jack, a Caucasian line cook who is also in his 40s. At the time of our interviews, the two of them were on a mission to improve their health, and, as they learn more about how to do this, they are told that the foods at higher end stores such as Whole Foods and Trader Joe’s are of better quality than the foods at discount markets where they usually shopped. Sheila confides, “you hear about Trader Joe’s and Whole Foods and places like that. That they have the top-grade organic fruits and vegetables, and I wanted to go and try it out.” After starting a new job, Jack suggests that the two of them celebrate by shopping at Trader Joe’s for the first time. “We decided we’re gonna get the real food,” Jack told me. “And I did that. I knew I was getting fresh ingredients. I was

getting things we hadn't had in ages. I got fresh fish from the grocery." Shopping at Trader Joe's was both a celebration of his new job and a symbolic act of affirming his role as a caregiver – a role he felt he hadn't been able to fulfill after being laid off from his last job.

I felt shame when I had to buy just fill-in food. When I was buying a lot of noodles and pasta. I knew it wasn't doing much for us and I knew it was my fault because I wasn't making the money I needed to have us eat better. Because, you know, my girl always kept up the rent and the gas bill and things like that. It was starting to get one sided, and I was barely keeping us fed and that's not good. So yeah, back then I was sort of ashamed.

Unfortunately, they left Trader Joe's with groceries for one week that cost what they were used to paying in a month. Sheila recounts the experience of leaving the store after purchasing this food. "I felt disadvantaged, discouraged. I felt just blah. Because I thought that the amount of money I spent there, I could have gotten a lot more, and what am I gonna do for the next couple weeks now? Because in a couple weeks, these organic things are gonna be gone." Jack echoes these feelings:

I was disgusted when I had to spend so much to get organic food. It tasted good, it was wonderful. But still, in the back of my mind, it was just like, damn, we spent that much money...I blew the whole budget trying to do it like that. We couldn't even pay attention we were so broke.

Jack and Sheila simultaneously feel the pleasure of eating "real food," the stress of having spent too much money, and both anger and shame that they couldn't afford to shop for "real" food again. Therefore, they return to shopping for food at Grocery Outlet where the prices are cheaper but the food is, as Jack says, "a little iffy." He continues, "You can tell that it's not exactly fresh. I've seen enough food over the years. I can look at the stuff. Most of their stuff is frozen."

How do Jack and Sheila make peace with the set of constrained food choices available to them given that they perceive their choices to be constrained and inferior? They engage in emotion work, changing the meanings of the situation in an attempt to generate a different set of emotions. Through "smart" and "careful" shopping practices, Jack and Sheila decenter the hi-quality versus low-quality binary that many respondents used to make meaning of their local food environment and instead center comfort versus scarcity. For example, after their purchase of "real" food at Trader Joes and the subsequent stress that this caused them, Jack tells me "We could have gone to Grocery Outlet and done all right and picked up a couple of movies. We could have watched some videos. Some of the quality [at Grocery Outlet's] not all the great but the prices are wonderful!"

To Jack comfort is being able to eat well and have funds left over to treat themselves without the stress of running out of money. To do this, they have to shop carefully and creatively, feeling proud that they can eat healthy on a budget. For example, Jack describes how he shops in the grocery store with pride in his voice:

At least over at [Grocery Outlet], you could buy lettuce cheap. You could make salads, because salads have always been a big thing. Five days a week you could do salads and just throw meat on it. Even there, it's a lot less expensive than Safeway or Lucky. Even when things are out of season, their prices are a lot less.

In this quotation, Jack communicates that he and Sheila still make healthy choices among constrained options, that he is knowledgeable about what a good choice is, and that he can smartly navigate making good choices even if that means eating things out of season. Sheila also talks about being excited to get fresh vegetables for a cheap price at Grocery Outlet and her careful selection of food.

I go to Grocery Outlet and push my cart around and get what I need to get. I'm not anxious to get anything. I'm happy to see when they got what I want. They got a lot of fresh vegetables there, I'm excited about that. I can go to Grocery Outlet and get two bags and at Trader Joe's just half a bag. I gotta get more for my money. I gotta eat for the whole month, so when I shop, I gotta shop very carefully.

Shaun, a 50-year-old African-American former bank teller now on disability talks about similar emotion work that he uses to turn shame into pride. During our third meeting, I meet Shaun at the Saturday farmer's market in the neighborhood. Sitting at a small table by the prepared food vendors, I ask Shaun about where he shops for food. He gestures to the vendor booths in front of us and says, "*this* is good food." But Shaun can only afford to spend \$30 a week on food, making it impossible to shop at the farmer's market. Instead, Shaun mostly shops for pre-packaged foods at the Dollar Tree. Without prompting him, Shaun explains the meaning that he ascribes to shopping there.

I had to get off of social media because they talk about how everything is contaminated and all this food will make you sick. But then I realized that the food at the Dollar Store is really just the overflow from Lucky and Trader Joe's. You see, the Dollar Store gets the food that Lucky and Trader Joes don't want anymore.

The fact that he offers this up during our interview suggests that Shaun feels negative emotions around shopping at the Dollar Store. He manages these emotions by reinterpreting the meanings of his constrained food choices so that he can imagine this food as coming from sources he trusts and values. This allows Shaun to assuage some of the shame that he feels around buying food from this discount store— a store that is situated far away from the quality of foods he wishes to buy and the quality of food spaces that he wishes to patronize.

Understanding that they are in a disadvantaged position within a highly stratified food environment, Sheila, Jack and Shaun all find strategies to cope with eating foods that they do not consider to be good at stores that they don't particularly like. This involves reinterpreting the meanings of their actions so that they can feel positively about themselves as they shop for food. Without these coping strategies, shopping for food

makes them feel shame and anger, as they are reminded that they are poor and that poverty means they cannot eat the food they consider to be “real” or “good.”

MANAGING THE SELF

Despite these various strategies used to resolve the gap between their aspirations and lived day-to-day food consumption practices, respondents’ emotions around their daily choices reveal that distress is never fully resolved. Instead, those who struggled always feel that they are on the verge of losing control either by eating something contaminated or making a poor choice. This leads to shame and guilt as respondents internalize these as “weaker moments of the self,” as one respondent names it, symbolizing that they have failed to live up to this local logic of accomplishment around what they knew was right and wrong to eat. While those who eat with ease accumulated wellbeing in the process of eating from day to day, these respondents accumulate distress or disappointment that they have to manage.

We return here to Lilly. As I outline in the beginning of this chapter, the day before Lilly and I met for the first time, she had eaten three meals and three snacks. She started her day with a meal replacement shake. Several hours later, she ate a peanut butter cookie and drank a cup of green tea. For lunch she had lentil soup, two vegetarian sandwiches with cheese, and a juice box. Dinner consisted of a burrito that was left over at her job. Beyond the cookie, Lilly ate four apples in between her meals. Here is how she felt as she was eating these food items:

This morning I had a green tea and a peanut butter cookie. I shouldn’t have done that...I felt nasty when I ate that cookie and I know why. I feel always lethargic after I eat the cookie. Cause the fat in it. Yeah...taking the blood away from the brain to break that down. So I know why, I just need to stop doing it. That’s why I had the green tea on top of it. To burn the fat. Got to think smart! When I was eating the sandwiches, of course I didn’t feel good, too many carbs in it, now I am gonna pay for it. I’ll go to the gym and run it off. Drink hecka water and run it off. But, it doesn’t really work like that you know. You are still messing up your body and that is still going to go into your cells.

Here, Lilly voices brilliantly the inner war that she feels as she navigates choosing and eating food from day-to-day. She knows what to eat, what not to eat, and what eating the wrong foods do to her body. However, she is struggling. She feels that she has made bad choices and imagines that what she has eaten is disrupting the health of her body on a cellular level. It is important to note that most of this food came from work. As it was the end of the month, Lilly is working to make ends meet. Still, despite the fact that her choices are in large part the result of her lack of material resources to eat otherwise, Lilly nevertheless blames herself: “I know why, I just have to stop doing it.” This phrase – “I just have to stop doing it” – was one that I heard frequently from this group of respondents. Given this gap between her practices and her aspirations, she must create strategies in order to counteract her bad choices and resolve her distress. These include drinking green tea and lots of water and going to gym to exercise. In order to achieve

this, she must subjugate the desires of her body to her knowledge about food with the hope that knowledge will help her rearrange her desires. If she fails, which she often perceives that she does, what is at risk is her future health and wellbeing.

Nicole powerfully illustrates this as well. Sometimes, when Nicole has gotten off of work late and is too tired to cook, she purchases tacos from the taco truck by her house. When she eats there, she feels a deep kind of distress. She says: “There are times when I’ll definitely eat non-sustainable meats or not question it. I have a sense that it isn’t and I still will buy and eat the food.” When she eats at the taco truck, Nicole feels distress for having made the wrong choice. She reflects on this experience,

To live a lifestyle of making health conscious... it takes a lot of willpower. Yeah, you gotta be self-controlled. In those moments, you’re throwing in the towel and saying, forget it. If I feel stressed or if I’m feeling tired, it’s a mindless act but it’s not because food choices for me at this point are never a mindless acts. I know what I’m doing, but I’m still doing it.

Therefore, like Lilly, when she is too tired to manage her food choices, she blames herself as having failed at properly disciplining herself. As she eats the taco from the taco truck, Nicole chastises herself for having poor time-management skills and a low-paying job. She says:

It’s not my proudest moment. Like I definitely feel bad about the choice but then it’s weighed out with well it’s either that or you’re gonna faint. You should’ve planned better; you should’ve prepared your food better, earlier. I wish I had a couple more dollars to go make a better decision.

Shaun provides yet another striking example of this. He typically spends \$10-20 a week on food. He, more than most of my respondents, took immense pride in being able to talk intelligently about healthy foods, the problems with genetic modification of food, and the importance of eating organic vegetables from a garden. However, on such a limited budget, Mike not only cannot afford to eat in alignment with this moral philosophy, he doesn’t eat very much at all. Through the interview, it became clear that many days Mike struggles to eat three meals a day. He deals with this distress by tricking himself into feeling full. He offers with pride, “I’m learning about transcendental meditation. I passed the Chinese restaurant on the way here. You think you want that fried rice but you don’t need to eat that fried rice. You can just imagine that you are eating the rice and you’ve eaten it.”

Respondents such as Lilly, Nicole, and Shaun highlight that, as respondents work to approximate their aspirations, their limited resources almost guarantee that they would make choices they regard as poor choices. However, these choices are poor only vis-à-vis the local logic of accomplishment that they internalized as correct. As the above examples illustrate, measuring themselves against this upper-middle class local logic of accomplishment creates a blowback effect that makes itself known to these respondents through anxieties around little and big things. For Lilly it is a peanut butter cookie and a sandwich. Despite her quite complex conceptual framework of how oppression works within the food system, she nevertheless blames herself when she fails to accomplish her

goals. For Nicole, it is her late night trip to the taco truck. For others it happens during a trip to the grocery store when they make a decision to purchase a bag of Doritos or a package of hostess cupcakes. Using words such as “willpower,” “self-control” and “self-discipline,” these respondents outlined for me how they often indulged in foods that they felt they should not be eating, causing them to feel shame, disgust, and guilt that had to be managed and corrected.

Taken together, these types of management strategies and emotion work demonstrate that for these respondents food is experienced as a field of struggle. However, they fully believe in their ability to discipline and control themselves into alignment with this local aspirational framework. They monitor, manage, and restrict themselves, and create a different system of meanings to justify their available strategies of action. However, these strategies never fully resolve their distress that arises from trying to procure and consume food within advanced capitalism. When these tactics slip, which they often did, respondents blame themselves for their inability to make the “right” set of choices. This leads to shame and guilt as respondents internalize these as “weaker moments of the self.” This internalization of the rules of the game as indicators of some intrinsic quality of the self along with their strategies to reap emotional rewards as they procured food from day to day, mystified the class relations that

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have outlined the daily shopping and eating practices of respondents who experienced their relationship with food through struggle. I argue that, on the one hand, these respondents had the discourse down. They revealed educated and thoughtful ideas about what was good versus bad to eat and excitedly shared this knowledge as proof that they were striving towards these overlapping aspirations. In other words, they had pinpointed where wellbeing was located. However, the data suggests that this group of respondents had a much harder time actualizing their practices in alignment with these aspirations as they ate from day to day. In part, this was because they lacked the material resources to do so. This translated into respondents needing to buy more canned and pre-packaged foods than they desired, and to shop at grocery stores that they felt stocked inferior quality products. Because of the local neighborhood setting in which they lived, they witnessed others eating well with ease and were thus reminded that they lacked the material resources to accomplish their aspirations. However, these respondents also felt that they didn’t always have the correct desires to easily eat the “correct” way, centering clean and healthy food choices. Despite their quite sophisticated analyses of systems of oppression operating within the food system, these respondents – like Lilly – tended to blame themselves for not eating in alignment with the upper-middle class aspirations towards which they were striving. Using words such as “willpower,” “self-control” and “self-discipline,” these respondents outlined for me how they often indulging in foods that they felt they should not be eating, causing them to feel shame, disgust, and guilt. This naturalized what Lilly points to in the beginning of this chapter – that eating healthy, “clean” food should be easy despite their own experience of struggling to do so.

CHAPTER FIVE

Distress

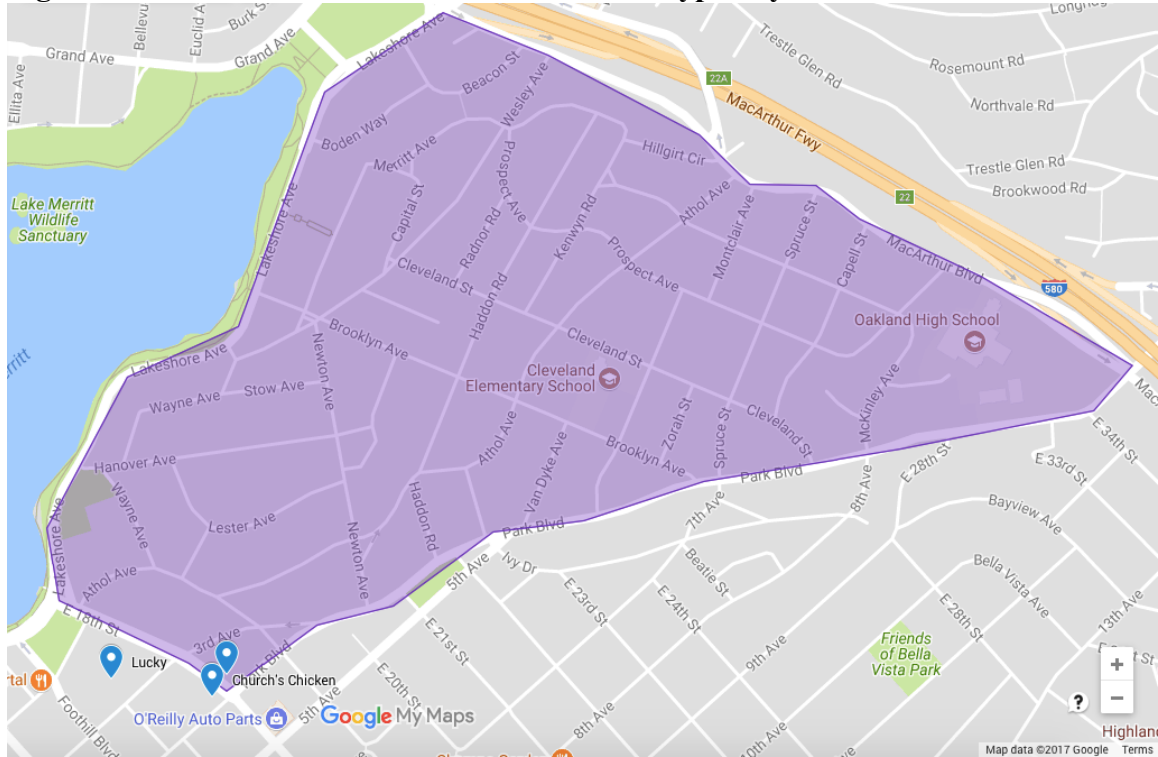
Half of the time, Donald is starving. On a street of mostly apartment buildings about a five-minute walk from Rachel, Donald lives in a small, subsidized apartment complex with the mother of his 2-year-old child. The day before our interview, Donald ate two meals and two snacks. For breakfast, he ate a bagel. Sometime between lunch and dinner, he went to the fast food restaurants Church's Chicken on the southeast corner of the neighborhood and bought the three pieces of chicken and three biscuit special. Throughout the day, he snacked on Reese's Pieces candy, chips, and an Odwalla protein bar. Some days, Donald eats roughly like this. During our interview, I asked him what he typically eats from day to day. He responded: "McDonald, chips, pizza, Church's Chicken. I'll get biscuits there. Candy. Burgers. Chicken sandwich. Pizza. I might get a good four course meal in there once a week with some vegetables or some fruit sometimes." On other days, Donald does not eat at all because he lacks the money to do so. CalFresh—the food entitlements program in California – comprises Donald's main source of income. This means that many months he finds himself selling his food stamps for cash in order to pay for other basic necessities such as rent and bus fare. If he is "smart" about it as he says, he can exchange the \$180 CalFresh card for \$130 cash. In order to eat, then, he needs to find other sources of income. This additional money typically comes from his family and social networks or creative money making hustles such as asking for money on the BART train. Altogether in a typical week, Donald scrapes together about \$50 for food. In a good week, he goes to Lucky Supermarket and buys fresh fruits, vegetables, and frozen pizzas. But these occasions are rare. Most days he eats from McDonalds or Church's Chicken. Some days he doesn't have enough money for McDonalds, and on those days, Donald doesn't eat at all.

Donald has a dream of upward mobility. He grew up mostly homeless with his father in and around the housing projects of San Francisco and Oakland. Until about the age of 13, his life involved moving from home to home, living on other people's couches. Now he is in college with dreams of playing professional basketball overseas, a profession that he believes is his way out of the cycle of poverty. He has aspirations of eating similarly to Rachel. He dreams of making his own fresh juice every day and eating balanced meals full of fruits and vegetables. He would also love to shop at Whole Foods. While talking about the grocery stores in the neighborhood, he brings up Whole Foods with excitement. "I feel like...I should shop *here!* (*laughing*) It seems like everything in there is just so healthy." However, along with not being able to afford the high cost of food at Whole Foods, Donald also does not feel that he belongs there. The people at Lucky felt like his people, and he knows that he can go there and not be judged. Therefore, most days, his consumption pathway through the neighborhood is in a small circle on the south side as he travels between Church's Chicken, the corner store on 18th Avenue, and Lucky Supermarket (see Figure 16).

Despite the fact that Donald eats mostly fast food, he knows that this food isn't healthy for him. After listing the typical foods that he eats, he lowers his head, frowns and admits in a resigned tone, "I know that isn't good." He learned that this food wasn't good from several sources: his father, the nutritionist who came to speak to his basketball team, and doing research on his own. But, perhaps most importantly, he knew it is not

good because of the way it looks, the way it tastes, and the way it makes him feel. He shares, “Cause I mean regardless of what people told me about it and doing research I can just look at it and when I see hella grease on my food and inside the food, you know, I think, this can’t be good for my arteries and this ain’t really the best thing. I can just tell.”

Figure 16: Food Establishments Where Donald Typically Procures Food



Source: Google Maps (2017), modifications by author.

Also like Rachel, Donald frames accomplishing these health aspirations as presumably easy saying, “I know what I have to do, I just have to do it.” But eating this way is not easy at all. Quite the opposite, Donald experiences his relationship with food through *distress* – the misalignment between aspirations, the resources to meet these aspirations, and daily food consumption practices with a fatalistic sense that alignment is not plausible. At the intersection of racial and economic marginalization, Donald lacks the resources to approximate his aspirations from day-to-day. We may not be surprised that Donald’s lack of material resources results in him consuming less fresh foods and more fast foods. What is striking is that Donald makes sense of his practice through a belief that he lacks two important intrinsic characteristics that make his relationship with food one of distress – correct taste and correct discipline. Without those, Donald is fatalistic about his ability to change his practices despite his strong desire to do so. Taking on the local logic of accomplishment that eating healthy should be easy compounds his sense of failure. The result is devastating anxiety, as Donald believes he is predestined for a future marked by disease.

In this chapter I discuss the experiences of a group of poor, mostly black respondents in the Oasis who experienced their relationship with food through distress. First, I discuss the dreams that these respondents have of upward mobility. Each of them grew up food insecure in public housing where they witnessed and experienced profound hardships. Now, they lived in the Oasis – a sign of upward mobility within itself – and they are striving to permanently break through the cycle of poverty that affects their loved ones. In this first section, I discuss their dreams of upward mobility. I argue that living in the Oasis allows them to regularly come into contact with different food consumption practices than they witnessed growing up. These regular encounters along with conversations with friends, doctors, and television shows taught them that their tastes are wrong and that breaking through the cycle of poverty requires correcting their tastes.

Second, I provide a discussion of what this group of respondents typically eats and where they purchase food. I show that, despite their aspirations, there is a gap between their food consumption practices and their ideas of what they should be eating. I illustrate that they make sense of this in two main ways, through lack of material resources and due to incorrect tastes.

Third, I discuss how these respondents make sense of and navigated the local food built environment. I find that respondents like Donald feel unwelcome at more elite grocery stores like Whole Foods both because they cannot afford the food sold there and because they do not see very many low-income black people shopping there. At the same time, they still locate “good” food at these places and “bad” food at the places where they can afford to shop. They therefore devise strategies to visit these places on occasion as a way to verify their identities as upwardly aspiring and distant from poverty.

Fourth, I illustrate three distinct experiences of distress that occur because of this gap between aspirations and practices. The first experience of distress emerges when respondents, like Donald, bought into the structure of accomplishment articulated by Rachel and Lilly but experience themselves as marginalized from it because of their racial and economic position. The second experience of distress occurs when respondents have competing logics of accomplishment. In these cases, respondents feel accomplished when they compare themselves to those less fortunate but feel like failures when they compare themselves to those respondents like Rachel who eat with ease. The third experience of distress occurs when respondents hook their identities and visions of their futures firmly to the local logic of accomplishment in the Oasis but lack the material resources to approximate these aspirations in any real way. In other words, they incorporate themselves into the local logic of accomplishment through discourse but are marginalized from actualizing it through practice.

Finally, I illustrate how these respondents use emotion work to manage this gap between their daily food consumption practices, identity, and aspirations. While often unsuccessful at approximating their aspirations through their consumption practices, they did have their emotions at their disposal as a resource to work with.

DREAMS OF UPWARD MOBILITY

Those respondents who experienced distress with regards to food and eating each grew up in predominantly black and Hispanic housing projects around the Bay Area. Now, they make a combined household income of less than \$20,000 a year and all receive

public assistance of some kind. All identify as African-American, and all but one respondent was struggling to find work.

These respondents all had dreams of upward mobility. As Donald and I waited at Merritt Bakery to be seated for our interview, I ask him if he knows of anyone else who might be interested in being interviewed. He replies, “Yeah I do. I know a lot of people like us who are trying to do better for themselves.” Signaling to our shared black racial identity, Donald reveals that he and his presumably non-white friends are thinking about how to live healthier lives, breaking free from the cycle of poverty in which they were “forced,” as Donald phrases it. Respondents who experience distress in their relationship with food have two things in common: they were all raised food insecure in Oakland public housing and they are all striving for upward mobility through work and school. Donald, for example, grew up mostly homeless with his father in and around the housing projects of San Francisco and Oakland. Until about the age of 13, his life involved moving from home to home, mostly living on other people’s couches. Even though his father didn’t have money to pay the rent, he always made sure that Donald had toys and nice clothes. “I would say overall my childhood was a happy one. Even though our living situation was unstable, I always had a roof over my head. Even if he didn’t have money for rent. He made sure that I had nice things.”

In this state of extreme poverty, one of the ways that Donald’s father treated him was by buying him McDonalds. Fast food wasn’t cheap for Donald’s father, but it was the food that Donald asked for. In this way, food was like the nice toys his father would buy him even if it meant that he couldn’t pay his rent on time. But not everyone’s parents could provide food for them, even fast food. Mike is a 60-year-old, African-American retired banker now on disability. He reflected on being food insecure as a child and needing to figure out food on his own: “When you grow up in the hood on Little Debbie cakes, that’s what you have. I used to have to work at McDonalds just to eat. So I’m used to not having food.” Shaun, a 32-year-old African American student and father was also on his own to make ends meet growing up. He tried to eat at friend’s houses whenever possible. His parents went to the local food banks for food where they received “mostly canned goods, every now and then bread, butter, produce, veggies, sometimes something good, cereal, rice, pinto beans, spam, plenty of pork and beans.” However, this food was never enough to last the whole month, and when food ran out, Shaun was responsible for finding more.

Donald, Mike, and Shaun’s experiences growing up lit a fire under them to try and break through the cycle of poverty in which they saw their parents and family members falling victim. Together, these experiences gave Donald the goal of being healthy, eating well, and being the first in his family to graduate from college. He shares these aspirations with me during our interview: “Now I’m going to college, I’m trying to break that cycle so I don’t have to be on food stamps myself.” Along with getting a college degree, Donald has dreams of becoming a professional basketball player and playing in the NBA overseas. Therefore, along with going to school at the local community college, he trains hard with his college basketball team every day in pursuit of this aspiration.

However, these dreams of upward mobility prove difficult to actualize. Despite his criticism of his father for receiving food stamps and not being able to provide steady housing, Donald himself is mostly living on his ex-girlfriends couch and using food

stamps as his major source of income. Mike lost his job working as a bank teller during the economic crisis in 2007 and has not been able to find a job since. He is now on disability and going to school at the local community college part time to earn his Associate's Degree. Shaun spent several years incarcerated during his 20s and now has a hard time finding work. He fixes up cars for people in his old neighborhood for extra cash and hopes to go back to school, although he is having a hard time being approved for financial aid. Jade, a 34-year-old African-American school counselor articulated this struggle as well. She was the first in her family to go to college. After college she took out loans and went to graduate school to earn a Master's Degree in social work. Despite being surrounded by family and community members who were using drugs and alcohol, she stayed sober and was proud of it. But after she graduated with her Master's Degree, she was unable to find a job. Mired in student loans without the income to pay them back, she found herself on public assistance and in public housing. "It's just so sad," she reflected during our interview, "cause I went to college and it *still* didn't help me get out of public housing. So I am just like, 'What did I go to school for?'"

In sum, these respondents grew up in conditions of poverty where they often struggled to get enough to eat. These struggles motivated them to seek out education and housing opportunities to help them to permanently move out of poverty. At the intersection of racial and economic marginalization, they find that their dreams of upward mobility are hard to accomplish. Nonetheless, they identify themselves as striving on a daily basis to break the cycle of poverty and make a better life for themselves. Their food tastes and consumption practices are one way that they grapple and interact with their dreams of upward mobility in their daily lives. In the section that follows, I outline what these respondents aspire to eat, how they came to adopt these aspirations, and how they make sense of their own tastes vis-à-vis this logic of eating and wellbeing.

EATING ASPIRATIONS

They learned from workshops, classes, television shows, documentaries, and doctors that their practices and tastes are wrong, will lead to inevitable illness, and need to be changed. They also learned that how they ate growing up was a product of poverty and racism. The blueprint for changing their habits is eating fresh fruits and vegetables in moderation and cutting down on processed foods, sweet and salty snacks, and sugar-sweetened beverages. These messages are made real for them as they witness others in their immediate local community seeming to consume food in this easy, pleasure filled, "conscious" way. Indeed, living in subsidized housing in the Oasis, respondents such as Donald, Mike, and Jade are surrounded by people like Rachel who are orienting their food consumption practices around the easy intake of "clean" local foods.

Some respondents fully bought into this logic of accomplishment as part of their dreams of upward mobility, desiring to bring their practices into alignment with the easy consumption of fresh, clean, local foods. However, some respondents rejected this logic of accomplishment as an imposition of white middle-class cultural norms, even as they still legitimized that their ways of eating were wrong and these ways of eating were right. In this section, I explain these two orientations towards this local logic of accomplishment that respondents encountered living in the Oasis.

“I JUST GOTTA DO IT”

Respondents such as Donald and Mike saw their ability to achieve their upward aspirations and wellness as linked to changing their wrong tastes. Take Donald, again, as an example. Donald has many ideas about what he should be eating: what it meant to eat well and what it meant to eat right. First, committed to “do it right as an athlete,” he has ideas concerning what the best diet is to support his athletic practice. In fact, a year earlier, a nutritionist came to speak to his team about the best foods to eat. Donald shares with enthusiasm: “She said you should be high on carbs. She said you’re an athlete so you need a lot of pasta and bread, and she was giving us yogurt covered pretzels with vanilla and she was showing us all kinds of juices. What juice was good, what juice wasn’t good.” Donald took these messages very serious. “I kinda *know* what to eat, I just gotta do it. Start juicing.” It is not surprising then, that though Donald typically shops for groceries at Lucky and the corner store in the neighborhood, he would rather shop at Whole Foods. While talking about the grocery stores in the neighborhood, he brings up Whole Foods with excitement. “I feel like...I should shop *here!* (*laughing*) It seems like everything in there is just so healthy.”

After being laid off from his job as a bank teller during the economic crisis of 2008, Mike began volunteering on occasion at an African food stand Uhuru foods at the Saturday Farmer’s Market in the Oasis. Along with a food stand, this organization holds teach-ins around food and nutrition, particularly for people from the African Diaspora. He describes his experience with me as a profound shift:

[The people at the food stand are a] network of people who wants to uplift the African nation here and abroad. The money they make from the breakfast and other things they do help an African child with books or maybe a backpack, their economic situation. They also, you know, tell people about nutrition and value about the food that they eat. What’s good for you, what’s not good for you. They’re there to educate and uplift people about what’s going on. Things I didn’t know about. Eating locally—what does that mean? It means if you eat locally, you save energy. You ain’t got to ship from Chile or some other place. It’s fresher, and you just need to expand your mind.

By framing local, organic eating as a state of expanded consciousness and necessity for racial uplift, this teach-in allowed Mike to see himself reflected in this set of aspirations and the local logic of accomplishment. The educators at the food stand taught him that the food system was built to sell cheap, unhealthy food to the poorest Americans, so many of whom were black. This generated for Mike a sense of indignation, distrust for conventional foods, and a resolve that aligning his practices with these aspirations was no longer an option. He shares with me, “It’s a conscious decision for me. It’s not a choice, it’s a must-do.” From that moment of awakening, Mike went out of his way to educate himself about what was good versus bad to eat and feels intelligent for doing so.

I’m at the forefront of doing the right thing from people who have been taught by others who are intellectually intelligent, telling us what are the

right things to eat. And it makes sense. People at the Park Garden and the Farmer's Market and nowadays people are now [more] intelligent than they ever have been and enlightened. Basically, if it works and it makes sense, why go a different way?

Both Mike and Donald believe that eating the “right” foods is their pathway to achieving wellbeing and accomplishing a lifestyle free of need. In fact, they see eating in line with Rachel's logic of accomplishment as a pathway to liberation. Knowing that their tastes have been shaped by racism and poverty, they feel uplifted thinking about making a different set of choices in what almost appears as an act of breaking through their habitus. Mike sees himself as “enlightened” and “conscious” in his knowledge about what is right versus wrong, and he suggests that making these choices was a no brainer. In this way, he echoes Donald's sentiment that he knows what to eat, he just has to do it. Setting up a logic of accomplishment that mirrors Rachel and Lilly's, respondents like Mike and Donald hold ideas of health and wellbeing that are tied to their food consumption practices, which fortify their identities as upward strivers.

COMPETING LOGICS OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

Whereas respondents like Donald and Mike found theoretical liberation in the logic of accomplishment held most easily by respondents such as Rachel, not all respondents feel this way. Take Jade, for example. Jade shares a similar story of learning about systemic racism and the connections with food. Growing up, Jade had never considered the effects of food on her health until she went to college at San Francisco State University. There, she took Ethnic Studies and Black Studies courses where she learned about structural racism, food deserts, and how “the system is set up to oppress black people and other people of color who are low-income.” These messages made her reconsider her own life. She shared,

Growing up I never thought about it. We would go to McDonalds everyday and we would have hamburgers, fries, milkshakes, and I never thought twice about it. We just ate whatever we wanted to and we didn't exercise either. There wasn't any awareness back then about childhood diabetes and stuff. They didn't talk about it. They do now. Calories in soda, they didn't talk about it. It seemed like it was encouraged to eat bad. But its in West Oakland because it is designed to keep us oppressed. The system is set up, the food system is set up, everything, the criminal justice system is set up, for people in low-income neighborhoods to fail.

However, although Jade has a well articulated understanding of structural inequality in her daily life, especially as it related to food, she struggles to change her daily food consumption practices because she has competing logics of accomplishment. Pre-diabetic, she has been seeing a white, female doctor regularly for some time. However, the eating advice that her doctor gives her makes her feel confused and overwhelmed. She shares: “Sometimes when I am eating I don't know if anything I am eating is right. Cause [my doctor is] like ‘You need to have kale and you need to eat organic foods.’ I

am like ‘What is that?’ Kale, asparagus, Brussels sprouts? What black person eats that? I mean, not from West Oakland. I don’t even know what that stuff looks like.” I asked Jade what kind of person she thinks of when she imagines foods that are organic such as kale. “White. Privileged. Athletic.” She says with fervor. “And you see that as not being you?” I responded. “Yeah,” she said. “Not me.”

Jade associates these moral, food rules with a position of racial and class privilege that does not take Jade’s life experiences or preferences into account. Because of this, she not only struggles to see these changes as belonging to her, she sees these changes as an imposition of white cultural norms and an imperative to shop in places that she does not feel comfortable shopping. She continues, “[My doctor] was telling me to shop at Trader Joe’s, stuff like that. I have been in there one time and they didn’t have what I like to eat. I did like their fruit, they did have some good fruit in there. But I didn’t really know what the stuff was. It wasn’t food that I eat. And I thought that their stuff was little bit pricey. I didn’t see any black people in there either.”

Jade’s orientation towards these ways of eating was informed by a competing logic of accomplishment that structures Jade’s identity. So many of the people that she grew up with had fallen into the cycle of poverty, getting hooked on drugs and alcohol. Jade has consistently rejected these addictions readily available around her. She went to school and completed a Master’s Degree all while being a single mom. So when the doctor told her that she was pre-diabetic and needed to start eating in a completely new way, she was confused and angry. “But I don’t drink or smoke. I have a Master’s Degree,” she told me. In other words, Jade is in disbelief that she seems to still be failing given how hard she has worked to break out of the cycles of poverty to which others around her appeared to be fated. During our interview, she expressed these competing logics while describing the interactions that she has had with her doctor:

I drink sodas everyday. See, I didn’t know. When I was growing up, we used to drink like 3, 4, 5 sodas everyday. The doctor is on me like, ‘You know you are not supposed to drink sodas.’ I’m like, I keep telling the doctor, ‘I don’t smoke and drink. What am I supposed to do when I am depressed? Cause I don’t do those things. Why are you on me about what I am eating? Be thankful that I don’t smoke and drink and I’m from West Oakland.’ She’s like, ‘That’s just as bad as smoking and drinking.’

But Jade doesn’t quite buy this logic. She continues,

I know people who drink alcohol have cirrhosis of the liver and all of that kind of stuff. And you can’t OD off eating too much cake or nothing. I don’t know. I know it’s not healthy. I know you can get some health problems from not eating healthy but I don’t think it is as severe as smoking and drinking. I pride myself on not smoking and drinking. I feel like she tries to knock me down ‘You don’t smoke or drink but you don’t eat healthy. You might as well smoke and drink. By eating unhealthy that is no better.’

Jade’s story illustrates the conflict that arises when two logics of accomplishment clash. Regardless of the fact that Jade doesn’t quite buy her doctors logic of what makes

someone healthy versus unhealthy, Jade internalized the fact that her tastes and daily food consumption practices are wrong, leading her towards inevitable disease, and a signal that she is being negligent. When I ask how she would assess her relationship with her body, she responds, “Not eating right, in that regard, not watching out for my body. But then I don’t smoke and drink so I don’t pollute my body in that way, but I pollute my body in terms of what I eat.”

Donald, Mike, and Jade illustrate that they have come to see their tastes as wrong and in need of correcting. Through social networks, television shows, conversations with others in the neighborhood, and doctors, these respondents came to form opinions about correct and incorrect ways of eating that in many ways lined up with Rachel and Lilly’s eating aspirations. They believe that the right way to eat is eating fresh fruits and vegetables in moderation. They also believe that fast foods, snack foods, and sodas are the wrong foods to eat and that eating these foods will inevitably lead to future disease. Lastly, these respondents learned that their wrong tastes were a result of structural inequalities of race and class that constrained their choices. However, as I will discuss in the section that follows, these respondents could not approximate these ideals through their daily food consumption practices. This was both because they lacked the material resources to do so and because they believed that they lacked the correct tastes. This led to a level of distress that they could not truly resolve.

DAILY ROUTINES

From day-to-day, these respondents bought mostly pre-packaged, pre-made or canned food and ate much more often than the other groups at fast food restaurants such as Church’s Chicken, Wendy’s, McDonalds, and KFC. When these six respondents shopped for food, they went to big supermarkets such as Lucky, Safeway, Grocery Outlet or the Dollar Store. They also received food from food banks. All of them received food stamps or government assistance of some kind. Many of these respondents did not own cars. They walked to get their food or took the bus. This was the only group of respondents who mentioned drinking soda, which they drank most days. During our interview, I ask Donald what he typically ate from day-to-day. He responds: “McDonald, chips, pizza, Church’s Chicken. I’ll get biscuits there. Candy. Burgers. Chicken sandwich. Pizza. I might get a good four course meal in there once a week with some vegetables or some fruit sometimes.” On other days, he does not eat at all because he lacks the money to do so. CalFresh—the food entitlements program in California – comprised Donald’s main source of income. This meant that many months he found himself selling his food stamps for cash in order to pay for other basic necessities such as rent and bus fare. If he was smart about it, he could exchange the \$180 CalFresh card for \$130 cash. In order to eat, then, he needed to find other sources of income. This additional money typically came from his family and social networks or creative money making hustles such as asking for money on the BART train. Altogether in a typical week, Donald scrapes together about \$50 for food. In a good week, he goes to Lucky Supermarket and buys fresh fruits, vegetables, and frozen pizzas. But these occasions are rare. Most days he eats from McDonalds or Church’s Chicken. Some days he doesn’t have enough money for McDonalds, and on those days, Donald doesn’t eat at all.

The day before our interview, Shaun did not eat a full meal. Instead, he ate several snacks. First, around 5pm, he ate popcorn that his friend bought for him at the movie theater. When he got home, he drank white wine, and ate cheese-its, and pepper-jack cheese purchased by his girlfriend. This was a typical day for Shaun. He lives with his girlfriend and their small child. His girlfriend received food stamps, which she uses to buy food for their son. While there is food at home for Shaun to eat, he refuses to eat it because he had not provided it. Instead, he eats only what he can purchase himself, which was usually a snack here and there throughout the day. When he had a bit more money, he tended to eat off of the dollar menu at the fast food restaurants in the neighborhood. He shares, "I like Wendy's, Burger King, any place in particular where they got the dollar menu. Every now and then I go to Nation's where I see the burger freshly fried."

Similarly, the day before we met, Mike had two English muffins, 8 small chicken sausage links, a big glass of water, and a cup of coffee. In a typical week, Mike will spend \$10 on food. When things were on sale at Lucky, he can purchase "pasta or rice, bananas, garlic, tomato sauce, cheese, milk, peas." If he has a bit more money to spare, he lets himself spend \$15 a week. With the extra \$5, he typically purchased a jar of peanut butter and a jar of jam. Those things lasted, unlike milk and orange juice.

Most of these respondents were food insecure, needing to go without food when money got low or make decisions between eating and paying for other necessary things in their lives. Donald talks about this struggle: "So do you skip meals?" I ask him.

D: I do but then that kind of catches back up with me because my body's like, 'you know you skipped like three meals.' So when I eat, I'm like eating a lot. I go to McDonalds, I be cheating myself sometimes. A chicken sandwich, a double cheeseburger, a fry. And that will be it. And then later on in the day I might go to Church's Chicken and get some biscuits.

K: But you say you'll be cheating yourself. How?

D: Because I feel like I won't buy all the food that I needed because I wanted to get the money for tomorrow to get more food. So I'm just sacrificing not eating that much tonight so I can get more tomorrow.

Mike also spoke to the struggle of food insecurity during our second meeting at the weekly farmer's market. "I'm used to not having food," he shares with me and then pauses. At this point, he rests his elbows on the table and cradles his head in his hands by the chin. His body deflates and he stares into space, trying to manage the emotional response that I can feel welling up in him. After about one minute, he turns back to me and says. "But you will see, pointing to the video camera. Some days I don't eat anything at all. Then I might wake up in the middle of the night and remember that I have something in the fridge. So I eat it, and then get sick because its past the expiration date sometimes. I'll have forgotten that I had some milk in the refrigerator."

These excerpts suggest that, while respondents in the previous chapter engage in acts of struggle to pull their practices into alignment with their eating aspirations, respondents in this chapter land far from being able to eat in approximation to their

visions of what is good and right ways to eat. Because they are making sense of their choices vis-à-vis Rachel's logic of accomplishment, they are distraught and distressed as they eat from day-to-day. They believe that they are making bad choices because they have the wrong tastes and the wrong income, that they are responsible for these bad choices, and that the implications of these bad choices is inevitable decent into disease. As they daily engage with food consumption practices, they come up against barriers to actualizing wellness through food. One barrier was the social geography of the neighborhood. In the next section, I discuss what it was like for respondents such as Donald and Jade to eat from day-to-day in the Oasis, how they make sense of the options available around them, and how they locate themselves among these options.

SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY OF SEGREGATION AND LONGING

If groceries stores act as places of pleasure and identity verification for upper-middle class respondents, it is in part because people like Jade, Mike, and Donald are not there. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that these respondents do not feel particularly comfortable or welcome at the more expensive food stores such as Whole Foods and Trader Joe's in the Oasis. They cannot afford the food sold at these stores and associate these spaces with upper-middle class, white ways of being that feel alien and uncomfortable for them. Instead, they shop at Lucky Supermarket or the corner stores in the neighborhood, or take the bus to other low-income neighborhoods to shop at the Dollar Store, Food Maxx, and discount food stores. At the same time, they agree with respondents like Rachel that "good" food is located at the farmer's market, Whole Foods, and grocery stores in wealthier parts of town. As such, they also link up pride and wellbeing with these places and devise strategies to shop there from time to time as a way to verify their identities as upwardly aspiring and distant from poverty. In this section I highlight how these respondents make sense of their local built food environment. I argue that living in this particular neighborhood means that those who experience systemic disadvantage both witnessed eating "good" food with ease and, in the process, bumped up against their own poverty. This amplifies their distress and gives them an incentive to aspire upwards towards the upper-middle class logic of accomplishment with regards to food. And in fact, food consumption practices are a pathway to achieving these aspirations when all else fails.

NOT FOR PEOPLE LIKE ME

Mike shops mainly at the Dollar Store and Lucky for sales. He discusses his experience going into Trader Joe's as an uncomfortable one. On the one hand, it is a bit farther from his house and at the time of our first interview, he didn't have a car. However, these reasons were amplified for him by the fact that he didn't feel comfortable while shopping there. Here, Mike and I have a conversation about his experience shopping at Trader Joe's versus Lucky:

M: I have to condition myself to go to Trader Joe's. Because I'm not used to Trader Joe's. It's alien because from what I see is the people that are in there and not people I usually hang around with.

K: Is it the way they dress, they look, their race, their class?

M: All of that. When I'm going in there and looking around and seeing these things, I'm like this is not my cup of tea.

K: So you feel uncomfortable there?

M: I do. I'm feeling while I'm in there, that I'm carrying large bags out of the store. Heavy bags and that's uncomfortable because I'm walking home and now I gotta walk all the way up this hill, down this hills, it's not a good experience. Here, at Lucky's, there's a bus line that goes right to my house. It's not that painful. It's the comfort zone. If it's my comfort zone, I feel good. I don't wanna jump out of my comfort zone. They're pretty much the same; [Trader Joe's is] just something I'm not used to.

Jade also brought up feeling uncomfortable at Trader Joe's. In there, she was confused about the food being sold. As she says, "I didn't really know what the stuff was." It wasn't food that she ate, and it was a bit pricey. Plus, she didn't see any other black people in there. This surprised her. She says "And it was Oakland." Because she didn't see any Black people in the Oakland Trader Joe's, she had crossed that off of her list of possible stores to check out in Alameda, where she worked. She says "I didn't even go to the Trader Joe's in Alameda, I know they have probably never seen a black person in that one. I didn't feel comfortable." I bridged this topic during my interview with Donald as well. Donald had briefly mentioned that he felt most comfortable shopping at Lucky. I was curious about his sense of how race and class played into food choices in the neighborhood.

K: A couple other people that I was interviewing, they were saying, I would never go to Whole Foods because its all these rich white people. There's this sense of "that's not my people" so when you said that about Lucky, how you feel comfortable up there I wondered if maybe you might feel the same way about Whole Foods.

D: There is a different group of people in Whole Foods but I don't really care about that too much. We're all human. We all eat food. We all get food. We're all **American**. That's that. But whoever said that, whoever you were interviewing, that does make sense though. You know? I don't know. That's probably be the biggest thing for me. Feeling like I'm comfortable up here. Lucky *are* pretty clean and there just *so close*. They're just so close. The neighborhood, I know. The people who work there, I'm more *comfortable* with it.

These stories highlight two important ways in which these respondents understood their local built food environment in the Oasis. While in theory they believed they should be able to shop anywhere they wanted to shop, in practice, they felt racial and class tensions

playing out in the grocery store. These racial and class tensions were imbricated with other concerns such as distance, transportation, and cost. Combined, these factors created a sense of food space that determined where they travelled and where they did not.

Other respondents in this category brought up experiences being followed by security guards or accused of stealing by other shoppers. Jade, for example, prefers to shop for groceries with her son at the Safeway grocery store in Alameda, a small city adjacent to and south of Oakland. Since getting placed as an after school counselor at a school in this community, she found that shopping there was convenient. She shared, “Prior to working at the high school, I would never even go to the city of Alameda. Cause I’m like, ‘Well they don’t want me there and I don’t wanna be there,’ you know in terms of being racially profiled. The more I work there the more I find myself going to the store cause of convenience.” However, by shopping there, she frequently came into contact with racial bias from security guards and customers. She reflected,

Alameda is a very racist city, period. They don’t like black people. They think you are gonna steal based on a racist profile. If I am just walking in there like right now comfortable then ‘Oh my gosh, she’s gonna steal something.’ But if I come in there with my work badge on and dressed up then I am not racially profiled. They follow you around the store. Even to this day. My son, he’s like ‘Why they doing that to us?’ I said, ‘It’s because we’re black.’ And he’s like, ‘But we have a black president.’ Well that don’t mean nothing. Just because we have a black president that racial profiling and racism went away.

During our interview, she offered this story about one particular time that this happened to her son and her.

One time my son he opened up a bag of chips and started eating them and the lady was like ‘You know you have to pay for that, your son can’t just...’ I was like, ‘Lady, mind your own business. I will pay for it, I have money, whatever he opens up and eats I am gonna pay for it.’ They are just so quick to like, ‘Oh my gosh, what are these black people doing?’ I only really go there because it is right by my job and there’s a Safeway gas station there and you get a discount on your gas if you shop at that Safeway. So I like the gas station. But I think it is so racist there.

After my conversation with Jade, I went back to Mike and asked him about this. Had this ever happened to him? He scrunched up his face in a look of slight shock that I would even need to ask. “Of course!” he said. “I’ve had several times when I’ve gone into the grocery store and there’s the security guard, following me around. I turn the corner and there he is again. I’m like, Ok, really? But you know that’s what you have to deal with when you’re black in America so I don’t let it bother me in any way. And then you learn where to go and where not to go, you know? You just adjust”

MAINTAINING DIGNITY

At the same time that respondents such as Jade and Donald felt unwelcome at certain food stores, they also located good food as existing at these places, not at the places where they could afford to shop. For example, Jade compared her experiences shopping at the ‘racist’ Safeway to her experience shopping at Food Maxx in Oakland.

If you go to like Food Maxx over here, they don’t always have everything and they don’t have a lot of brand stuff. Plus its crowded and ghetto in there. I like that Safeway even though they’re racist. They’re not racist at that Food Maxx. I mean its in Oakland. They’re not racist. It’s predominately Hispanic people going in there. I find that they don’t have the brands that I want all the time. If I buy a loaf of bread I don’t want to buy some generic bread I want Home Pride wheat bread, but they don’t always have it. They have some off brand stuff that I don’t like.

Jade associates Food Maxx with off brand products, low-income people of color, and crowded space. In other words, Food Maxx is a place people go out of need and is therefore a place that lacks choice. Even though Food Maxx’s prices are more in line with her budget, and despite the fact that she is often racially profiled while shopping at Safeway, she tries to shop at Safeway instead. Being at that Safeway allowed her to verify her identity as one who is not consuming out of need but rather consuming out of choice. In fact, as Jade shared the details of her daily life with me, it became clear that her occasional trips to Safeway and Panera Bread Company were the ways she reached out and touched her middle class aspirations.

In September of 2016, I met Kevin at the weekly Farmer’s Market. He had agreed to do my video project, and I was there to hand him the camera and give him instructions. The following conversations are adopted from field notes taken on that day.

At the entrance to the market, Kevin points to a stand selling coffee and asks me if I would like some. I kindly decline his offer but stand with him in line while he waits to order his. The coffee stand appears to be on bicycle wheels. Two thin, white men with goatees stand behind a hand made counter of slightly different colored pieces of distressed wood making pour over coffees for waiting customers. Mike orders an ice coffee for \$3.00. Since learning during our first interview that Mike was food insecure most of the time, I was surprised to see him purchase what most people would consider an expensive cup of coffee. After adding generous amounts of almond milk and sugar, we go over to a cluster of small round tables situated in the middle of the prepared food section of the market and sit down to check in.

“This is good food,” he says to me as he looks around at the venders selling fresh fruits and vegetables. “But you don’t get this all the time. The other days, I go to school. So sometimes you go to the hot dog cart for \$2.00 because its there. Sometimes I walk past the food giveaway and they’re giving away free food. On 30th and San Pablo. But I don’t go there. People who work on a daily basis, their refrigerators are full. People who don’t work on a daily basis, their refrigerators are full too,” he says with distain and a tinge of anger in his voice.

Here, Mike points out a hidden cost of food insecurity – individual dignity. While there is an impressive safety net in Oakland through which people can acquire free food, this food is actually not truly accessible or truly free to respondents like Mike who are

upwardly aspiring but extremely poor. The cost in his dignity feels too great. He would, therefore, rather go without food than to stand in long lines for hours waiting for free food, visible to cars passing by on busy streets. Mike, then, actually falls through the cracks. “Project Open Hand is the only square meal I get or from the African food stand at the Farmer’s Market when I’m volunteering. When I was working, my refrigerator was full. I had three square meals a day. I didn’t really like to cook but I had money to go out. I had money for coffee,” he points to his now empty ice coffee cup. Then he tells me that he wants to get another coffee. We go back in line. When we get to the front, he asks for a refill. The same man prepares the coffee refill for him. “That will be \$3.00,” the man says. Kevin pauses and then says “\$3.00? Even though I work for Uhuru?” The Bicycle coffee worker says “Oh, you are a vender? Never mind then. Here you go.” The man taking orders smiles at Mike with a nod of camaraderie in recognition of their shared vendor status. Mike had figured out a way to access the wellbeing sold at the Farmer’s Market. Saying that he was a vender allowed him to get free coffee refills, additional samples and free produce at the end of the market. It also allowed him to feel fully incorporated and therefore fully participate in this market that he otherwise couldn’t afford.

After I left Mike, he began his video project by walking around the market. As he filmed the various vendors selling prepared foods, he described the market to me as follows: “As you see, this is a watering hole for people who like natural foods. They serve coffee and Himalayan food to Mexican food, to good old Baklava.” As he goes through the market with the camera, he introduces himself to various vendors as Mike with Uhuru foods. He videotapes the open and inclusive responses from the other vendors who enthusiastically give him additional samples. As he consumes these items, he expresses the same kind of pleasure as Rachel. For instance, Mike pauses in the middle of the market and pans the video camera over a rectangular table overflowing with purple and green grapes “These guys have the best grapes at the Farmers Market. I’m gonna take one,” He says. “Mmmmm. Those are the best. And they have no sulphates. So this is a great place to come. Bring lots of money, and bring home very good food”

RELATIONSHIPS OF DISTRESS

These respondent’s eating aspirations were predicated on understanding their tastes and practices as wrong and in need of correcting. However, as I outlined above, there was a gap between their daily food consumption practices and their ideas about what constituted right versus wrong ways to eat. This manifested in three different experiences of distress that I spell out in the sections that follow. The first experience of distress emerged when respondents, like Donald, bought into the logic of accomplishment articulated by Rachel and Lilly but experienced themselves as marginalized from it. The second experience of distress took place when respondents had competing logics of accomplishment. In these cases, respondents felt accomplished when they compared themselves to those less fortunate but felt like failures when they compared themselves to those respondents like Rachel who ate with ease. The third experience of distress took place when respondents hooked their identities and visions of their futures firmly to these logic of accomplishment but lacked the material resources to approximate these aspirations in any real way. In each case, respondents suggest that they deal with their

distress by working on their emotions. In the sections that follow, I outline both the experiences of distress as well as the emotion work that respondents deployed in order to cope with these states of distress.

“I DON’T EVEN WANNA BE CARING ABOUT FOOD”

One way that respondents experienced distress was when they subscribed to the set of eating aspirations outlined above but felt entirely fatalistic about their ability to approximate these aspirations through their daily practices. Instead, they ate food that they considered to be bad for them, described these practices as their fault, and felt that sickness was inevitably around the corner. Donald illuminated this experience of distress. After describing the kinds of foods he would ideally like to eat as well as the kinds of foods that he typically eats (described above), I asked Donald how he felt about his choices? How did he feel after eating at Church’s Chicken, for example? He quickly responded, “You know that’s a good question because I work out so I really don’t feel *nothing*. When I feel full, I feel good. I feel good to be honest with you.” On the one hand, Donald made sense of his practices through two frameworks. First, he is an athlete who works out, which he defines as a good thing that he does for his health. Second, because he doesn’t always have money to eat, being full feels good and is an accomplishment all its own. However, as we continued to converse, Donald revealed that these justifications existed alongside a backdrop of distress as he grappled in his head with the gap between his aspirations and practices. In asking him to consider his choices against this idea of good versus bad foods, Donald revealed a completely different internal emotional landscape within which he was assessing his choices from day to day.

K: At the beginning of the interview, you listed the foods you normally eat and said, “I know its not good.” Do you think about that when you are eating foods from day to day?

D: I do. I think, why am I eating this burger? I know its hella bad for me. Am I gonna get cancer one day? I’m just eating this shit and its bad for my heart. It’s hella greasy. But I’m hungry. But I feel like I’m a slob when I’m eating it. But I’m gonna eat it anyways. Because I’m addicted to it, I think. I just crave it you know what I’m saying? There have been times when I’ve tried not to eat it. But it’s so convenient. Its right there and my taste buds and my body’s so used to it. It’s almost like a drug! And I just want to eat it.

This quotation is striking, especially compared to Donald’s first response. Research on cognition and research on cultural logics suggests that, most likely, Donald is experiencing all of these logics at the same time. He is happy to be full, he feels that he is counteracting some of the negative affects of his food consumption practices by exercising, and he feels distressed knowing that what he is eating is “hella bad” of him. Strikingly, in this quotation Donald reveals that he believes his tastes are wrong. “I’m addicted to it” “I just crave it” “my taste buds and my body’s so used to it” he reflects. Therefore, changing his food consumption practices is destined for failure. Not because

he doesn't have a aspiration to eat differently, but because at the end of the day, this is the food that he desires. Given that this is also the food he has learned will cause him to become ill, having a taste for what Donald has come to see as disease producing foods means grappling with distress around falling ill as he goes through his daily food consumption practices. He revealed,

Sometimes I do feel weird things in my body and I'm like "*uuuhhhhhh*" I'm *dyin'*. Slowly but surly I'm dying. People say I'm a hypochondriac because I talk about worrying about dying a lot. It's mostly linked to food more than anything. Sometimes I can feel weird things after I eat it and I think, that wasn't the best thing to eat. Sometimes it feels like something's slipping. I don't know, like, I just feel like my heart could just pop at any time, or my blood vessels could just pop or I could just pass out.

Donald resigned to the belief that eating this food would most likely cause him to become ill at some point in his life. He shared,

D: Like later in life when I'm older...I'm trying to live *better*, but I'm not. Its hard. You know, you follow more of your **flesh**. You follow more of what *feels* good and what *tastes* good and what *seems* good. And I know...I know that a lot of that stuff is wrong, but its *good. It feels good.*

K: have you had moments when you've tried to change that?

W: Yeah, I have, I have [voice goes down in resignation]. But its *hard*. I'm like damn this is hard. So I'm like **yep** [*with resolve*] one day I'm gonna have to deal with the consequence. We all gotta die one day. So, I do worry about it. Like, when I get older I'm gonna get sick. But aren't we all? It runs in my family. Everybody is. Even if I *live* I'm probably gonna get sick. Even if I drink water I'm probably gonna get sick. Its in the water now. So if I only live once I'm gonna try to have fun regardless of it.

Respondents like Rachel and Lilly lift up ideas about the health and wellbeing of their future selves to motivate their present food consumption practices. They use their knowledge about food related diseases and hidden contamination in food to carve out a pathway towards wellbeing for themselves. With a lack of material resources and the incorrect tastes, Donald believes that he cannot protect himself from food related risks and illness. Moreover, he is resigned to the fact that he will get sick from eating this way one day. With an irresolvable gap between his aspirations and his practices and fatalistic assumptions about what kind of future was available to him, Donald managed his distress by working on his emotions. Specifically, he subjugates the future to the present, throwing away concern for his future health in order to find pleasure in his immediate set of choices or his present state of being full. He also attempts to numb himself from his emotions, feeling angry at himself for being poor, experiencing crippling distress at the thought of future disease, and then attempting. In other words, eating is an emotional

battlefield. In the midst of impossibly limited options, Donald strives to resolve his distress by controlling his emotions.

During my interview with Donald, we spoke at length about the days when his money ran short. “So do you skip meals often?” I asked him. “Yeah,” he replied pensively. “But I don’t even want to be *caring* about food like that sometimes. Sometimes I don’t really care that I’m restricting myself because I know that this ain’t the greatest choice of food anyways.” Donald was actively engaging in emotion work as he contended with the gap between his material resources, daily food consumption practices and his logic of accomplishment. Rather than give into despair when he didn’t have the resources to eat, Donald worked on his emotions attempting to distance himself from feeling and caring. While Rachel and those who eat with pleasure go towards and even seek out the positive emotional experiences with food, Donald works every day to subdue his appetite, his desires, and, therefore, his shame around food. When he allows himself to feel that he is hungry, he also has to feel his shame around what it means to be hungry. Take as an illustration this conversation that we had during our interview:

D: Why are you hungry? I get mad sometimes when I’m hungry. I’m like **I’m hungry!** When I eat and be full, I can think better. Then I’m like now what’s up? Cause I’m like *starving* and stuff and I start thinking about the disadvantages in my life you know? I’m hungry.”

K: So being hungry makes you think about all of the ways that you’re dissatisfied with your life?

D: [*Nodding his head in large motion*] Mm-hmm [*he says as if I’ve hit the nail on the head*]. Yup. Yup.

Hunger is a physical and symbolic pain: a reminder to Donald that he is not aligning his practices with his aspirations, and that this failure to do so has real, material, bodily consequences in the form of potential future disease. So Donald tries not to think about it at all, by numbing his emotions and replacing his anxiety about the future with thoughts of present and immediate need. This helps to explain Donald’s first response when I asked him how he felt when he ate at Church’s Chicken: “I really don’t feel *nothing*. When I feel full, I feel good.” In his book *Distinction*, Bourdieu finds that as part and parcel of their class position, the dominant classes distance themselves from tastes born out of necessity and function while the dominated classes embrace these tastes. In this section, I suggest that my data reveals contrary findings. Respondents such as Donald utilize a *framing* of food as function and necessity in order to quell unrest about the implications of his constrained set of choices. And, as processed, fast food is cheap, convenient and delicious, it is not hard for Donald to privilege the present pleasure and utility of his food over worries about his future self. I argue, that while the dominant classes distance from necessity through practice, the disenfranchised distance from necessity by working on their emotions.

JADE

A second experience of distress occurred when respondents, such as Jade, bought into the idea that their tastes were incorrect and could lead to disease, but didn't take up the logic of accomplishment that was shared enthusiastically by respondents such as Rachel, Lilly and Mike. Rao, Monin, and Durand (2003) write that when multiple logics are in tension with one another, instability can arise. Jade's story echoes these findings. As I outlined above, Jade was pre-diabetic and had been seeing a white, female doctor regularly for some time. However, the eating advice that her doctor gave her made her feel confused and overwhelmed. She shared,

J: She was talking about portions. Like it should be like this. When you are eating your meat should be like this. Sometimes she says your plate, this much should be vegetables, this much should be meat, and this much should be whole grains. I'm like "that's not enough to fill me up, those little portions." She's like "Don't fry your chicken, bake it, and it should be skinless." If you want chicken it should be lean. If you cook it should be olive oil." If you eat rice it should be brown rice, eat bread it should be brown bread, eat this it should be that. Oh my *god*.

K: How does it make you feel?

J: Confused and overwhelmed.

As I have argued thus far, the majority of respondents that I interviewed in the Oasis enthusiastically took up rules around what kinds of foods to eat and how to eat them. This knowledge made them feel smart and, in many cases, self-righteous. Jade, on the other hand, felt distressed by these rules. As I outlined above, she felt distressed on the one hand because she measured her success against those with whom she grew up, many of whom had never gone to college and were struggling with addiction. She also felt distressed because her tastes for food and the pleasure she got from food were the only buffer between her and systemic oppression that she confronted in her daily life. Taking away food as pleasure, then, felt like a punishment rather than a pathway towards wellness. This was fortified by her assessment that the pathway towards wellness offered to her by her doctor was meant for privilege, white people. Her older brother had a heart attack and died when he was 18. Her younger brother had recently been incarcerated for a crime she says that he did not commit. She was a single mother living in public housing where she felt in danger, and her son was struggling with his own depression stemming from his father's absence. She reflected on the connection between these life stressors and her desires for food:

I'm sad about my life and a lot of what happened. And because I don't drink...I think that's a lot of the issue. Cause a lot of people drink to numb their pain or they smoke to numb their pain. People always tell me "Well I bet if you smoked or drunk alcohol you wouldn't be so depressed." But I don't wanna do that, I *just* wanna eat a cupcake and that makes me feel good for just a little bit but then I feel bad cause I know its wrong. I know that it is eventually going to give me diabetes, and I keep gaining weight

and stuff.

Jade assesses that healthy food is a luxury accessible to the upper-middle classes and not to her. Still, she knows that her tastes and desires are dangerous and must be corrected. When she eats out of alignment with her doctor's orders, which she does on most days, the choices that used to be soothing are now sources of distress. As an example of this, I outline what Jade ate and how she felt about her choices in the 24 hours before our interview. She began her day with a bagel. Her doctor had recommended that she eat bagels for breakfast, specifically suggesting that Jade check out the bagels at Panera Bread by her work. The bagels that Jade can afford to purchase are the frozen kind from the grocery store, and she finds these to often be chewy and lacking in taste. She reflected:

Well I don't really like to eat it and it doesn't fill me up. And then I don't really know if that is really healthy either if you are smacking a whole bunch of cream cheese on it, that's not good either. And bread makes you gain weight too. I went Panera bread and got a bagel from there once. Their bagel was good. But then that is expensive to buy a bagel from them everyday. But then the bagels that I have don't taste as fresh as like as Panera's. Their bagel was good and their cream cheese. I might like bagels if I ate their bagel everyday.

I enquired whether Jade thought about this as she ate the bagel that she had at her house. She replied, "I am thinking about a hamburger, or some fried, or some crab or something, or some soul food, or some cake, and a soda"

K: Ok, so you have breakfast and then how much longer before you eat again and what will you eat?

J: Immediately after, I have to eat something else.

K: What would that be?

J: Cause that bagel didn't do anything. So then I have lunch. I like to go to Wendy's. I love their nuggets and fries and my Coca-Cola.

K: So you will eat that how many hours or minutes after breakfast?

J: Maybe an hour, two hours afterwards. Or In-and-Out burger.

K: Will you snack in between?

J: Yeah, I'll have some chips. Sometimes fruit. I do like to eat fruit, but I don't like vegetables. I might have something sweet to eat like I might have a cupcake.

Like Rachel, Jade goes towards pleasure in her daily food consumption practices. But Jades pleasure is the wrong pleasure, a pleasure she tries to hide even from herself. She

admits, “I have a stash of snacks in my house.” Because she knows that her pleasure is the wrong pleasure, she feels only momentary satisfaction. Along side the delicious taste of the cupcake comes in a looming sense of inevitable doom. She shared,

I know that is so bad. I feel so bad as I am eating it. Well, back then I didn't cause I didn't know any better. But now, I know better. I know that I am a borderline diabetic and I know that I am almost there. My doctor is like, ‘You are headed there if you don't stop eating what you are eating.’ She had me see a dietician and I did a food intake. She was just like, ‘You are gonna have diabetes, clogged arteries, a heart attack if you don't stop eating what you are eating.’ And I *know* better but, I don't know what it is, I just like to eat what I like to eat.

Unlike Donald, Jade didn't buy in to the set of eating aspirations around healthful eating outlined by Rachel and Lilly. She also didn't buy into the idea that eating in alignment with these aspirations should be easy. She lacks the material resources to buy into a different pleasure pathway. Panera bagels were delicious, but out of reach because they were too expensive. So, as she sees shifting her daily food consumption practices as resulting in only struggle and management without pleasure, she cannot in her honesty opt in. “I just like to eat what I like to eat,” she reflects, and categorizes her tastes and practices as immutable, and her inevitable descent into illness her own fault.

MIKE

Another strategy that respondents used to align their practices with their aspirations with limited material resources was to use knowledge to subjugate desire in an attempt to rearrange their desires. Shaun provides a striking example of this. He typically spends \$10-20 a week on food. As outlined above, Mike took immense pride in being able to talk intelligently about healthy foods, the problems with genetic modification of food, and the importance of eating organic vegetables from a garden. However, on such a limited budget, Mike not only can't afford to eat in alignment with this moral philosophy, he doesn't eat very much at all. Through the interview, it became clear that many days Mike struggled to eat three meals a day. He dealt with this distress by tricking himself into feeling full. He offered with pride, “I'm learning about transcendental meditation. I passed the Chinese restaurant on the way here. You think you want that fried rice but you don't need to eat that fried rice. You can just imagine that you are eating the rice and you've eaten it.”

During my first interview with Mike, he spoke at length about his involvement with the local community garden in the neighborhood. He found the garden after attending the teach-in at the Farmer's Market. At the community garden, he was taught about kale and got a chance to taste it for the first time. He described this interaction with kale as elevating and enlightening. “When you ate kale for the first time, what was that experience?” I asked him. “I felt younger. I knew nothing about kale before. But I learned about it through listening, reading. Facebook, the social networking, they shared. We need to know what's good and what is bad. Within reason. I'm gonna try and give it a shot because it makes sense, to me. And kale isn't the only thing, it's not a wonder drug, but from what I can gather, it makes sense. I'm gonna give you an easy way to feel good,

it's cheap, it's easy available, and it tastes good. Hmmm, **okay**," he shared with enthusiasm. The messages that he was receiving from his social networks and through reading about what was good versus bad to eat had directed him to kale and inculcated in him a sense that eating kale was an easy, common sense pathway towards wellbeing.

However, there was a problem. Mike didn't actually like kale. One year later, I met up with him again to check in about how things were going. At this time, Mike revealed a different orientation towards kale. He had recently discovered a free meal delivery service for the elderly and people with disabilities. He described the meal service to me as follows: "When I'm broke, there Project Open Hand. Its seven days of frozen food. It has a green, a grain, a meat. But see I'm from the South. Eating kale and brown rice is not conducive to my appetite." Given his elated description of kale during our first meeting, I was curious about this different response. I ask him about this. He responded, "I used to get kale for free. Yes. And Japanese radish. And some other vegetables. I used to give the kale away and keep the Japanese radish." These conflicting narratives provide a window into how Mike makes sense of his tastes compared to the "right tastes." Kale was easy, right, and the way to achieve wellbeing. However, Mike didn't actually enjoy the taste of kale. Mike's tastes were wrong and needed to be corrected. In other words, Mike's eating aspirations were predicated on understanding that his tastes were wrong.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have traced on how food related health aspirations, material resources, daily food consumption practices and identity are imbricated for respondents such that they experienced food as a relationship of distress. I argue that these respondents, too, had similar aspirations as those who ate with ease. However, despite these aspirations, there was a most irresolvable gap between their reported food consumption practices and their aspirations. living in the Oasis allowed these respondents to regularly come into contact with different food consumption practices than they witnessed growing up. This regular witnessing along with conversations with friends, doctors, and television shows taught them that their tastes were wrong and that breaking through the cycle of poverty required correcting their tastes. They believed this was due to their lack of material resources and their incorrect tastes. I then illustrate three experiences of distress that occurred because of this gap between aspirations and practices: marginalization, fatalism, and powerlessness. Finally, I illustrate how these respondents used emotion work to manage this gap between their daily food consumption practices, identity, and aspirations. While often unsuccessful at approximating their aspirations through their consumption practices, these did have their emotions at their disposal as a resource to work with.

In what follows, I look at the local logic of accomplishment that emerged in the Turf. Despite their physical proximity, these two communities are a world apart. One of the central arguments of this dissertation is that neighborhood matters for what people feel they can accomplish with regards to their health through food, and that what people feel they can accomplish impacts both their practices and how they feel about their practices. In Part One, I described how respondents in the Oasis tended to center their logic of practice around their eating *aspirations*. With an abundance of fresh food close to home, they felt accomplished and a sense of well-being when they could use their

material, symbolic, or emotional resources to approximate these aspirations from day to day. However, they also felt distress and anxiety when unable to do so in part because living in this neighborhood meant that they were regularly confronted with the gap between their aspirations and their practices. In Part Two, I describe how respondents in the Turf tended to center their logic of practice around *abjection* – a low or downcast state. This orientation towards abjection was in part because respondents lacked the material and symbolic resources needed to practice their health aspirations through food. Just as importantly, living in the Turf meant that they were *not* bumping up against their aspirations like those in the Oasis. On the contrary, they were surrounded by food they considered to be low quality, and they were made to feel that accomplishing their aspirations was impossible.

PART II
THE TURF

CHAPTER SIX

Survival

Shakira is just trying to get her stomach to stop talking to her. Day after day in the Turf is an exercise in thrift and survival, and she is on her own to make it. Shakira, a 19-year-old African-American high school graduate, has dreams of one day becoming a famous rapper. Presently, she is curious about community college but cannot enroll right away. Her mother fell seriously ill several years before our interview due to complications with overlapping health issues including diabetes and is now permanently under hospice care. So Shakira is looking for a job to support herself and her family. She has been looking for a job since she graduated from high school a year ago, but full time jobs are not easy to find in the Turf. Therefore, she spends her days doing odd jobs here and there for people in the neighborhood, helping out her family, and interviewing for open positions. Although this isn't easy to do, living in the Turf has provided her with the skills to know how to survive in tough times. She tells me, "If you come from the hood, you know how to survive in the struggle. You know what the struggle is like so you know how to hang onto money and you know how to replenish it. Cause you've had to do it so much with little or nothing."

One of her survival strategies is eating the "fast," "easy," "convenient" and "cheap" food from the fast food restaurants close by. She would prefer to eat three home cooked meals a day including, for example, cantaloupe, stuffed mushrooms and grilled chicken. Shakira learned from her high school wellness class and her family doctor that a healthy meal is a balanced meal. This consists of a "portioned plate" so that she has fruits and vegetables along with a protein. Also, although she doesn't particularly like the taste of organic fruits and vegetables, she is adamant that if organic foods are truly better than non-organic foods, she wants that for herself and her community. She shares, "People say organic is better so yeah, I would want the best for everybody around me. Everybody deserves to live longer. So yeah, if organic is the best than organic is what I want for everybody even if you're my enemy cause we're all in the struggle together." But these are aspirations that share almost no overlap with her material reality or living conditions. First of all, she doesn't have a car to get to the grocery store and bring groceries back home. Second of all, her economic situation is tenuous and changes from day to day depending upon the work that she can find. Plus, she is always on the move either supporting her parents, siblings, and extended family or trying to find opportunities to make money. Third, living in the inner-city means daily coming into contact with what Shakira calls "ghetto food:" rotting onions in the corner stores attracting flies, meat that doesn't look too fresh, and an over abundance of snack and fast foods. Whereas walking around in the Oasis from day to day brings residence in contact with wellness practices and fresh, beautiful looking food, walking around in the Turf brings residence in contact with struggle: devalued, abandoned, boarded up houses and storefronts, people without work and food, and accumulated trash on the streets that the city rarely picks up. It is, perhaps, not surprising then, that along with her sense of what a balanced diet consists of and what the ideal types of foods may be, she has a racial logic around what being healthy looks like and its not her or located in her neighborhood. I ask her to imagine someone who is eating healthy from day to day: "I would say not a black person. I'd say

a white girl running in some jogging, tight pants they be wearing with a headband and a little ponytail. That's what I see. With the little Earpod things, running."

Therefore, she approximates that she eats a "full" home cooked meal two to three times out of a typical month consisting of chicken, rice, and vegetables on the side. The rest of the time, she eats fast food: "McDonalds, McChickens, McDoubles, Chicken Nuggets with the large fry, and the mango slushes or sprites. All large or mediums. Jack N' The Box. Vanilla milkshakes. Number 4's. Burger King. I don't really do Taco Bell too much. Subway, Everett and Jones. Pretty much anywhere." She typically eats at these places twice a day – for breakfast and dinner. Each of these meals costs her exactly \$7.99. She doesn't eat a full meal in the middle of the day because that allows her to save money and, plus, that is when she is on the go. When I asked her to describe what she ate on the day before we met, she mentioned skipping lunch. I asked her if she was hungry, but she quickly rejected the question.

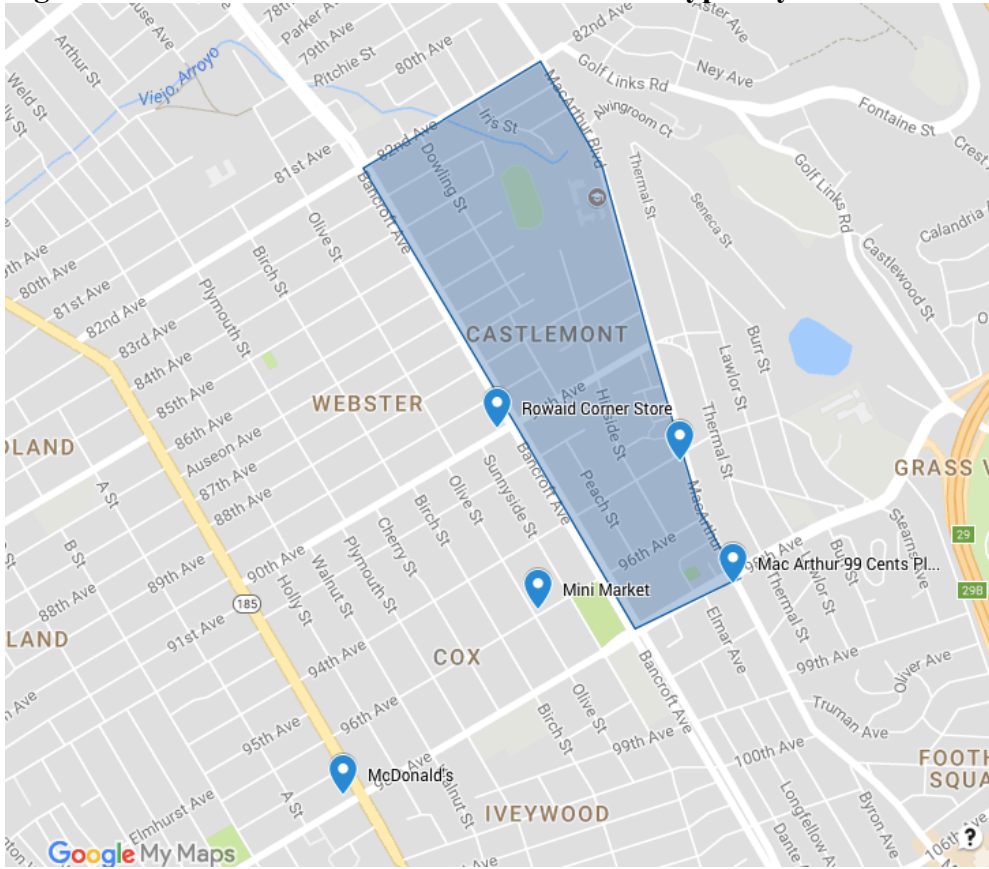
I wasn't even thinking about food because I'm always moving. In the middle of the day I'm moving. That's my busiest time of the day... just doing different little things. I might be helping a person in my family, or I might be doing something to better myself for the next day. So I'm always busy. I'm not really thinking about food unless my stomach hurts and then I'm like, oh I gotta eat something even a little snack.

When her stomach starts to hurt, she goes to whatever corner store is closest to her at the time and gets about \$10 worth of snacks that most days consist of candy, soda, and a bag of chips. She will occasionally go to the dollar store on 98th and McArthur (see Figure 17).

Shakira does not enjoy this food. In fact, she experiences it as "all the same." It is good, but not delicious. It fills her, but is not fulfilling. She is clear during our interview that she only eats this food because she needs to eat something. She shares matter-of-factly, "I just eat it to get full so my stomach won't talk to me. That's it." In fact, Shakira characterizes the food as "fake" food and describes it as "cardboard-y." "Biting into McDonalds meat doesn't feel like biting into real meat. It is more like rubber," she described. She also has in the back of her mind that eating this way can cause cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes, which, she tells me, "runs on both sides of her family." She describes for me that during her daily trips into the McDonalds or Jack in the Box by her house, she confronts a warning placard that states the food sold inside may cause cancer (see Figure 18). This sign has become part of her daily life. However, unlike Donald in the Oasis, she doesn't let that bother her. She's proud of herself for surviving day to day in an environment where she has few opportunities to find work in the formal sector and where she does not have the material resources to make ends meet.

Shakira experiences her relationship with food as a relationship of *survival* – making it from day to day despite difficult or ordeal circumstances. With the aspirations that were so present in the Oasis a cultural, symbolic, and physical universe away, Shakira's sense of self is formed around how well she can maintain herself in the midst of hardship. She feels moments of anxiety around the future consequences of her present

Figure 17: Food Establishments Where Shakira Typically Procures Food



Source: Google Maps (2017), modifications by author.

Figure 18: Warning Placard, McDonald's Restaurant



food consumption practices, but she has made peace with being oriented towards survival. In fact, she feels accomplished when she is busy enough that she doesn't remember or need to eat. This allows her to save money. Plus, she doesn't feel sick *yet*. She explains to me how she makes meaning out of her food consumption practices:

If I'm hungry I'm gonna eat, whether it gives me cancer or not 'cause I'd rather get this food and not have my stomach talking to me. This food probably has bad effects, but they don't affect you right away. And it is *good*. So you go get food when you need to. And you're gonna spend as less cash as possible so that you can have enough to survive for the next day. It's the best way I can put it.

Shakira has accepted that she's "in the struggle," using lemons to make lemonade just like everyone else around her.

Out of the 40 respondents that I interviewed in the Turf, 20 of them framed their relationship with food as one of survival. In this chapter, I discuss how food and eating aspirations, material resources, daily food consumption practices, and identity were combined for these respondents such that they experienced their relationship with food as one of survival. I suggest that because of the overlapping systemic barriers to wellness that structured daily life in the Turf, abjection and not aspiration was the dominant framework through which these respondent made sense of their environment and their choices. The basic necessities of life – food, shelter, and money were all unpredictable here. Corner stores and food giveaways stood in for grocery stores, job opportunities and housing were fleeting or unstable, while interaction with and surveillance by the state was a part of life for many residence. Scholars have shown that each of these are stressors and constitute barriers to wellness and health. While these respondents held food related health aspirations that were similar to those in the Oasis, these systemic barriers to wellness created a fissure between their aspirations and their daily practices. Unlike those in the Oasis who used their food related health aspirations as a symbolic north star against which to measure their practices, respondents in the Turf used survival as the comparator against which to measure their practices.

I organize this chapter around four main themes. I begin by discussing what my respondents thought of as the right and wrong food consumption practices. I show that, like those in the Oasis, they desired to eat three home cooked meals a day consisting of a balanced plate of fruits, vegetables, starches and meat. They believed that eating too much fried foods and drinking too much soda was a sure path to illness. They were either struggling with illness or had family members or friends who had developed diabetes or high blood pressure. It was in the context of illness that they talked about the importance of drinking water, eating vegetables, and baking their foods instead of frying them. They learned these messages from four main sources: classes in school, parents and guardians, family doctors, and television shows. Also important to note, these respondents didn't typically purchase or talk about organic, free range, or locally produced foods. However, when asked what they would buy if they made a million dollars, 90% of them responded

that they would buy organic foods from upscale grocery stores like Whole Foods or in upscale suburbs far away from the Turf.

I then discuss what these respondents reported that they ate from day to day. Because there were so many barriers to wellness, their ideas and aspirations for healthy eating didn't get them very far in the Turf. Instead, they negotiated among available options in order to eat as much food as they could eat for as cheaply as possible. It was typical for respondents to eat two meals a day and fill themselves up with snack foods in between. It was also typical for them to run out of food towards the end of the month.

Next, I outline what the experience was like procuring food from day to day. I argue that respondents didn't trust the foods for sale at the corner stores and were often treated with disrespect there. They experienced similar treatment at the food giveaways. They appreciated the full service grocery stores in East Oakland and San Leandro when they could get there, but with so few respondents owning cars, these trips were infrequent. This added up to a generally negative experience procuring food in the Turf, which respondents understood as a result of racialized poverty.

I then use these reports of what it was like procuring food in the Turf to give context to how respondents felt about themselves as they ate from day to day. In the last part of this chapter I show that respondents approached food as function because they had made peace with being survivors and in fact found ways to feel quite accomplished as they went through their days as survivors. With necessity all around them and wellness a world away, any incremental step above the extremes of having no food or eating only sweet, salty and fried foods every day made my respondents feel accomplished.

EATING ASPIRATIONS

With a few notable exceptions, respondents in the Turf articulated a similar set of eating rules and aspirations as those in the Oasis. In fact, they shared these aspirations with me eagerly and with pride. They had been taught to eat balanced, portioned meals of fruits, vegetables, starches and meats. They had learned to cut back on sodas and instead drink water, to eat baked foods instead of fried foods, and to eat three meals a day. Many respondents in the Turf told me that if they made a million dollars they would buy all organic foods and shop in upscale neighborhoods where they could purchase the highest quality foods. However, in practice those in this neighborhood didn't care much about buying foods that were organic or locally sourced. The biggest difference that respondents made between food items was the price and quality of the food sold in the places where they shopped. As I described in chapter two, organic foods were mostly absent from the grocery stores closest to them. There were few signs or labels articulating differences in farming or production practices. Instead, the stores that they frequented were set up to center value, deals, and quantity. Also, because most of them were lucky to eat two meals a day, thinking about farming practices felt like a luxury that was very far away from their daily lives. Still, everyone that I spoke to was quick to tell me what they knew about healthy versus unhealthy eating.

Standing about 5 feet 10 inches tall, Wayne is a light skinned black man in his early 50s. Wrinkles under his eyes and around his mouth seemed to communicate that Wayne had been working hard and was tired. He grew up in the Turf not too far from where he now lives with his girlfriend. He tells me that when he was growing up, the neighborhood

was a lot safer. There were black owned businesses and jobs. People got along. Now there's violence, high speed chases "and all that to maintain with. I'd like to get to a better neighborhood, but it is what it is," he reflected, shrugging his shoulders up towards his ears.

He is a father of four children, three boys and a girl, none of who currently live with him. Like Shakira, Wayne has struggled to find work. With a high school diploma and a criminal record, work seemed to come in spurts and end as quickly as it came. Luckily, several months before our interview, he got hired to be a greeter during the games for a local sports team and is hoping that this job will allow him to eventually land a more permanent position in the sports industry. "I'm starting at the bottom," he tells me, "but I'm gonna work my way up." He earns about \$1000 a month doing this work, enough that he is not eligible for CALFresh benefits. He also does work on cars for people around the neighborhood every now and then.

Wayne knows how to eat healthy and its something that he wants to do for himself. He describes with pride how his mother demonstrated this for him. With 8 brothers and sisters, food was never in abundance when he was growing up, but his mother always made it work. He reflects,

W: My mom showed me to stay away from fat - fat foods, a lot of cholesterol. I *was* taught to stay away from fatty things. But she taught us how to eat everything, vegetables and all that. And she wouldn't let us get up from the plate until we ate it all on our plates.

K: What did she say were fattening foods?

W: She didn't really *serve* us fatty foods. But you know as far as eating too much grease, too much fried foods. When we had meat or we had beans, she taught us how to portion out right. She taught me how to eat healthy.

Wayne feels that staying healthy and living a long life means eating healthfully. Eating healthfully means staying away from fattening foods, making sure to include vegetables and fruits in his diet, and maintaining balance between protein, starch, and vegetables in every meal. In theory, Wayne wants to eat that way now. He is getting older, so he knows he has to be more "conscious" about what he eats. His mom lived to be 93 years old so that means she must have been doing something right. His uncle, on the other hand, just got diagnosed with diabetes. This scares him. Though his uncle is the first person in his family to develop diabetes, it's a disease that seems to be appearing around the neighborhood. He, like so many others that I interviewed, attributes this to race and genetics: "black people are susceptible to diabetes and stuff like that," he tells me. This makes the idea of developing an illness such as diabetes feel real to him and has him thinking about the lessons he learned as a child. "I've been consciously thinking of what I'm in-taking. What's the healthiest thing that I can eat? I watch those health shows. I watch Dr. Oz so I am interested. That's in the back of my subconscious mind."

Wayne's experience echoes the experiences of many respondents in the Turf the majority of whom learned information about healthy food consumption practices from school, doctors, parents, and shows on TV like *Dr. Oz*. They took these messages

seriously, reflecting on how, in an ideal world, their daily food consumption practices would align with this information. For example, Shakira, Sahana, and Fabiana also learned what was “right and wrong” to eat from nutrition classes in school. In these classes, Shakira learned how to “portion [her] plates” and Sahanna learned about “healthy food and bad food for you.” They even showed Sahanna how to make healthy snacks in class. Fabiana learned that fried foods weren’t good for her and that she needed to drink water rather than soda.

Respondents also learned these lessons from parents, although these messages were often complex. Martin is a 53-year-old African American man who has been out of work for 2 years now and living out of his truck for just as long. His ideal meal consists of “a perfect balance between fruits and vegetables and meat” and staying away from pork. He learned to eat this way first and foremost from his parents. Growing up, he tells me that he always ate home cooked meals of usually soul food including such foods as collard greens, yams and chicken, baked fish, macaroni and cheese, “a lot of vegetables”. From these meals he learned that the best way to eat was “Everything in moderation and not too much of one thing.”

He also remembers seeing a large picture of the food pyramid in his doctor’s office growing up. He shared, “when you go to the doctor’s office they got the food groups up there and that stuck with me from a kid – make sure you get your fruits and vegetables every day. Make sure you drink a lot of water.” He knows that this is important because, like Wayne, he understands that not being aware of what he is eating can be a path towards illness. “I’m 53 years old now and I don’t want the doctor to tell me I can’t eat something. And people that stuff themselves with fried foods usually have problems with arteries. Stuffed arteries and high blood pressure. I don’t drink sodas I drink a lot of water and juice. And I try to stay conscious about eating healthy.”

When Shakira’s mother developed diabetes, the family doctor instructed Shakira’s mother about how to change her daily food consumption practices and asked her to “take this home and do this with your family.” During this time, the messages that Shakira was learning at school took on new meaning as her family explored ways to be healthier together. Brenda also learned food related health messages from her doctor after being diagnosed with kidney disease. “My doctor told me, you need baked, boiled and broiled. He said, I expect people to kind of go off a little bit, just not a lot, maybe every 6 months. So every now and again I might have a pork chop, but only half of it. Not even the whole thing. I cut all the cupcakes, potato chips, ice cream, cookies, they used to be my nightly, every single night, just nothing but *junk*, late night up watching TV and just eating. So I cut all of that out. I *loved ice cream*. I still eat my ice cream but periodically. Not as often as I used to. So that’s one of things, all the fatty foods. And then all of the baked foods are much better anyways.”

For Sahanna, the messages were a bit more confusing between school and home. On the one hand, she was being taught about what foods were good and what food were bad from her teachers. However, her parents had a hard time making ends meet. During the week they ate whatever they could and every Friday her mom used to take their family to McDonalds. “That was just like our happy place, we used to *love* going to McDonalds.” Being treated to fast food was a common experience for those in the Turf. Respondents shared stories with me of joyous occasions when their mothers, fathers, or grandparents would splurge to take them to McDonalds when they were children. For

those who struggled to feed their families from day to day, fast food was a treat. Now at 19-years-old, when Sahanna thinks of her ideal meal its more in line with what she learned at school. She would love to eat fruit, especially grapes, and a grilled chicken salad.

“Me personally I don’t drink soda. I learned that soda causes certain people to have diabetes with all the sugar and all of that.” Certain people that I know, I noticed that they gained a lot of weight drinking sodapops and then they end up with sugar diabetes and now they wish that they never drunk soda. I don’t know if that’s hereditary or what but they’re like, ‘you know what man, its good that you don’t cause I gained so much weight by drinking sodas and alcohol’ Things that pertain to sugar in drinks”

These vignettes demonstrate that the people whom I spoke with in the Turf had similar ideas about what constituted healthy food consumption practices. Eating organic, free range, or local foods did not come up in conversation for these respondents the way it came up with those in the Oasis. However, respondents did desire to eat three fresh home cooked meals a day with fruits and vegetables. They believed that eating fried foods and drinking soda would eventually lead to health problems, especially diabetes and high blood pressure. In the section that follows, I discuss what and how respondents in the Turf ate from day to day.

DAILY ROUTINES

Despite these eating aspirations, most of the people that I interviewed in the Turf couldn’t align their practices with their aspirations. A typical day in the life of these respondents included a mix of foods that they cooked or warmed up at home, foods from fast food restaurants, and snack foods purchased throughout the day at the corner stores in the neighborhood. The foods that they ate at home consisted of eggs, bacon, and pancakes, pasta and ramen noodles, sandwiches, chicken and hamburgers. Additionally, respondent ate foods from fast food restaurants such as McDonalds, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Church’s Chicken, Taco Bell or Pizza Hut. They snacked on chips, candy and cookies. They drank soda and juices such as Kool-aid and Snapple. Below, I document the responses from six of my interviewees as they described for me what foods they typically eat or what foods they ate the day before our interview.

McDonalds, McChickens, McDoubles, Chicken Nuggets with the large fry, and the mango slushes or sprites. All large or mediums. Jack N’ The Box. Vanilla milkshakes. Number 4’s. Burger King, Everett and Jones.

- *Shakira*

Yesterday, I ate some chicken strips, biscuits, french fries from Kentucky [Fried Chicken], I had a root beer float Then I had some dressing. Macaroni and Cheese. And then that was it. This was two separate meals. I ate some cookies. Coffee and water, water, water.

- *Brenda*

Yesterday, I got up, ate some pancakes and sausage. Then had I had...some chicken...got some \$2 special Church’s Chicken. We had some leftover spaghetti.

Then I had a snack late last night, a little sandwich and some potato chips. I drank juice, pink lemonade.

- *Mark*

I don't eat in the morning. I came home from school, ate some cake, from my best friend, at around 12pm or 11am. Then I came here and I got some fried chicken strips and fries, then I went back to school, then I went to work, and I ate some cinnamon twists, then my boss had bought us a sandwich so I ate a sandwich, then I ate a cookie, then I was just drinking soda. I got 5 or 10 refills. But usually at work I eat a burger, some fries and a frappe.

- *Sahanna*

KFC, KFC, eggs, bacon, grits, KFC, A sandwich and boiled eggs.

- *Fabiana*

Pizza. That's all. I had pizza for lunch and I had it for breakfast, then I had pizza for dinner. Then I went to sleep.

- *Tangerine*

As these quotations illustrate, respondents in the Turf ate a mix of fast foods, snack foods, and foods cooked at home. Notably, these quotations suggest that these respondent's daily food consumption practices often included eating the very items that they had learned were the worst for them in the long run – fast foods, fried foods, and sugary snack foods. Some respondents, such as Fabiana, Tangerine, and Shakira relied on these foods as their main sources of nutrition. Others, such as Emily, Mark and Brenda consumed a mixture of fast foods as well as foods that they cooked or someone they knew prepared for them. In other words, my respondent's reports of what they actually ate from day to day were more often misaligned than aligned with what they believed to be the right or healthy food items to eat.

Respondents also revealed that they often skipped meals or replaced meals with snacks. Sahana, George, Fabiana and Ernest typically skipped breakfast. Emily, John and Shakira usually skipped lunch. Generally, my interviewees suggested that they skipped meals because they were too busy working to think about food. As Emily described above, "I skipped lunch yesterday just because I was in the groove and didn't want to quit." Shakira echoes this sentiment in her description of her daily routines. She says, "I wasn't even thinking about food because I'm always moving. In the middle of the day I'm moving. That's my busiest time of the day... I'm not really thinking about food unless my stomach hurts and then I'm like, oh I gotta eat something even a little snack."

Within this neighborhood, respondents tended to buy snack foods at the corner stores or small items such as milk or butter if they had no way to get to the larger grocery stores. They also bought meat packages from the meat markets in the neighborhood. These packages consisted of several different cuts of frozen meat. Since there were no full service grocery stores within 1 mile, people needed to leave the neighborhood to get groceries. Only 1/3 of these respondents owned a car. The rest depended on family members, friends or the bus if they wanted to get to the full service grocery stores. When they did go to the grocery store, they tended to go to Foods Co, a full service grocery

store about one mile away from the center of the neighborhood that mimicked Costco in its warehouse like feel and focus on big quantities and deals. They also went to the dollar store on 98th avenue and Bancroft, or the outlet grocery stores in the neighboring suburb of San Leandro.

These respondents, however, didn't always have money to purchase food from food markets. Many respondents talked about the experience of going through each month knowing that food, money, and social benefits would run out. When this happened, they relied on food outside of the marketplace. Joi prays and hopes that someone will come by with a plate of something. Carl relies on the free breakfast programs that happen seven days a week at one of the churches in the neighborhood. Aaliyah, Darius, DeAndre, and Maurice go to the food giveaway on the outskirts of the neighborhood. In fact, Darius keeps a running list of all of the places where he can find either a hot meal or free groceries every day of the month if need be.

In sum, everyday life in the Turf consisted of eating a mix of foods made at home, from convenient stores and fast food restaurants. My respondents purchased grocery items from corner stores, meat markets, and discount grocery stores in other parts of East Oakland. They rarely ever travelled as far as the Oasis. Additionally, skipping meals and relying on social supports outside of the market were common practice. Taken together, these daily food consumption practices did not align with the visions that respondents presented to me of how they would ideally like to eat from day to day. However, unlike respondents in the Oasis, the respondents in the Turf did not feel especially distressed about the gap between their food related health aspirations and their daily food consumption practices. In the section that follows, I outline how these respondents – as Bourdieu famously wrote in *Distinction* – made a “virtue out of a necessity,” eating from day to day with the frame of survival as their compass. But before I get to the discussion of my respondents sense of identity as survivors and how this informed their feelings about what they ate from day to day, I discuss how respondents described their neighborhood, the food choices within and around their neighborhood, and the possibilities for health and wellness for people like them – the black poor living in segregated inner city neighborhoods.

“I MAKE DO WITH MY NEIGHBORHOOD”

Damien is a tall, slender African American man in his late 30s. During our interview, he described the food options in the Turf as follows:

We got corner stores – lots of corner stores. Some free food at the neighborhood churches. There are a couple of grocery stores too but they're farther away. You need a car to get there really. I mean you could walk but that's...there really not that close. Lots of fast food restaurants. I get a meat package from the meat market around the corner on the first of the month when I get paid. Pick up some things from the corner stores. Its ok, it gets me through. I make do with my neighborhood.

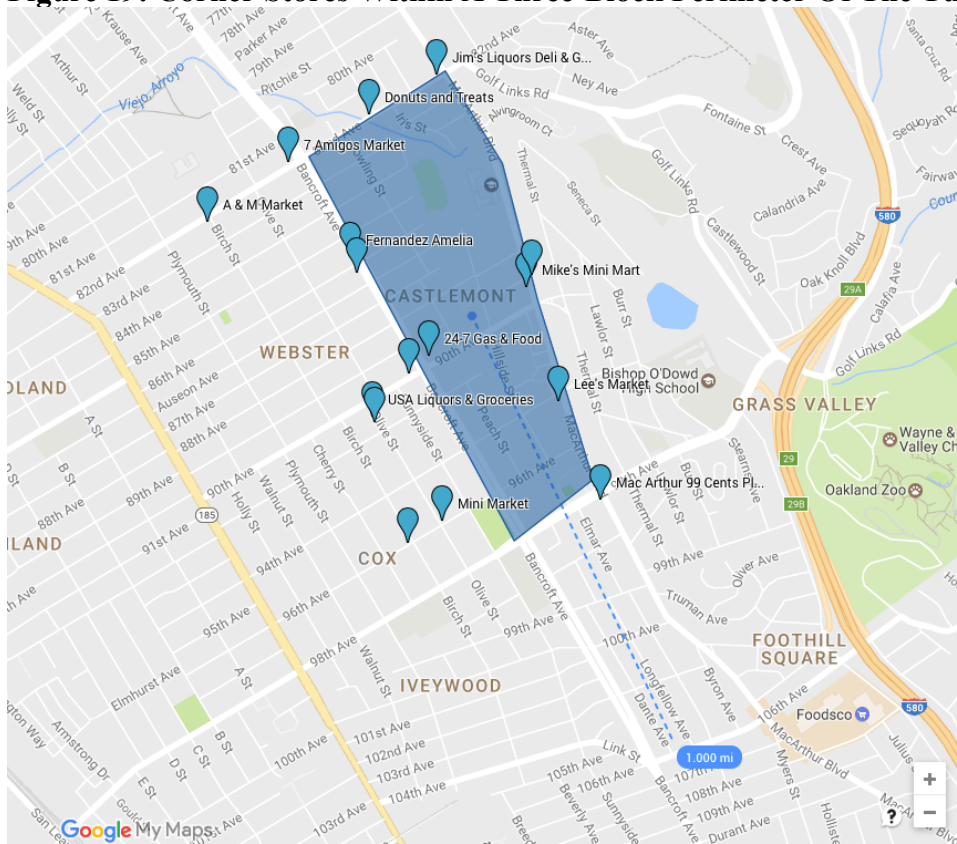
In order to understand the logic of accomplishment that these respondents attached to their daily food consumption practices, it is necessary to first understand what it was like

procuring food in this neighborhood from day to day. In what follows I discuss how my respondents described their experiences with the three main food establishments that they most frequented: the corner stores, the free food giveaways, and full service grocery stores. I suggest that respondents reported being often treated unkindly and with disrespect at the corner stores and food giveaways. They appreciated and felt committed to shopping at Foods Co because it was their “hood grocery store” as one respondent named it. However, if they had more resources, they would rather shop in the white suburbs at places like Whole Foods. There, they imagined that they would be treated with the kind and caring customer service that is standard for people with higher status. I argue that respondents knew that their position as black and poor living in the inner city meant that they had no status and, as such, were devalued, mistreated, and distrusted. These food establishments did not present them with images of wellness and good health. Rather, procuring food from day to day was an experience in which respondents confronted their racialized class position within the city.

CORNER STORES

Corner stores represented a main source of food for my respondents. There were 16 corner stores within a three-block perimeter of the Turf (see Figure 16).

Figure 19: Corner Stores Within A Three-Block Perimeter Of The Turf



Source: Google Maps (2017), modifications by author.

Jordan is a 42-year-old short, black man who is for all intents and purposes homeless. He has conked hair that falls just above his ears and a face that appears weathered. He spent the majority of his 20s incarcerated and, like so many formerly incarcerated men from this neighborhood, has struggled to find work post-release. He has two friends in the Turf with whom he stays from night to night. Jordan was one of the first respondents to participate in my extended ethnography project. At the time, I did not have a video camera to lend him so I gave him a disposable camera and asked him to take pictures of what he ate, where he ate, and where he got his food from for three full days. One late afternoon in August of 2016, I sat down with Jordan and Fantasia – a community organizer in the neighborhood - to go over the photographs that he had taken. Below are excerpts from that conversation in which he discusses the experience of taking the photographs and how he made sense of this experience as being a product of living in the inner city.

“How did it go?” I asked him.

“I had a hard time, Kara, I had a hard time,” he tells me.

Its sad its like that, but a lot of people that hang out, if they see a person taking pictures of a building the first thing that come to mind is negativity. ‘Who you taking pictures of man, you working with the police undercover?’ Even though they know me, that’s the first thing that comes to mind. You know people in this neighborhood, they don’t really trust. Then I’m in the corner store and the guy asked me the same thing: ‘Why you taking pictures?’ I think he thought I was with the health department. He asked me ‘do you have a permit to do this?’ I told him all about the study and showed him the instructions you gave me but he still followed me all around the store.

Although Jordan found this experience to be sad, it did not surprise him He understood this as a product of living in the inner city as a black man. Living in this neighborhood meant that people didn’t necessarily trust each other. On the one hand, times were hard and people had to do what they had to do to survive. On the other hand, black people were often the target of suspicion, misrepresentation, and disrespect. This made Jordan angry. He tells me,

Instead of assuming that I was coming in here doing something to better the store, they assumed that I was doing something wrong. I believe that if I was dressed in a uniform it would’ve been different. But me going in there dresses as a black man? Cause most of these stores are run by Arabs and they have a negative attitude towards black people already.

Jordan highlights a racial tension that many respondents expressed. The corner stores were owned and run by men from the Middle East, and this made a lot of people feel anger. Wayne, for example, also brought this up: “we can’t keep our money circulating for our people. The last black owned corner store closed last year. And the other one was a year and a half ago. And these were my friends and they were successful business men. Now these men come from across the other side of the world and they getting paid. Now,

does that make any sense to you?” Jordan connected this racial tension and exploitation in the corner stores into a larger racial order in which white people in white neighborhoods had status and were therefore treated with respect and dignity whereas black people from the inner city had no status and were therefore treated with disrespect. This translated into the quality of foods that were sold in these neighborhoods. As he was talking about his experience being followed while trying to take photographs, his tone of voice and body language became increasingly frustrated. He shared,

I bet you if I went to Berkeley or somewhere out there ‘How are you doing sir, can I help you?’ I bet if I went to a white area, it’s probably a different attitude. But it is what it is. It’s a trip out here [in the neighborhood]. It’s sad in a way. I see what they mean on the TV when they say only certain lives matter. Some of the youngsters are out here being corrupt but not all black people are like that. You can go to Albany. Your gonna be approached with: ‘How are you doing today? Do you need anything?’ You walk into a store out here and they don’t even look at you, say hello to you, nothing. Nothing to make you feel worthwhile or comfortable. Say we all went to the mini-mart. They’re not gonna say: ‘How are you doing today?’ They might be on the phone or smoking a cigarette. All they care about is what money you’re spending.

This was one of many ways in which residents of the Turf felt exploited and undervalued by the corner stores in the neighborhood. In fact, Shakira took her comparison one step further and suggested that the mere presence of corner stores was a sign of economic devaluation and poverty. She shared with me, “over here we got a lot of corner stores. You go up to the hills, there’s no corner stores. Well, there’s probably one or two but you gotta drive to that corner store. Everything is different. You have different opportunities.”

They also felt that the corner stores stocked inferior quality foods that were often a gamble. Respondents reported times when they bought things that had gone bad. Shakira and Monet are examples of this. For Shakira it was an onion. For Monet, it was a carton of milk. In both instances, these women’s experiences drove them to believe that the corner stores were not to be trusted because the owners didn’t care about their customers and, therefore, could sell them inferior products. As Shakira articulates,

I would never buy fruits and vegetables from the corner store because I just think that, I just wouldn’t eat it. I would just feel like it’s...i’m not gonna say clean cause that’s not what I mean. But I wouldn’t feel like it was fresh enough. You feel me? When it came from a grocery store, or if it came from the Mexican people who there on the corner with they fruit? Oh yeah! I’ll go get some fruits or vegetables from them. But the corner store? No!”

Jordan echoed these sentiments. During our second interview, he showed me a photo that he had taken of the corner store that he likes the best. “This is the place that I go if I need something really fast, like a loaf of bread or something. They keep stuff more or less updated, at least for the inner city. A lot of these neighborhood stores keep things on the

shelf way past when its fresh. This place, the stuff I get is pretty much fresh. You know in other stores, it just doesn't feel fresh when you pick it up. And then you look at the sell by date and it's a month or two old." Through experience, Jordan, like Monet and Shakira, understood that the food available to purchase closest to the Turf was not reliable. Jordan also illuminates that the best quality food was still only good compared to the probably expired foods for sale down the street.

Respondents also overwhelmingly agreed that the prices at the corner store were much higher than in the grocery store. These accounts affirm that poverty penalty hypothesis that foods sold in inner cities is often of inferior For this reason, they tried not to buy grocery items at these places, though they often found themselves doing so when, like Jordan, they were out of food and without transportation. Not only did respondents affirm the poverty penalty hypothesis, they also shared stories of being overcharged. John was the first of my respondents to talk to me about this. He and his wife receive food stamps, but it is not enough to get them from the beginning to the end of the month. When money ran out, they had a credit account set up at the corner store nearest to their home. On this account, they are allowed to buy food items now and pay for them later. However, several months before we met, John went to settle his credit account and found that the bill was much higher than he had anticipated. He took it home to his wife and they sat down to try and do the calculations. How much had they spent? Was this total too high? Were they being cheated? Because he had kept pretty good receipts, he was able to determine that they had overcharged him by \$45.00. He took all of the paperwork back in to the store and discussed it with the owner, who suggested it had been an error and changed their bill. But John wasn't convinced. He wondered with me during the interview whether the store owners had done this on purpose, assuming that few people would take the time to double check.

This sense of being cheated came up during my interview with Jordan as well. He commented on the workers in the corner stores with dismay: "And if you're not paying attention, they might try to cheat you out of some of your change." At this point, Fantasia chimed in "Yeah, I've noticed that too." I share Johns story and ask Jordan if he had heard of this happening. He replied with resolve, "Yes, yes, yes, yes. It's sad. Here's an example. A lot of people on the first of the month get food stamps. [The corner stores] buy people's food stamps. Say you wanted \$20-30 cash, say you needed \$20, you needed gas or whatever and you didn't have any cash but you had food stamps. They will charge you \$40 in food stamps for \$20 cash." Fantasia is chiming in here with "mmm-hmm" as he speaks, shaking her head up and down in affirmation. "Corner stores!" Jordan says and laughs. "Its sad. Its sad. And these are food stamps for people's kids. Inner cities, inner cities. There's a lot of slick stuff going on."

In the Turf, there are four corner stores that sell some fresh fruits and vegetables. During my fieldwork, I visited these stores each 10 times over the course of two months. During these trips I confirmed the reports that respondents shared with me. Though some of the corner stores did stock fresh vegetables and fruits, the fresh fruit section was often a small refrigerated case on one wall or a stand alone set of stacking baskets by the door. The four stores that had fruits and vegetable sections left a lot to be desired. Every time that I went, at least one food item was wilted, bruised, or clearly past the point of being ripe. I witnessed bins of avocados, which were all brown and soft to the touch, lemons with mold spots, and lettuce that was wilted. Even when these expired or expiring foods

were surrounded by other foods that looked edible, the presence of expiring foods made me, like Shakira, conclude that this was not the place to buy fruits and vegetables at all. On one occasion, I bought an apple. It looked fresh and was in a bin of other produce that looked fresh as well. But the apple cost \$1.00 and this made me frustrated and angry. I could buy 2 apples at the grocery store for that much, maybe three. My observations confirmed the reports I heard during my interviews. Foods at the corner stores were more expensive than the grocery stores. They also often looked like they were about to go bad. This arose in me negative emotions of frustration, anger and a feeling of being trapped.

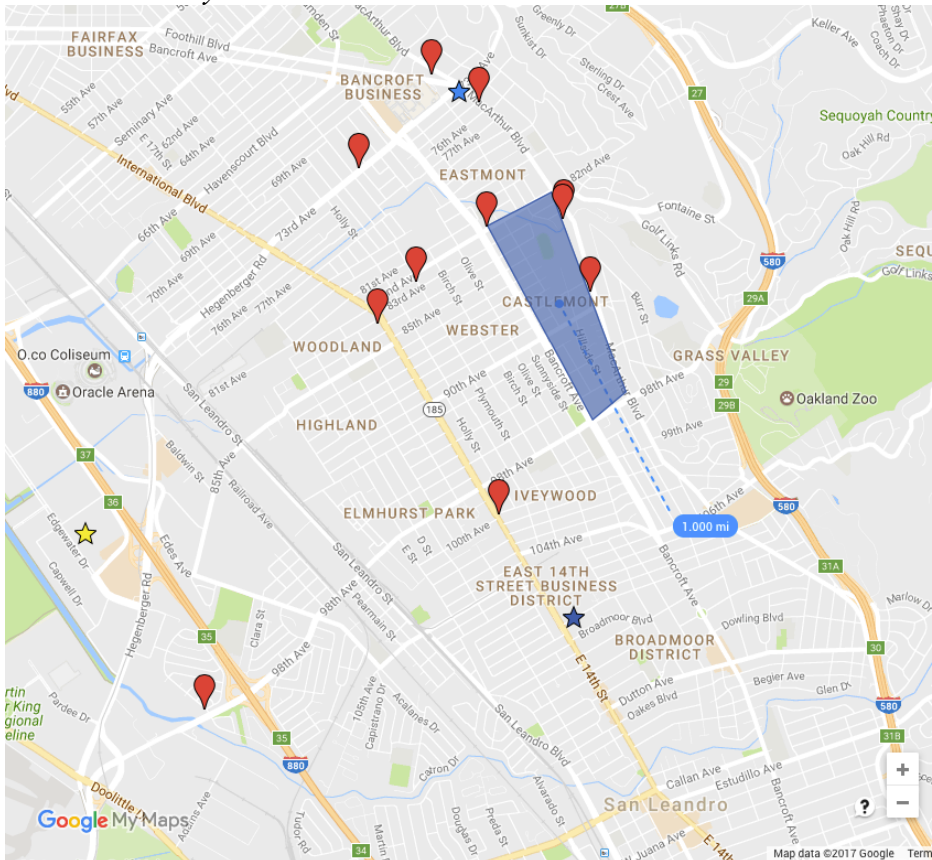
In all, respondents shared with me how the corner stores were a fixture of their daily lives. These stores stood as a symbol for their denigrated status within the city. Respondents did not trust the food sold there. They also did not trust the employees not to swindle them. These were places where respondents often experienced micro-interactions of disrespect, or as Jordan put it, as if he was not “worthwhile.” At the exact same time, these were the places that respondents relied on to feed themselves and their families when money ran out or they couldn’t get to the grocery stores. In fact, most respondents went to these stores every day. Some respondents went there several times a day. This conundrum – needing to rely on stores where people felt simultaneously exploited and degraded – was woven into the fabric of their daily food consumption practices in a way that informed their logic of accomplishment.

FOOD GIVEAWAYS

The food giveaways also represented an integral part of daily life in the Turf both for those who participated and for those who didn’t (see Figure 20). For example, every Wednesday starting at 11am on MacArthur and 86th avenue, one of the neighborhood churches gives away free grocery bags of fresh and nonperishable foods. The food giveaway takes place in the church parking lot, which is enclosed by a tall metal fence and secured with a padlock. People begin to form a receiving line around 10:00am. Over the course of the hour, the single file line can grow to a block and a half long. On this main thoroughfare, the food giveaway line is a somber scene and a public spectacle. The people waiting mostly appear tired, sad, on drugs or having been on drugs. To Oakland’s credit, there is an impressive social safety net of free food available to those in need. This safety net is comprised of soup kitchens, food banks, and food giveaways. Many of these services are coordinated between the Alameda County Food Bank and local church’s. The scene on MacArthur and 86th is calm compared to many food giveaways in East Oakland. I learned from Steward that this is in part because this particular food giveaway doesn’t give out as much food as some of the others. According to my respondents, the two most popular food giveaways happen on Tuesdays and Thursdays about 11 blocks south and 20 blocks north from the Turf (See the blue stars on figure 6.1). One food giveaway begins at 1pm but those who wish to receive food must arrive at 9am and wait in a line to receive a number. Then, recipients can either wait in line according to their number or come back closer to 1pm when the program begins. The other only happens once a month. At this one people begin lining up as early as 6:00am for services that open at 11am. As you can imagine, getting free food was a time intensive and humbling task. People there were often hungry, and hunger often led to anger or frustration. It was not uncommon for fights to break out or people to act aggressively towards one another. If

someone arrived to the food giveaway by car or wearing clothes that signaled any kind of economic stability, there was sure to be a scene, as others in line would call them out for taking food from those who truly needed it.

Figure 20: Free Food Services In The Turf. *The blue stars are the two most popular services according to my respondents. The yellow star represents the location of the Alameda County Food Bank.*



Source: Google Maps (2017), modifications by author.

In order to receive the food at these giveaways, respondents needed to show a proof of residence and a valid ID. This proved to be a barrier for my respondents who were staying somewhere temporarily, living in a shelter, or out of their cars. Those who made it through the line and had the proper ID had to deal with unpredictable volunteers who could be rude. Several respondents told me that they witnessed volunteers stash the best foods for themselves before they opened the doors or show preferential treatment to some recipients over others. Cecilia is a 30-year old Hispanic mother of two. About a year before we met, she was living in an apartment in the Turf with her family and getting ready to move to a better part of town. At the last minute, her new landlord gave the apartment to another family and the place that they had been living was already rented to new tenants. With nowhere to go, Cecilia and her husband took their family to the short-term rental motel up on 90th and MacArthur. She thought it would be a month long stay as they looked for a new place. But with rental prices skyrocketing in Oakland, a new place was impossible and the short-term motel turned into their long term solution.

During the first month at the motel, money ran out and Cecilia was struggling to feed her family. She had a part time job, which made it difficult to get to the food giveaways early enough to get a number. She also didn't yet have proof of residence. She went to the food giveaway anyways because it was her last hope for groceries. "I had to sneak out of work and wait in this long line and then I straight up got turned away. 'You don't have proof of residence, you don't get food,'" Cecilia recalls the volunteer telling her at the door.

And what was crazy is at the same time I'm watching this woman let her friend in under the radar. I burst into tears right there in the line. You know, this was it – my last hope. I didn't know how I was going to feed my kids that night. I begged the woman and tried to explain my situation. But it was hard. It shouldn't be that hard. This is the place people come when they don't have anything. And then we are treated like we have nothing. Like we *are* nothing.

Jordan provided me with another example of this. "Last thanksgiving I went to a food giveaway to get a Turkey," he shared with me. "And the lady asked me 'You gonna take that or are you gonna go sell that?' I was like 'Excuse me? Are you serious?' She was a black lady, too. Crazy. People are actually doing that, I know. I mean, but I didn't look like the kind of person... I know *I'm* not doing that. I feel like the way I present myself... I'm respectable. I speak well. But she had the nerve to ask me that question. I took it, but it didn't feel the same. I hardly even wanted it no more because I felt so disrespected." These factors – the long lines, the hit to people's pride, and the unpredictable behavior of other patrons and volunteers – made many respondents tried to avoid these food giveaways all together and instead go to soup kitchens or the Alameda County Food Bank instead. Frankie shares her experience around this,

You go down there, you wait in line, then they got all these people, then they let their friend wait in front of you, while you been standing there like three hours. So I just don't do it. When someone does stuff like that it makes me not wanna go in. That church down there... they lie and tell me to put my name on a list, they was gonna give me a christmas basket, they was gonna call me, never heard from them. All they wanted me to do was get me down to that church and give my money to that church - told them I aint got no money to give you. I got bills to pay! Why would I come to church when you gonna lie to me about free food to get me to come down there? That's how life is.

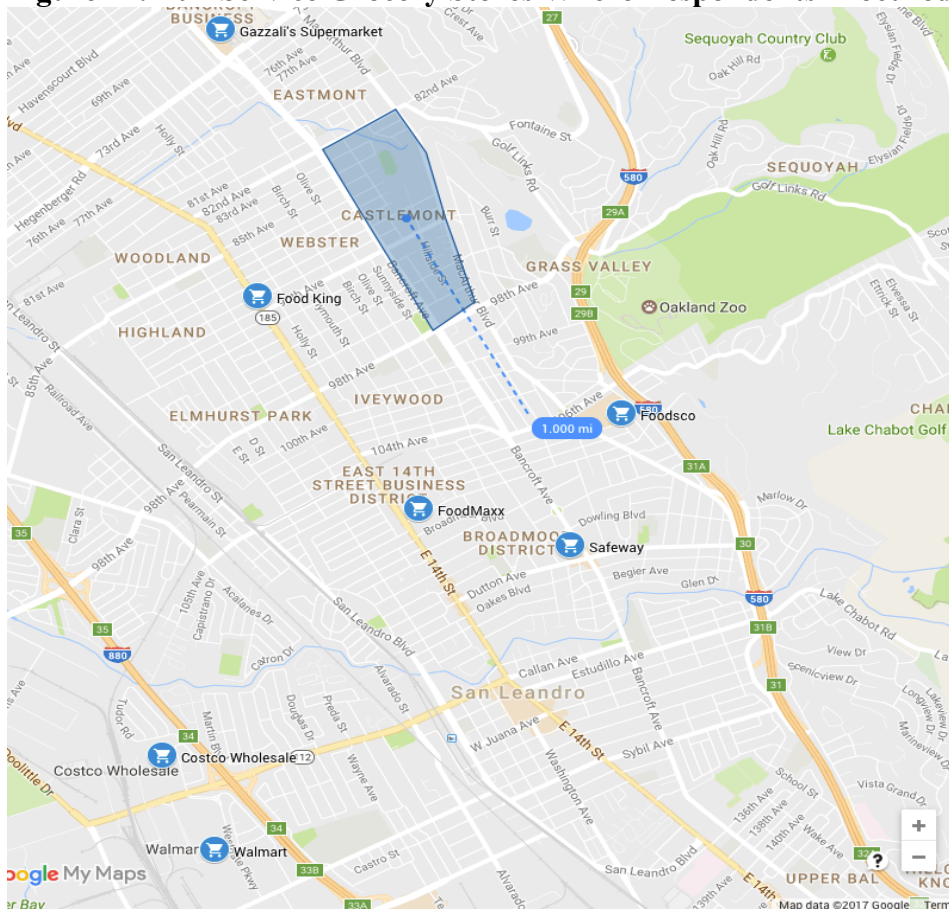
But the food bank was far away – it would take an hour to walk or 15 minutes to drive – and most of the food kitchens served breakfast only.

Still, for those without money, food stamps, or social support, the free food programs in and around the Turf proved to be lifesavers. Several respondents noted that the quality of food given away had shifted over the past five years to include more fresh fruits and vegetables. Before, they recalled receiving mostly nonperishable items such as rice, canned goods and pasta. This made my respondents very grateful, as this was many times their only source of fresh foods.

FULL SERVICE GROCERY STORES

Full service grocery stores were the other place where my respondents procured food (see Figure 21). The closest full service grocery stores were Gazzali's a mile to the north, Foods Co a mile to the south and Food King $\frac{3}{4}$ miles away to the west.

Figure 21: Full Service Grocery Stores Where Respondents Procured Food



Source: Google Maps (2017), modifications by author.

Curiously, only a couple of respondent mentioned going to Food King or Gazzali's. Food King, a small produce and canned foods store seemed to drop off people's radar. Respondents perceived Gazzali's to be low quality food that was more expensive than Foods Co. and catering to the Hispanic community in the neighborhood. Therefore, most respondents travelled south to go to Foods Co., or to Safeway if they had a bit more money to spend. Respondents also shopped at other discount grocery stores such as FoodMaxx, Costco, Walmart, or the Dollar Store. For those respondents who owned or had access to a car, getting to the grocery store was not a problem. Foods Co., for instance, was a 6 minute drive down MacArthur Boulevard. However, out of these 20 respondents, only 5 owned a car themselves. The others took the bus or relied on a mixture of family members, friends or neighbors to drive them. For them, getting to the grocery store wasn't easy or convenient as they relied on others to transport them or had

to walk, which could take 20-30 minutes. Maybe not surprisingly then, no one mentioned walking. Although the streets were relatively flat, carrying groceries back through the neighborhood on foot was labor intensive. It also made some of my respondents feel nervous. As Julie said “I don’t mind this neighborhood. This neighborhood is cool. But I’m not trying to be just walking around by myself for no reason. Especially at the beginning of the month when people have just gotten paid. Don’t let me be walking around with no money in my pocket.”

Respondents talked about going to Foods Co. with the most frequency. This 80,000 square food grocery store opened its doors in 2014 to help alleviate the lack of fresh foods in the area. Inside, customers are greeted with a wall of sale items and value packs. The aisles are wide and the ceilings are tall, giving the store a warehouse feel. Respondents liked this store because of the low prices and access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Shakira reflects, “over here we’ve got Foods Co. They got bargain shopping there. They’ve got everything there you want. Everything.” Brenda shares a similar sentiment: “I like shopping out here. They have good deals and they have the foods that I want.”

Many respondents expressed an affinity to this store in particular because they saw it as their neighborhood store. As Jordan describes for me “I go to other grocery stores and they’re cool, or whatever, but Foods Co., its like our hood grocery store. You know? Our community grocery store. We didn’t always have a grocery store over here so it’s a place I feel comfortable going. I see people from the community and its ‘hey how you doing?’ So that’s nice.” Wayne echoed this sentiment almost exactly. He felt camaraderie with the other patrons at the store and pride shopping at a place he felt comfortable. “This is our grocery store,” he shared with me. “We shopping for the same reasons. We gone make this our spot. Foods Co. We gone adopt this as our store. They made it clean, and we gone go there and you shop till you drop. It’s the community! That’s’ what makes it.” Foods Co. was indeed experienced as a step up from the corner stores, dollar store, or food giveaways, which many respondents described as dirty or feeling unclean, unkept, and undesirable. Mark’s feeling of affinity to Foods Co was in part informed by experiences being profiled at stores in other parts of Oakland. This was an experience that came up frequently in my interviews with these respondents who voiced either having been profiled or generally feeling ill at ease at stores in other neighborhoods. Mark reflected on this experiences being profiled with anger and frustration.

Me and a friend was in this store over in Rockridge. We was getting two bags of shrimp and some sirloin steak and then they said: ‘Security on line such and such.’ And we said, ‘do you believe that?’ I mean, shrimp?! Shrimp is expensive, and I was ready to do some damage. Then I seen the motherfucking people following us. When they did that, I said throw that shit down, and we went to Foods Co.! They treated us so bad [at the other store]. That profiling was a mess. ‘Security on line such and such.’ Can you believe that? And I was *dressed*. I *stay* dressed. I don’t walk in there looking like I’m gonna steal stuff, rob anyone. You know what I’m saying? I live nice, I feel good, so why would they do that? Then there was another time. [The security guard] came from behind. They said ‘Are

you gonna pay for this?’ So I have been profiled and it’s very distasteful. But you know I’m so used to it, you know what I’m saying?

Wayne makes sense of this happening to him because he carries the marks of living in the Turf with him when he leaves. Although he wears nice clothes, he understands that he is still read as an outsider when he leaves his community. He continues, “In different hoods like that...you can’t just go from this hood to that. That’s why we gotta turn this store into *our* store because we ain’t *got* no other store we know we can go to! Because you get profiled.” This made Foods Co. hold significant symbolic value for him as a safe place where he wouldn’t get accused of stealing or treated with suspicion. This sense of comfort outweighed some of the more inconvenient experiences that people had at the store. During our interview, Fabiana shared with me that although she likes Foods Co. because of the price and the location, she did feel like it is sometimes a battlefield to get into and out of the store. Often the shopping carts are scattered around the parking lot, there aren’t enough checkers so the lines are long and the workers aren’t always friendly. She also found that the produce as sometimes fresh and sometimes going bad on the shelf. Lastly, she reflected that, while they do have a small organic section, the organic food is more expensive and not always the foods that she wanted to buy. For example, they always have organic kale but almost never have organic collard greens, which are the greens she buys most frequently.

In sum, the full service grocery stores were located far enough outside of the Turf that respondents needed a car to get there. Many didn’t own cars, which made going to the grocery store an outing that needed some planning and could only happen every so often. Respondents were thankful for Foods Co. because they felt comfortable there and attached symbolic meaning to the store as their neighborhood store. However, though the price was right and they often ran into people that they knew at the grocery store, they didn’t always enjoy the experience making their way to and through it.

All in all, procuring food from day to day was an experience in which respondents confronted their degraded racialized class position within the city. They often felt exploited and disrespected at the corner stores, overwhelmed at the food giveaways, and racially profiled when they tried to shop for food in other neighborhoods. They knew the food available to them was of lower quality than the food sold to people in wealthier communities. And so, despite the fact that there was a lot to eat around them, they felt like there were very few choices, and that the kinds of foods for sale were foods of racialized poverty. For example, I asked Shakira if she thought living in the Turf made it easy or difficult to get food from day to day. She answered, “well I’m gonna go back to the whole deprivation thing with my whole neighborhood. Its harder.” Living in the Turf made it harder because there was so much food but so little variety, confirming the ‘food swamp’ hypothesis that Doran had spoken about years before in Santa Cruz. Healthy and high quality foods were both absent from the immediate neighborhood and also too expensive to purchase. She thought of these together as mutually reinforcing and imbricated reflections of living in poverty. She continued,

S: I like Filet Mignon, but I can’t afford Filet Mignon. I ate scallops and stuff. I’ve never seen that here. I’d like to see some different experiences. I watched this one movie *Mr. Beans Holiday*. He was eating slimy things that I

don't want to eat, but I'd love to see it in a restaurant with somebody next to me, you know what I'm saying?

K: Cause they're not a lot of restaurants around here?

D: No! You gonna eat the same. Either you're gonna go eat some fast food or you're gonna go to the grocery store and get some stuff that you already know how to cook, or you're gonna...get some fast food! *[laughter]*

Sahana echoed this sentiment. She eats fast food almost every day but doesn't like to eat this food for several reasons that I will discuss in the next section below. Still, when I asked her why she ate it, she answered that this was essentially the only food that was available to the poor and disenfranchised.

It's basically the only thing we really have up here, and that's really affordable for all of us. And then everything that is so healthy is so far or costs heck money. Sometimes I don't just buy food for myself, I buy food for my friends if they don't have any money. Sometimes they don't have money, and they need it. McDonalds is cheap enough that I can buy for me and my friends. Sometimes I just get like mad, like why don't they have healthy stuff for us too? But then, I mean, that's just what we grew up eating so we just got adapted to it

Sahana and Shakira both make sense of the food around them as part of what it means to be black, poor, and living in the inner city. Though they wished for other options, their wishes seemed futile.

In the section that follows, I argue that the daily hardships that they endured as a result of racialized poverty, the neighborhood context in which they lived and ate, and these experiences procuring food in their communities all together informed how my respondents made choices and made meaning out of their choices. Their eating aspirations and their material reality were like discrete spheres that did not overlap. While they had distinct ideas about what they wanted to eat to be their best selves, they did not perceive a direct pathway to achieve this. Therefore, they focused their daily goals and choices around materiality – material and physical survival. This framing allowed them to largely subdue distress around the disjuncture between their eating aspirations and their daily food consumption practices. How and what they ate was a matter of necessity and a symbol of surviving in an environment where daily life was a struggle. However, as I will discuss below, while they made peace with their positions within this field of food and health, they weren't being fooled by their position. In other words their position and disposition overlapped in practice but they understood they were eating some of the lowest quality options within a stratified system and that they couldn't easily escape this reality. As Shakira aptly stated about her feelings eating at McDonalds, "it was filling but not fulfilling." I posit that within this segregated and ghettoized neighborhood context in which systemic deprivation and racialized poverty structured daily life, survival was an accomplishment.

“NOT WANTING FOR NOTHING”

In 2011, Martin’s son was killed by the Oakland police. A few months later, his girlfriend passed away and he lost his job as a general manager at a fast food restaurant where he had worked for 15 years. The overlapping trauma created a level of stress so intense that he needed to retreat into solitude. He did this by becoming voluntarily homeless – leaving his family and living out of his truck. This made him feel like he had freedom, but with the freedom to be alone came hardship. He had no kitchen and he had no income. Despite these hardships, Martin saw himself as a survivor. He shared with me, “I refuse to be defeated. I raised 9 kids at the house at one time. So when people ask me how I’m doing today I say, ‘I woke up this morning.’ As long as you wake up every day, you have a chance to make it better. So I do ok. I’m a survivor.” This sentiment – “I’m a survivor” or “I do what I need to do to survive” – was one that I heard repeatedly in during my interviews in the Turf. Shakira provides another example of this logic of accomplishment. As I discussed in the prologue, Shakira was mostly on her own to provide for herself from day to day because her mother was in permanent hospice care. She had been looking for a job since she graduated from high school a year ago, but full time jobs are not easy to find in the Turf. Therefore, she spent her days doing odd jobs here and there for people in the neighborhood, helping out her family, and interviewing for open positions. Although this was not easy to do, growing up in the Turf provided her with the skills to know how to survive in tough times. “If you come from the hood, you know how to survive in the struggle,” she tells me with pride. “You know what the struggle is like so you know how to hang onto money and you know how to replenish it. Cause you’ve had to do it so much with little or nothing.”

I argue that this logic of being a survivor structured how people moved through their days and how food fit into their days such that food related health aspirations were often buried in the practice of survival. This logic of being a survivor, then, was also how they made sense of the gap between their eating aspirations and their daily practices. After taking me through the food that he had eaten the day before our interview, I asked Mark what he was thinking about when he was making his choices. He replied, “Let me just put some food in my system. Got a long day and gotta make sure I eat something. Make sure I’m not wanting for nothing. I wasn’t thinking on the health benefits.” Here, Mark expresses the common framing that people whose relationships with food were of survival used in the Turf: food was fuel and food was necessity. And if food was fuel and necessity, especially given that it wasn’t guaranteed, then eating was within itself an accomplishment. As Mark so aptly puts it, in an environment of scarcity, “not wanting for nothing” was the markings of a good day. Shakira expressed an almost identical sentiment in her articulation of what she was thinking about when she ate the day before our interview. In the evening, her girlfriend’s mother bought them pizza from the 7-Eleven by their house. When I asked her if she enjoyed eating it, she responded, “*Yeah*, I enjoyed the pizza. I was *hungry*. If I’m hungry, I’m gonna eat. I’d rather get this food and not have my stomach talking to me.”

The other way that survival and scarcity informed respondents daily practices was in being too busy to eat because they were working hard to make ends meet. John tells me, “In the morning I don’t eat. I get up and I’m gone, going about my day. I gotta hustle and time is money. Then I’ll get hungry eventually but in the morning, I’m out and on it.”

Skipping meals also meant that, in theory, they could save money for later on. This quotation illuminates that, for John, being too busy to eat made him feel accomplished because it was a sign that he was working to provide for himself and his family. In this case, time was a resource that could be used and that was, in some cases, more valuable than food.

Respondents such as Brenda had eating aspirations and daily food consumption practices that did not align. However, they didn't think much of this misalignment. Rather their practices were her practices, despite the distance that existed between her aspirations and her practices. During our interview, Brenda also spoke about survival as the lens through which she makes meaning of her practices but rejected thinking about food any deeper than this. When I asked her to take me through what she was thinking about as she was making her decisions about what to eat the day before, she looked at me sideways and took a long pause. Then she replied, "That's a good question. I eat to survive. There's nothing...man I don't know. I can't answer that. I eat to stay...alive! Like I say, food is the last thing I think about really."

For others, the misalignment was felt as emotions that needed to be managed and survival was the framework to help them make peace with and keep going despite their position. Paul and Martin, for example, both typically eat at least one meal a day at a local soup kitchen. They both express similar sentiments about the experience eating there. On the one hand, they are grateful for a hot meal. On the other hand, they feel angry that this is their only option. As they juggle between the two, they work to subdue their anger to their gratitude and use their framing of survival to anchor this emotion work. Martin describes the experience going to the soup kitchen:

M: I eat breakfast over here at Word Assembly at 96th and MacArthur. They have breakfast Monday through Friday and every first Saturday which consists of a hard boiled eggs, grits or oatmeal, and a piece of toast and maybe one strip of bacon or one strip of sausage. Its cool [long pause]

K: You sound like you have more you want to say about that.

M: Well, you know. It's...I mean I have no other options so... I'm grateful and I try to remember that. Who am I to be complaining? What's the phrase – beggars can't be choosers? I don't have any other food options. And it's a really great thing this church is doing for the community. But it's not really what I *want*. Its all the same. Bland. You know, free food. And they serve it to you on a tray and...its just, it's just...*free food*... a reminder to stay humble and be thankful but I wish I had my own kitchen so I could cook up those eggs and grits the way I want, the way I like them. But you know, you do what you gotta do to survive in these streets and then keep it moving. I'm homeless and that just is what it is. You can't think too hard about it or you just get depressed.

Low-income respondents who lived in the Oasis were surrounded by people who appeared to be practicing wellness through food. And in fact just living in the Oasis

represented a step towards wellness and upward mobility for respondents who came from neighborhoods like to the Turf. However, similarly situated respondents in the Turf were surrounded by others like themselves who didn't see a pathway out of the neighborhood. Instead, respondents such as Martin, Mark, Jordan, Shakira, and Juana chose to make peace with their positions and the options around them. Framing food through a lens of materiality or functional necessity, enjoying it for what it was, and subjugating anger to gratitude represented several strategies that they used to feel some level of accomplishment given their position within the field. As Martin so poignantly reflected, "You can't think too hard about it or you just get depressed."

In the section that follows, I discuss two ways that these respondents made sense of the choices that they made: as the result of poverty and as the result of racial inequality. I show that, while respondents didn't express the level of distress that those in the Oasis expressed regarding their daily food consumption practices, they often felt dissatisfied with what they ate.

FILLING BUT NOT FULFILLING

These foods of survival were good for what they were: survival foods. But respondents weren't fooled by the taste of these foods. Instead, they had made peace with eating the foods that they could eat while simultaneously experiencing these foods as fake foods made with low quality ingredients and under subpar conditions. For a lot of respondents, this made them lose their appetites. For example, Sahana typically eats one meal a day supplemented with three to six sodas. She isn't sure why she doesn't have an appetite, but she doesn't anymore. Six other respondents from the Turf mentioned a similar phenomenon. They don't really feel like eating because their choices don't feel like choices much at all. Sahana explained this to me during our interview. She works at one of the fast food restaurants near the neighborhood and so her one meal usually comes from there or the McDonalds down the street. This is convenient and cheap food on the one hand – because she gets meals for free, it allows her to save up what she earns to help her family and friends. But on the other hand, she doesn't like eating this way. As quoted above, the day before our interview, Sahana ate the following:

I came home from school, ate some cake, from my best friend, at around 12pm or 11am. Then I came here and I got some fried chicken strips and fries, then I went back to school, then I went to work, and I ate some cinnamon twists, then my boss had bought us a sandwich so I ate a sandwich, then I ate a cookie, then I was just drinking soda. I got 5 or 10 refills. But usually at work I eat a burger, some fries and a frappe

During our interview, I asked Sahana what she likes about McDonalds or the food she gets from work. She replied,

I don't like it at all, that's the problem. It's just nasty. Before I worked in a fast food restaurant, I used to always eat fast food. Now that I work in one, I see, they don't clean stuff. There's just certain stuff that you don't do to somebody's food so I don't know, I just don't feel comfortable eating that.

Having seen what it is like to prepare fast food, Sahana felt a deep aversion to eating this food. Behind the counter, the restaurant was often dirty, employees frequently didn't wear gloves or wash their hands before preparing orders, and she noticed that the food was also regularly not properly cooked. "It tastes good, but you can tell its not healthy. The meat is sometimes pink in the inside, just certain stuff that me personally I don't feel comfortable eating that stuff." Beyond concerns about cleanliness and proper cooking techniques, Sahana could also tell it wasn't healthy because it tasted fake to her. "It tastes fake you know? It doesn't taste like real food. It doesn't taste like if it were fresh, like freshly made. More cardboard tasting like." She laughs and shakes her head from side to side.

Shakira makes the same assessment of the foods that she eats, describing them as fake food that taste like cardboard. Above, I described how Shakira had eaten pizza from the 7-Eleven with her girlfriend the day before we met. While she enjoyed the pizza because she was hungry, she also enjoyed it with a grain of salt, so to speak. She described for me how she knew it wasn't "real": "It tasted like cardboard, you could tell it was fake. Just like the school pizza. It had a nice flavor to it but you could tell ain't nobody made this with real dough. Ain't nobody sat there and tossed it up." She continues this description with a comparative analysis between what she describes as real hamburgers and the hamburgers that she gets at the fast food restaurants around her. She described,

Biting into McDonalds meat doesn't feel like biting into real meat. Not even the sausages. I mean I've been eating it all my life so I want to say it *tastes* like *meat* but its *not*, you know? When I eat from an actual burger joint its juicier and I have to chew it more first off but McDonald's meat is more like rubber. That's what I mean by consistency. But the actual meat I have to chew it more. To me that's real.

PROBABLY NOT BLACK PEOPLE

Lastly, overwhelmingly, when these respondents thought of someone who was eating healthy, they thought of white, middle class women not black people and especially not black people living in the inner-city. Darnella was an African American 22-year-old mother of two. When I asked her whom she thinks of when she thinks of people who eat healthily she says "not black people. White people." When I asked her what she meant, she replied, "most of the black people that I know, we don't think about what we eat. We just eat unhealthy until we get sick and then we deal with it." Shakira, Fabiana, Juana, Sahana, DeAndre, and Samuel also articulated this. Shakira for example, imagines that someone who eats healthy is: "not a black person. I'd say a white girl running in some jogging, tight pants they be wearing with a headband and a little ponytail. That's what I see. With the little Earpod things, running." Many respondents echoed this sentiment. In fact, one respondent referred to "the silent epidemic in the community" – people eating fast food and sweet and salty snacks until they hit their mid-to-late 20s at which point people start getting diagnosed with diabetes or high blood pressure or dying from health

complications. Shakira and Sahana suggest that black people don't tend to see themselves as healthy because no one else sees them as healthy. Speaking about businesses and residents in the rest of the city, Sahana reveals,

I feel like they don't really see all of us as healthy, they just see us eating snacks all the time, that's why all the bad places move they business up here cause they know all kids like to do is eat fast food, and eat chips and candy all day. And that's why most of us have bad teeth. Just stuff like bumps and things that don't make us healthy at all.

Sahana was absolutely right. If the responses from upper-middle class participants in the Oasis was any indication, those with higher levels of status and prestige did tend to look down on the food consumption practices of the poor with disgust and moralize them as making bad choices for themselves and their families. In fact, Bitekoff's (2013) book *Eating Right in America* shows that this has been the case historically that wealthier Americans chastise the poor for their amoral, slovenly ways of eating as a way to affirm their own middle class identities and distance from poverty. This made it harder for my respondents to imagine that wellness and health were truly available to them through food. Instead, these respondents knew that they were looked down upon by the larger society as making poor choices and not caring about their health. They had learned that no one saw the black poor as healthy. Rather, the black poor were already always sick or about to be sick because of the bad choices that they made. Therefore, as they made decisions about what to eat from day to day, they did so with a framework of being a survivor and with little expectation that they could achieve the kind of wellness and health for themselves they believed white middle class women accomplished with ease.

IN SUM

This group of 20 respondents materiality was the dominant framework through which they viewed their environment and their choices. It was common on the one hand that my interviews with these respondents in the Turf included stories of people dealing with great losses and deep struggles, incarceration, drug use, prostitution, homelessness, and food insecurity. On the other hand my respondents endured these systemic and perpetual hardships with great resilience and social networks stepping up to help fill in the gaps. They adopted a logic of accomplishment in which being a survivor was centered and their daily food consumption practices were about being full not fulfilled. They understood that they were trying to succeed in an environment of scarcity in which there were few options that they considered to be high quality. They also make sense of this as a result of racialized poverty. Because they saw their lack of choice as a result of racialized poverty and felt blocked from true pathways towards health and wellness, they made peace with their daily food consumption practices and found ways to feel accomplished as they procured and consumed food from day to day. A quick fix wasn't the best fix, but it was a fix nonetheless.

CHAPTER 7

Accomplishment

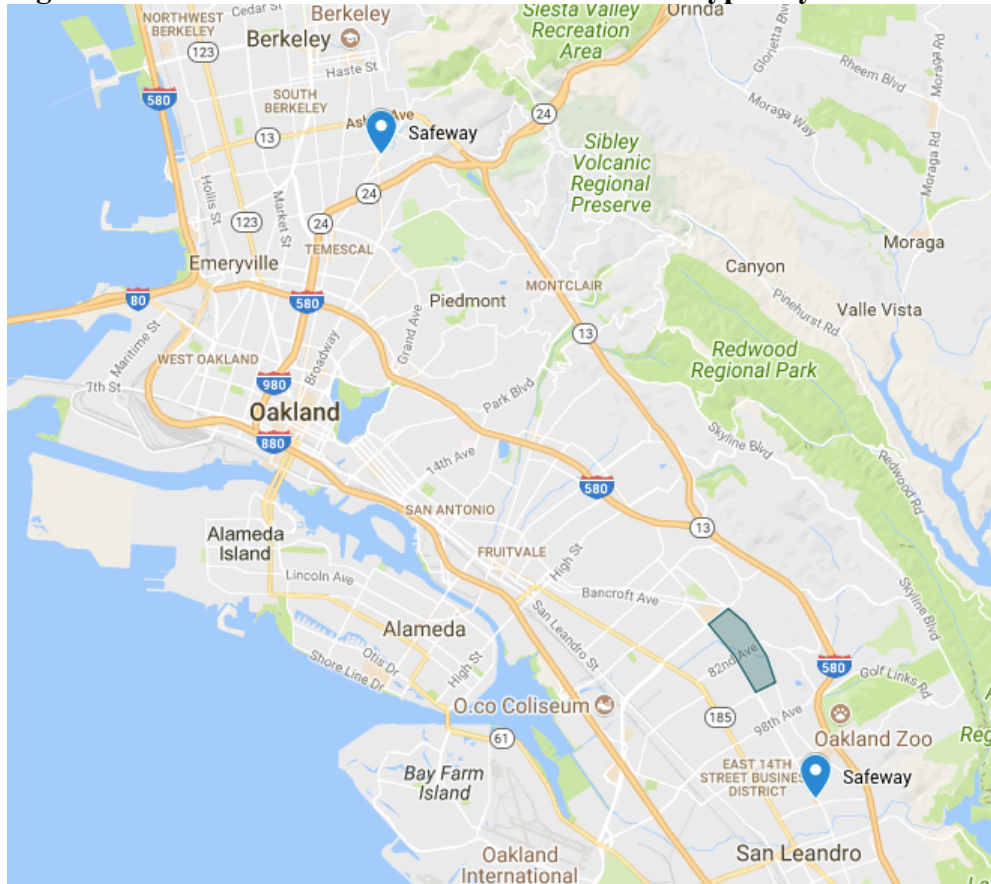
Cameron is a 23-year-old African American line cook and father who grew up and went to school in the Turf. On a scale of excellent, good, fair or poor, Cameron rates his health as “excellent.” He links this entirely to the food that he eats. “Right now,” he explained, “I feel like I’m *very* health. I don’t eat the same way [that I used to]. I eat different so I know I should probably be *highly* healthy.” A couple of years after graduating from High School, he took a job as a cook and cashier in a local restaurant where he makes approximately \$27,000 a year. He lives with his auntie and his son in an apartment complex. A typical day for Cameron begins early in the morning when he and his son eat oatmeal and a piece of fruit for breakfast. After working out, he goes to work where he eats a breakfast sandwich comprised of a croissant, egg and turkey sausage with a carton of chocolate milk. He typically eats two other full meals during his work day: one around noon and one around 2:00 pm. His favorites consist of a hamburger, French fries, and a milkshake or breaded chicken strips with French fries. Additionally, he will snack on a granola bar or two and a bag of chips. After leaving work, he comes home and eats a home cooked meal that either he or his son’s mother has prepared. Typical dinners include baked chicken, ground turkey burgers and spaghetti. Sometimes he has a snack before bed. The day before our interview, that snack was a rice crispy treat from a local gas station. He also noted that he drinks a lot of water and stays away from soda. He commented, “when I was younger I used to drink a lot of soda, so I have enough sugar to last me the rest of my life. So I drink a lot of water now.”

Cameron spent most of his teenage years in and out of juvenile detention centers. When he was 21, he realized that this way of life was going to lead him to prison and that he needed to make a change. He got a job at a local restaurant and stopped running the streets. In the restaurant, he was suddenly around people his age talking about food and food related disease. He noticed that almost every member of his family had been diagnosed with high blood pressure, and through these conversations with his peers, he connected the dots that this was related to what they were eating. This motivated him to make the change. He realized “I done change my life, but I’m still eating stuff that’ll kill me. I’m done doing stuff in the streets that can kill me, but I’m still eating stuff that’ll kill me. I’m eating McDonalds, Pizza e’ryday. It was crazy. I was like, ‘I gotta do better than this, man.’” So one day he woke up, told himself ‘Ok that’s it! I’m not doing it no more,’ and “went and got a big old thing of water.”

This new way of eating includes a mantra: elimination and transformation. No more fast foods or sodas, no more fried foods, only baked. Cut down on oil and salt. Drink water instead of juice. Buy as much fresh food as possible and buy organic food over nonorganic to cut back on pesticide and GMO consumption. His commitment to eating this way also led him to start shopping at Safeway in North Oakland on a commercial street full of high-end stores and restaurants. Without traffic, getting to this store takes Cameron 20 minutes on the highway. He reflects, “Safeway is my store because their stuff is high end and it *is* high [cost] but the quality of the food is what really matters to me.” He finds Safeway to be clean and the staff there to be friendly. He attributes this to the store being careful and caring. “They make sure you can carry your bags out, you know. They kind of watch who they hire. They don’t just hire anybody,” he

shared with me. He also likes that he can return anything without a problem if something is wrong. When he doesn't have time to drive to the Safeway in North Berkeley, he goes to the Safeway to the south of the Turf in the neighboring suburb of San Leandro, a closer 7-minute drive. He owns a car, making it possible to get to these stores. He estimates that he takes 2-3 trips to the grocery store in a month and spends between \$55-70 per trip. Sometimes it has to be less than that. This money goes towards food for his auntie, his son and himself. He is thankful for his job, which allows him to eat for free during his shifts.

Figure 22: Food Establishments Where Cameron Typically Procures Food



Source: Google Maps (2017), modifications by author.

If Cameron were to buy his groceries in the Turf, his options would be either the Middle Eastern owned mom and pop stores on the corners or the full service grocery store Foods Co. about 20 blocks away. But he hates shopping at these places. He rates the quality of the food at the corner stores as “terrible,” noting several times that he has found products still on the shelves way past their expiration date. Furthermore, when he has brought these items to the attention of the workers there, they didn’t care, apologize, or remove the items from the shelves. These mom and pop stores that also sell meat were the worst to him. He offers a description: “Floor’s yellow, not white. Discoloration on the boards, discoloration on the meat. You can tell, too much leaving the meat out when a lot of its been exposed to a lot of air so you can tell from the color.” While the quality of the food at Foods Co is, perhaps, on par with Safeway, the experience going there leaves a

lot to be desired in Cameron's opinion. He shared, "Foods Co, its probably the same quality food but as far as the experience go? I don't know about that one. Seriously ghetto. Have you ever been to a welfare office? Babies crying, mamas hollering [*he laughs*]... its just...people stealing. You see it [*he laughs again*], its just *ghetto*. Its hood. That's how I can explain it." Therefore, shopping at Safeway is a way for Cameron to embody his new set of choices as he works to distance himself from what he suggests is the typical food consumption practices of those in his neighborhood. As he explains these typical food consumption practices to me, he reveals a racial logic that wellness is associated with whiteness and eating poorly is associated with blackness.

Black people, compared to white people, our diets are ridiculous. And that's another reason why. As black people we eat terrible that's why we don't *live* long. That's why our average life expectancy is like 55-60 years old, because of high blood pressure different things like that. Black people don't look at it like that though. They look at it like, 'We just eating. We just wanna survive the next day.' They don't care what they eat. I don't know if you notice, but I get a lot of white people here [*referring to the restaurant where he works*]. And when I do get them, its like, they always want salads.

He laughs and changes his tone of voice as if impersonating his white customers:

'Make me a plain salad with ranch. Or probably no ranch. Just give me a little bit of oil. They cool with that. They know how to eat. They know how to take care of theyselves. Black people we just don't believe in that. We eat fried chicken, greens, cornbread, and mad Fast Foods.

Because of this, he wasn't surprised that he met resistance when he shared with his friends that he was changing his food consumption practices. During our interview, he reenacted the dialogue that occurred between his friends and him. "Everybody kept saying 'Oh, you want some of this?'

'No, no,'

'Man, why are you acting like that?'

'I'm just trying to...I'm doing something right now, I'm cool,'" he described with his eyes closed as if tapping into his internal resolve. "And that's all. I couldn't. If they were on me: 'Man I'm trying to stay away from that stuff.' Them niggas like, 'Oh! Good *luck!* I aint eating that. Ima eat what I want to'."

Cameron experiences his relationship with food through the lens of *accomplishment* – the alignment of this eating aspirations, the resources to achieve them and his daily practices. With extreme hardship as his main frame of reference, Cameron feels accomplished when he is able to distance himself from a relationship with food as survival. He has a sense of what it means to eat the right way and knows from experience what it means to eat the wrong way. In fact, living in the Turf, he sees his family members and friends daily making what he considers to be poor choices. As long as Cameron is making better choices than those around him and than those that he made growing up, he feels extremely accomplished. During our interview, I asked Cameron

how he felt as he ate from day-to-day. He answered, “I feel good. Like, ‘I ain’t eating like *them!* They about to *kill theyselves*. I’m trying to stay 100. 100 years old.”

Out of the 40 respondents that I interviewed in the Turf, 8 of them framed their relationship with food as one of accomplishment. These respondents shared very similar eating aspirations to the respondents that I discussed in chapter 6. They desired to eat three, home cooked meals a day made with fresh ingredients. They knew that they should watch their sugar, salt, and fat consumption and that in general their food should be baked not fried. They also shared unfavorable experiences procuring food in the Turf. They found the food to be unacceptably low in quality and the service to often be disrespectful. I begin this chapter with a brief discussion of these two points of similarity. I then posit that what stood out about these respondents was that they rejected the frame of survival adopted by their friends and family to justify being treated poorly. They associated it with the degraded conditions that arose from systemic, racialized, poverty. They witnessed friends and family refusing to think about their food consumption practices and becoming ill. Many had witnessed members of their close networks being hospitalized or dying from food related diseases. So, they worked to distance themselves from this state of abjection through their food procurement strategies and their daily eating practices. They tried not to patronize the neighborhood stores and instead made their way to wealthier parts of town where they could take distance from the abject practices that were porn of poverty. Lastly, I argue that, because they measured their practices against this state of abjection, they felt relatively good about their food choices and eating practices. In other words, they didn’t perceive that there was a gap between their aspirations and their practices. This stands in contrast to similarly situated respondents in the Oasis who would feel a great deal of anxiety for eating the foods and the ways that these respondents, like Cameron, ultimately ate. I posit that this difference was due to the logic of accomplishment in the Turf versus the Oasis. These respondents felt accomplished because they oriented their self-assessment against abjection and the worse practices of their close ties rather than against aspiration and the perceived better practices of their neighbors.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CLOSE TIES

As I have argued throughout this manuscript, these respondents held a similar set of eating aspirations as the majority of my respondents in both field sites. They wanted to eat three home cooked meals a day made with fresh, high-quality ingredients. They wanted to have variety in their choices. They believed that the healthiest way to eat was to eliminate fast foods and sodas, to bake their foods instead of frying them, and to cut down on oil, salt, sugar, and fat. They all knew the importance of drinking a lot of water throughout the day. These were aspirations and ideas that they had learned from family members, family doctors, and schools just like the survivors discussed in chapter six. What was different about these respondents is that they had close ties who had politicized them around food and supported them as they retooled their logic of accomplishment towards health versus survival. Maria is a 26-year-old Latina who works for a non-profit organization as a youth counselor. She grew up in what she tells me was a very low-

income neighborhood south of San Francisco. Growing up poor, Maria's family ate a lot of rice, beans, and oatmeal. When money got tight, her grandmother would crush up Ritz crackers and put them in milk for her grandchildren. So when Maria was old enough to make some of her own food choices, she was excited to eat fast food, cookies, candy, and chips. She loved the convenient and cheap foods like Top Ramen. These foods got her through college and the years that followed. Then, she moved to Los Angeles and met her girlfriend Clara. Clara was adamant that they needed to eat fresh fruits and vegetables. Additionally, the two of them had a housemate and friend that was, as Maria described him, "a health freak." "Him and my partner would gang up on me, and I'm still traumatized from that," she recalls jokingly.

They seriously helped me eat *healthy*. He helped me not smoke cigarettes, he helped me not use that much grease, he encouraged me to use certain pans that you don't have to use grease in, and not to eat any of the syrup stuff. He's very critical about it. He got me my first kombucha. We tried it and I was like what the fuck is *this*? But it was really good, you know, so he was telling me about it. So he's been helping me out a lot.

Having close ties that encouraged Maria to eat in a different way was critical for Maria to shift her daily food consumption patterns. But it wasn't easy. What really motivated her was thinking about the possible health consequences of her old practices and linking that to the injustice of poverty. She shared,

It's very difficult to get out of what you're used to. I was used to eating Top Ramen every day, man. You know, it was my partner who told me 'did you know that there was this person who went to the Dr., to the emergency room and had a fucking ball of wax in his stomach? That was because of *Top Ramen*.' I was like Oh. My. God I probably have, like *two* balls of wax in my stomach, you know? *It's Crazy!* And I was like, I don't understand, why wax? Cause it holds the noodles together, you know? So, it's little shit like that that you aren't aware of cause you're in *survival mode*, your family's in survival mode.

Maria's friends politicized her to think about her daily food consumption practices as a matter of racial and economic injustice. They gave her research to read about the health benefits and risks of certain foods and ways of cooking, and they ate with her as she worked to transform her eating practices. Cameron's story provides another example of close ties providing inspiration and politicization to support a food transformation. As I discussed in the Prologue to the Turf, Cameron was politicized by his co-workers at the restaurant where he works. He had been in and out of juvenile detention centers during his childhood. After graduating high school, he became aware that if he didn't change his practices, he would end up in prison. So he looked for a job. The first job that he received was from the Safeway grocery store a 20-minute drive away in the wealthy community of Rockridge on the border of Oakland and Berkeley. There, he noticed that the quality of the food was better, the store was cleaner, the staff was friendlier, and the customers were buying more fresh foods than he was used to seeing in the Turf. This was the beginning

of his transformation. However, the real change happened about six months later when he got offered a job as a line cook at the restaurant close to the Turf. He was relieved to be able to work closer to home and with people from his community. There, he met co-workers who often talked about trying to stay healthy, and how the lack of fresh foods in the Turf was an injustice causing people to become ill. Cameron looked around him and realized that many of his close ties, especially the members of his family, were struggling with high-blood pressure. That's when it clicked for him. He recalls. "Then I just started looking into it more like, let me watch what I eat, man, cause I don't wanna die early," he tells me. "You know, this food out here'll kill you early. All that grease. All that fast foods. Then I started looking into it. And I was like, ok I gotta slow it down a little bit. Then that's when I just started changing my eating habits and everything like that." He laughed a little bit and then spoke with resolve: "I done change my life, but I'm still eating stuff that'll kill me. I'm doing stuff in the streets that can kill me, but I'm still eating stuff that'll kill me. I'm eating McDonalds, pizza e'ryday. It was crazy. I was like, 'I gotta do better than this, man'"

Motivated by supportive social ties and bolstered by a sense of injustice, these respondents strove to buy as much fresh food as possible. This set of respondents was more like those in the Oasis in that they believed that organic foods were better and that they should buy organic food over nonorganic to cut back on pesticide and GMO consumption. These respondents believed that the biggest barrier to accomplishing these aspirations was the abject conditions of food in the neighborhood in which they lived and the logic of survival that their closest ties adopted to cope with living within these conditions. In what follows, I briefly outline how these respondents made sense of the food stores in and close to the Turf. I argue that in many ways, they shared similar sentiments about the food giveaways, corner stores and grocery stores in the neighborhood. The one exception seemed to be that these respondents did not like Foods Co. and lumped it in the same category of low quality and disrespectful customer service as the food giveaways and the corner stores.

SHOPPING IN THE TURF

Dorothy is a 50-year-old African American woman. She received her bachelor's degree from a university in the south before moving to California at 21 for a summer job. Up until about 6 months ago, she had been living in a 2-bedroom apartment with a family member closer to the border of San Leandro. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, she is currently staying in the living room of a friend's apartment in the Turf. By training, she is a paralegal but she has had difficulty finding work in her field. So she drives for the ride-share company Uber. She also receives a modest amount of money through social security at the beginning of the month. But this money does not last her the entire month and so she, like so many other respondents in the Turf, had to get creative in feeding themselves and their families. The closest food available to her is a food giveaway that happens every week at the church two blocks from where she is staying, but she refuses to go. In telling me why, she reveals that being poor and in need is both time consuming and strips her of her dignity. "Dorothy, do you ever go the food giveaway closest to your house?" I ask her. "Nooooooo" she replies in a slow drawn out way, shaking her head from side to side. "The food giveaway close to me, I used to be

church secretary there so I don't want to go *there*, you know it kind of crushes your spirits when people see you, 'Whatcha *doin*'? Whatcha doing in the *line*?'” she recounts. Beyond the shame that would come from going to the food giveaway, Dorothy also can't always afford to take the time out of her day. She continues, “and you have to be there early in the morning, get a ticket and come back at 10:45am. And its Thursday, it cuts right into my workday and they have a really great food, fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, fresh breads. Its a really great giveaway, I just don't have time like that. That's 4 hours out of your day waiting around in long lines.” Getting free food is time intense and its time spend in lines of people that are hungry. She recalls “I just don't *like* long lines, I don't *like* people shoving, pushing. Most food banks lines are like that. People are tired, they're impatient. they're aggressive. Bumping and whatever. And you end up arguing with somebody and I just don't do that.”

The irony, perhaps, is that when Dorothy has some money or some time to spend, she doesn't feel particularly more valued trying to procure food in the neighborhood. Shopping in the Turf makes her feel exploited and disrespected because she is a poor person of color. For example, at the corner stores, she shares with me how much more expensive the items are and how she often complains to the workers.

I try not to go to the liquor stores, There's this Food something on 88th and every time I go in there I give this guy hell. “Dude! A bottle of hot sauce? \$3.00? \$3.00? I can get this for \$1.59.” And he's like, well go to Foods Co. and I'm like well no I need this. And he's like, well I'll charge you \$2.00 for it. And I say OK. That's alright. I can pay \$2.00 even though its \$.50 above the price.

First, Dorothy knows that the prices are higher at the corner store and she chops this up to the corner store owners knowing that their customers are often unable to get these items elsewhere. The store owner challenges her to go the 15 block distance to Foods Co. if she isn't happy with the price at his store. But Dorothy needs the item right then and is willing to settle for the renegotiated price, even though she still feels swindled. “When you're jacking and doubling the price,” she continues, “Dude, you jacking and robbing the hood! So when I walk in he says, ‘Oh here comes robbing the hood in here again’.” Cameron agrees. Not only are the prices high at the corner stores, but the quality of food is, as he says, “Terrible!” During our interview, he recounts several stories of his friends, family, and himself buying items from these stores that is long past its expiration date. When this happens, his friends recant that they are going to sue the store for constantly selling bad foods. But Dorothy isn't going to go to Foods Co. instead for her hot sauce, and Cameron's friends are really going to sue. And the workers know this. Dorothy shares an anecdote as an illustration:

You know, I think about a mother who's made some choices, she's a single parent, she's got two kids, she gets food stamps, she gets Calworks, its gonna last her. She's got to get on the bus with those kids, with a shopping cart, I've did this before, and a stroller, and you gotta grocery shop with those kids, with the grocery basket with the cart under it. It's an effort to go grocery shopping so it's easier to just run around this corner and just grab something.

These convenient stores truly are convenient for the people in the Turf. Plus even if Dorothy could get to Foods Co, she doesn't feel any better about shopping there. Neither do the other five respondents who reject what they consider to be the abject foodways of the inner-city. For instance, Cameron considers Foods Co. to be "seriously ghetto" and likens the experience to being in a welfare office. He reflects, "Have you ever been to a welfare office? Babies crying, mamas hollering [*laughing*], it's just...people stealing. You see it [*laughing*]. It's just ghetto. It's hood. That's how I can explain it." Sharon, a 45-year old Black and Hispanic high school counselor, has a similar assessment. She shares, "I've only gone in there a couple of times because the neighborhood is still the neighborhood and I don't really feel safe per say. People there are always in starvation mode. It's like a food stamp place. When you see families going in there, you see their carts filled with frozen and sugary foods. They are trying to stretch and maximize dollars. Its not about health but just filling their kids up." To Cameron and Sharon, Foods Co. is a place for people in need. As such, it mimics a welfare office with its long lines, disrespectful patrons and workers, and people in states of desperation. Dorothy chalks this up to this state of abjection – those who work there, she believes, have bought into the idea that poor people of color don't deserve to be treated with dignity. Dorothy shares,

Foods Co., even though its cheaper cause they're a warehouse, don't like it. It's so disrespectful. The cashiers are disrespectful, the clients are disrespectful, they talk crap they cut in line. The cashiers act like they're doing you a favor. I don't go there. It is so rude. I see that most of their clients are mostly people of color and they're people of color too but they've lost their respect. Because its all people of color they don't feel like they have to respect them. It's a lack of respect for self and people like you.

These assessments about the quality of food and service at Foods Co. stood out from the assessments expressed by respondents in chapter 6. Those respondents tended to like Foods Co. and embrace this store as an important institution in their community that was affordable and patronized by their neighbors. However, these six respondents tended to reject Foods Co. for exactly these reasons. They found it to be, as Sharon states, "the bottom of the barrel" where "people in states of desperation" came to shop. As such, they felt badly, undignified, and poor when they shopped for groceries there. In sum, these respondents experienced poor treatment when eating and procuring food in the Turf. They also experienced the quality of the food to be unpredictable and often on the edge of expiration. As I will argue below, unlike the respondents in chapter 6, who justified procuring food at these places as a matter of survival, these respondents worked hard to distance themselves from these physical places as well as what they considered to be dangerous ways of relating to food.

THE SILENT EPIDEMIC

Along side their frustration procuring food in the Turf, these respondents were also critical of their close ties for adopting a logic of survival. They assessed that their family

and friends had taken up this panorama of low quality food and poor treatment as the norm. As such, they noticed how their close networks defended in these ways of eating, even as these ways of eating were making many of them ill. Echoing the findings from chapter 6, these respondents understood that their friends and family were in survival mode and found meaning in this struggle. But they were critical of this and sought to distance themselves from this logic of accomplishment. Cameron, for example, tells me of the racial logic around eating and health that he sees as pervasive in the Turf.

Black people, compared to white people, our diets are ridiculous. As black people we eat terrible that's why we don't *live* long. That's why our average life expectancy is like 55-60 years old, because of high blood pressure different things like that. Black people don't look at it like that though. They look at it like, 'We just eating. We just wanna survive the next day.' They don't care what they eat. I don't know if you notice, but I get a lot of white people here [*referring to the restaurant where he works*]. And when I do get them, its like, they always want salads.

He laughs and changes his tone of voice as if impersonating his white customers:

'Make me a plain salad with ranch. Or probably no ranch. Just give me a little bit of oil. They cool with that. They know how to eat. They know how to take care of theyselves. Black people we just don't believe in that. We eat fried chicken, greens, cornbread, and mad Fast Foods.

On the one hand, Cameron recognizes that the quality of food and the quality of service in the Turf is sub-par. He understands that this was because he lived in a poor inner-city community. Within this environment, he noted how his family members and friends had taken on this sense of place and quality in their own belief systems about their health and wellbeing. In other words, if the choices in his neighborhood were abject, his mostly black neighbors had bought into their abjection through the discourse of survival. This position was concretized as they placed themselves within the larger racialized health and food order of the city. White people take care, and Black people don't care, Cameron theorizes. Therefore, it wasn't surprising to Cameron that when he set out to change his daily food consumption practices, his friends weren't all that supportive. He recalls the conversation that he had with his friends when he was first shifting his food choices: "Everybody kept saying, 'Oh, you want some of this?'

'No no,'

'Man, why are you acting like that?'

'I'm just trying to...I'm doing something right now. I'm cool,'" he recounts with his eyes closed as if tapping into an internal resolve. "And that's all. I couldn't. If they were on me [I'd tell them] 'Man I'm trying to stay away from that stuff.' Them niggas like, 'Oh! Good *luck!* I ain't eating that. Ima eat what I want to.'" As Cameron tells me this story, he both shakes his head in dismay and laughs at the same time. Aware of the health impact of his friend's daily food consumption practices, Cameron hypothesizes that his friends' and family's' refusal to confront their practices meant that many of them would eventually suffer the consequences in the form of health issues.

Most of these respondents used to eat the same way that they now reject. Trayvon, for example, tells me that growing up his diet consisted of oatmeal, chips, candy, soda, and fast food. In fact, hopping from fast food restaurant to corner store and back was his friends' and his normal post-school routine. He reflects, "When I was younger, I didn't care. Just put it in, put it in, and then maybe you have a stomach ache. A lot of people in my life tried to tell me, you shouldn't be eating this way, you shouldn't be eating that way. But it went in one ear and out the other." Then the people in Trayvon's life started getting sick. First it was his mother who, when Trayvon was 23-years-old, needed to have heart surgery. After the surgery, she was instructed to change her diet and Trayvon took it as a warning sign for what could be in his own future. It was at this point that he decided to do research and educate himself about what kinds of foods were healthy and unhealthy to eat. He also tried to educate his friends, but his friends thought that he was crazy. Then, about six years later, several of these friends started getting sick. One of this friends died at the age of 29 from obesity and diabetes.

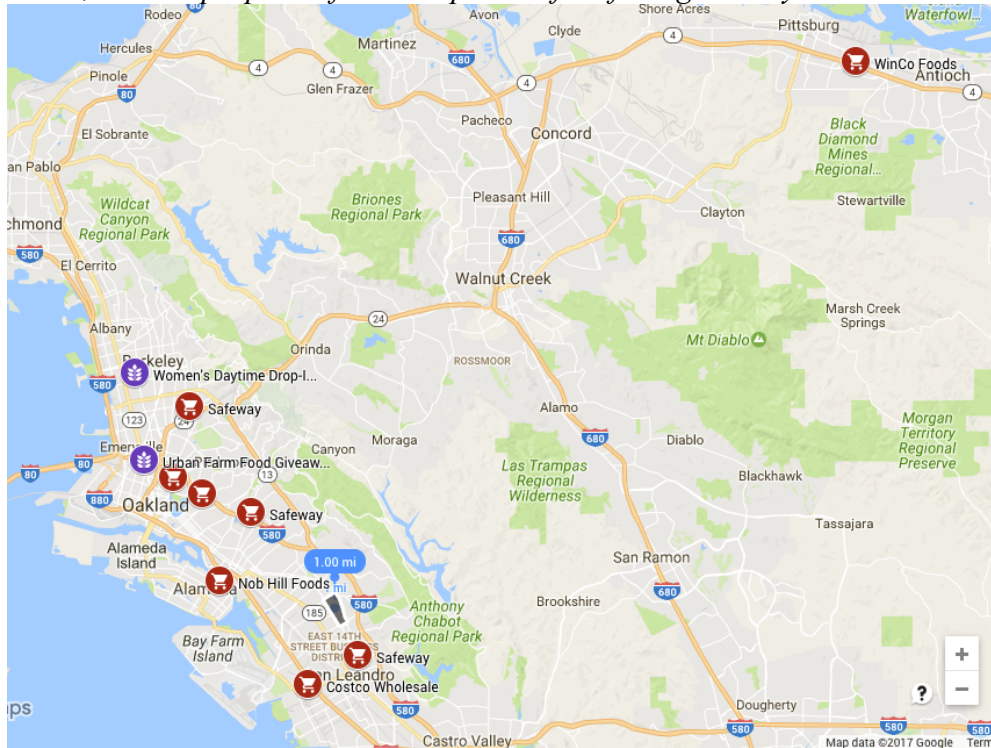
I started to notice my friends suddenly having heart problems and needing to lose weight. And so I was like, 'Well if you guys had just done that in the beginning...' because when my mom got sick when I was 23 and needed to change her diet, I needed to change my diet and was telling my friends, 'hey maybe you should change your diet' and then when they didn't listen, they started deteriorating in front of my face. It was kind of scary. Like, we all used to eat the same thing. And now you have these health issues.

Trayvon refers to this as 'the silent epidemic' that's spreading rapidly through his community because even as people are 'deteriorating before his eyes,' it seems that no one really wants to talk about it. He explains, "I think a lot of people are quiet too because its a fear. They don't want to talk about, if I eat too many French fries, gonna gain weight. Salt intake, not too much healthy, it clogs your arteries. You don't want that." Together, their bad experiences procuring food in the Turf and their desire to avoid the ill health that transpired for their close ties, these respondents rejected the logic of survival so prevalent in the Turf. Instead, they worked to reconfigure their practices with distance from abjection their goal. One way of doing this was through their food procurement strategies, which I discuss in the section that follows.

WHERE THERE'S A LOT OF DIGNITY

Instead of procuring food in the neighborhood, these respondents tried to travel to the neighboring suburb of San Leandro, other parts of Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda, and Pittsburg to get their food. Below is a map of the places where these respondents typically procured food when all went well.

Figure 23: Food Establishments Where Respondents Typically Procure Food
The gray rectangle represents the Turf, the red shopping cart icons represent grocery stores, and the purple leaf icons represent free food giveaways and hot meals.



Source: Google Maps (2017), modifications by author.

For example, at the beginning of the month when Dorothy receives her social security check, she goes to the Safeway grocery store in the Fruitvale neighborhood of Oakland or the Grocery Outlet close to downtown. By car, it takes her about 10 minutes to get to Safeway and 15 to get to Grocery Outlet. Here, she typically purchases “fresh fruits and vegetables, avocado, different kinds of salad, kale, romaine, onions, zucchini, fresh meats like tuna or fish, eggs, walnuts and almonds.” She tries to buy both organic foods and foods on sale. Then, at the end of the month when money and food are both running low, she goes to a women’s drop in center in Berkeley and a produce giveaway in an organic garden in West Oakland. At the garden, they have fresh fruits and vegetables that they pick the same day. At the drop in center, they have spreads of food for breakfast and lunch. When she goes to these places she finds the dignity and respect that she feels is stripped from her in the Turf. For example, Dorothy and I had the following conversation about her experience at the garden:

D: It’s not a food bank, it’s an organic farm. But it’s *civil!* They call your name, they mix up the numbers so its not necessarily called in order, and they have different tables that you can go to. It’s very organized.

K: So it *feels* different.

D: It *feels* different. You sit there. You chat with other people out there. They've got other community things that you can know about. And when you get it, it's *dignified*. It's *dignified*. So I tend to go where there's a lot of dignity. Not making you feel like... 'Just take what you get, be quiet, shut up, get back in line, go somewhere!' You know, that kind of thing.

When I met Dorothy the first time, she had a car and could get to these far away places in between or after driving for Uber. However, five months after our interview, I met with Dorothy a second time to check in on how she was doing. Her car had broken down and she had lost her housing. She was staying in a temporary shelter in Fremont, a suburb located 20 miles south of the Turf. But, still, she was not dissuaded. She continued to go through her routines by taking public transportation to get from her housing to these places. She shared with me "I do not think of myself as homeless. This is a just a temporary roadblock. The shelter has a kitchen so I can still control my food. That's important to me." With limited resources and precarious housing, Dorothy's dignity and resolve to maintain that dignity were the things keeping her afloat. As she procured food, she also procured her dignity. Therefore, it was imperative that she worked to keep herself from giving into these "convenient" spaces of abjection – where disrespect, struggle, desperation, and low-quality often-expired foods were the standard.

Cameron, Trayvon, Maria, and Sharon made a similar set of assessments. Cameron took his son and auntie to shop in North Oakland where he used to work, a 20-minute drive away when traffic was light. This store was on a commercial street with upscale restaurants, flower and coffee shops, and bakeries. Here, he felt surrounded by both better quality food and better quality service. "Safeway is my *store!*" He said, with added emphasis that communicated that he really enjoyed going shopping here. "Their stuff is high end and it is high [cost]..." he pauses to reflect on his statement and then continues, "but the quality of the food is what really matters to me. I would rather eat a clean steak that I know came from somewhere where they actually took their time with it than come from *here* where they just rushed and put it together and now they selling it for cheap." He waves his hand in a circle to denote that he is talking about the Turf. "Or they may have a lot of it, so they're trying to hurry up and sell it. Anything like that. I personally I would rather go to Safeway." Cameron was like Dorothy in that he did not want to shop at a place where there *was* low-quality food, but he also didn't want to shop at a place that *would stock* low-quality food. He took offense to this as a sign of disrespect. "It's all about the quality of their service. But they're high. They're expensive, though. But you pay for real quality, you know?" I ask how Cameron knows that the quality of the food is better. He responds, "You know, I *can't* tell. I'm not gonna lie. But as far as the quality of their stores, and from keeping their stores clean and everything? From what I can *see*, they definitely keep their stores nice. Everybody's hecka nice. Everybody. They make sure you can carry your bags out, you know. They kind of watch who they hire. They don't just hire anybody." This stood in sharp contrast to the kind of stores closest to his house. He compares his experience at Safeway to the experience shopping for food in the Turf: "If people paid more attention to it they would be like, 'You know what, I'm not going there no more.'" He says, referring to the food stores in the Turf. "If people paid more attention, they would see this store don't care about nothing. I'd rather go somewhere where they have quality and they actually care about their customers

compared to them.”

Maria and her partner Clara shopped at Trader Joe’s in the Oasis. About a month before we met, they bought a car, which made the trip much easier. With a car, it takes them 10-15 minutes to drive to Trader Joe’s depending upon traffic. During our interview Maria and I discussed what it was like getting groceries without a car. “When we *didn’t* have a car, we had to take buses there. That. Fucking. Sucked! That. Sucked. So. Much. We had to double, triple bag things. We’d swear, we’d bicker. Because it would **suck**. The bus would be full. it was hard. that was really hard. We literally would go to the grocery store *when* we needed to. when we needed to.”

K: How long did it take you get there on the bus?

M: (*laughing*) like 45 minutes...it was **crazy**. And then we’d have to sit there and wait in line, people would try to get on the bus, people were trying to get off the bus. we were trying to sit down sometimes we would have to stand and let people sit. children sit. the elderly sit. Like a lot of times bags would rip. I can’t tell you how many eggs I’ve lost. (*laughing*)

Despite the ordeal, frustrating, and physically taxing process of getting to Trader Joe’s on public transportation, Maria and Clara were ever committed to shopping there over the stores close to their apartment. In fact, while they will go to the nearest market once in a while, they really prefer not to. Maria explains,

Sometimes when we’re low on funds, we’ll go to this little store [down the street]. It’s a local store and we try not to go there, really. It sucks to go there, but if we just need cilantro, I’ll be like: ‘No! We’re NOT GOING ALL the way to Trader Joe’s to get cilantro. I’m WALKING down the block to get cilantro.’ But I don’t like it. I really don’t like it. Because you can tell their garlics are huge. Their apples are ginormous. You can tell that...you know...that’s not the right size. I mean like I remember when [I was a small child and] we used to grow peaches, they weren’t fucking ginormous they were like tinny. I don’t know, it just doesn’t seem right. But like I said, we’ll go there when we *have* to. Or we’ll be like, we’re not gonna keep this [cilantro], lets just wait until we do the run.

Trader Joe’s was also Alima’s store of choice along with Farmer Joe’s, a locally owned grocery store located a 25-minute bus ride from the Turf. Trayvon took his family once a month an hour-long drive away to a place called WinCo, 40 miles to the East in the suburb of Pittsburg. Sharon drove 20 minutes to the neighboring community Alameda to shop at a Whole Foods-esq store called Nobb Hill. Here, she tells me, she sees health conscious people instead of EBT cards. She says, “These are just hardworking people and this is their neighborhood store. They expect to spend because they feel they are getting a superior product.” When time was tight or these respondents didn’t have the energy to make the trip, they at least tried to go to San Leandro to the south to shop for food at Costco, Walmart, or the Safeway there. At least at these places, the experience was more standardized and they didn’t have to deal with the ordeal that came along with getting

food in the Turf.

EVERYDAY FOOD CONSUMPTION PRACTICES

How did these desires to distance themselves from the food practices of the Turf pan out from day to day? I argue that these respondent's daily food consumption practices were made with the purpose of distancing themselves from abjection. But even as they had plans to shop at grocery stores that stocked what they perceived to be better quality foods, income, time restraints, and access to transportation still proved to be barriers to them fully accomplishing their aspirations. Still, some of these respondents felt great about what they ate, assessing themselves as doing much better than friends and families. When I asked Cameron and Trayvon how they would rate their relationship with food, they both rated themselves the highest score of excellent. Cameron states, "Right now, I feel like I'm *very* health. Excellent. I've been eating this way for a year, a year and half straight. I don't eat the same wa, I eat different so I know I should probably be highly healthy." Trayvon answers similarly, "to me I'm in the best of health right now because I watch what I eat. You have to. I went to go play basketball. If I wasn't healthy, I couldn't play basketball cause of the weight on my heart. *Diabetes*. Things of *that* nature. I don't want none of that so therefore I have to watch what I eat. I get conscious everywhere I go. I open my eyes to it."

What does this look like from day to day? A typical day for Cameron went something like this: oatmeal and fruit for breakfast; a croissant, egg and turkey sausage breakfast sandwich with a carton of chocolate milk around 10am; a hamburger, French fries, and a milkshake around 1pm; fried breaded chicken strips with French fries at 4pm; a granola bar or two and a bag of chips for a snack around 5pm. After leaving work, he came home and ate a home cooked meal that either he or his son's mother has prepared. Typical, dinners include baked chicken, ground turkey burgers and spaghetti. Sometimes he has a snack before bed. The day before our interview, that snack was a rice crispy treat from a local gas station. Though he is not eating from the fast food restaurants, Cameron is still eating high calorie, high fat, and high sugar foods throughout his day. Given his aspirations, someone such as Cameron in the Oasis might feel a great deal of anxiety as he grappled with the gap between his aspirations and his practices. Quite the contrary, during our interview, I asked Cameron how he felt as he ate from day-to-day. He answered, "I feel *good*. Like, 'I ain't eating like *them!* They about to *kill* *theyself*. I'm trying to stay 100. 100 years old."

Trayvon felt the same way. During our interview, Trayvon described a typical day in his life: "I don't eat breakfast, lunch I probably have a bag of chips and some water. My intake on water has gained so much. I drink more water than anything. It fills me up. So for dinner, it's some chicken, some pasta, salads, or ground turkey." I inquired about whether or not Trayvon go hungry going so long without eating? But he assured me that he does not. Instead, not eating made him feel proud of himself. He comments,

I don't eat during the daytime cause I know that will make me go to sleep. and people say you gain more weight when you sleep cause you're inactive. Like I say, I'm more conscious of the foods that I eat. So like I said, I won't eat. I will drink some water. I drink 3-4 bottles of water and I'll be ok. I can

actually get full by quenching my thirst. now, if my head starts hurting, then maybe I need to eat something. So I grab a quick snack and then I don't feel the hunger anymore. So lets keep on going. You have to stay active.

Being conscious about what he puts in his body meant bypassing as much as possible the "bad" choices that were available to him as he went through his normal workday. Plus, if he ate the foods available in the Turf, he would surely want to sleep afterwards. If he slept, he believed he would gain weight and this would put him on a path towards illness like his friends. Drinking water, then, was the healthy alternative.

Not all of these respondents felt excellently about their choices. Sylvia, for example, rates her relationship with food as good. "What would make it excellent," Sylvia shared, "would be if I was stable enough spiritually, emotionally and financially to get what I want when I want it and can choose when I can eat it or not eat it. Not have the limited choices or food bank food, or having to buy water because I don't trust the water system here because I'm in a very demographically challenged area. I believe it's a healthy meal every day. Breakfast, a snack in between, lunch, a snack in between, a light dinner and a snack in between." On the days when Sylvia is able to eat this way, she feels blessed. But her unstable and stressful housing situation and living on a block with a lot of drama often causes her to want to eat hamburgers and red vines. "Dealing with this kind of situation has a lot to do with my mood swings. I never saw myself dealing with this crazy housing situation at my age," she reflects. "Sometimes I eat comfort food. But that's not an excellent because its like a risk benefit thing going on. Right now I'm gonna risk a high blood pressure, I do have high cholesterol. And its not bad enough for them to put me on lipitor, but they're *watching* me. And I know that that hamburger is gonna make that cholesterol high."

IN SUM

In this chapter, I have focused on how food related health aspirations, material resources, daily food consumption practices and identity are imbricated for respondents such that they experienced food as a relationship of accomplishment. I argue that these respondents shared very similar eating aspirations to the respondents that I discussed in chapter 6. They desired to eat three, home cooked meals a day made with fresh ingredients. They knew that they should watch their sugar, salt, and fat consumption and that in general their food should be baked not fried. They also shared unfavorable experiences procuring food in the Turf. They found the food to be unacceptably low in quality and the service to often be disrespectful. I then posit that what stood out about these respondents was that they rejected the frame of survival adopted by their friends and family to justify being treated poorly. They associated it with the degraded conditions that arose from systemic, racialized, poverty. They witnessed friends and family refusing to think about their food consumption practices and becoming ill. Many had witnessed members of their close networks being hospitalized or dying from food related diseases. So, they worked to distance themselves from this state of abjection through their food procurement strategies and their daily eating practices. They tried not to patronize the neighborhood stores and instead made their way to wealthier parts of town where they could take distance from the abject practices that were born of poverty. I argue that because they measured their

practices against this state of abjection, they felt relatively good about their food choices and eating practices. In other words, they didn't perceive that there was a gap between their aspirations and their practices. This stands in contrast to similarly situated respondents in the Oasis who would feel a great deal of anxiety for eating the foods and the ways that these respondent in the Turf ultimately ate. I posit that this difference was due to the logic of accomplishment in the Turf versus the Oasis. These respondents in the Turf felt accomplished because they oriented their self-assessment against abjection and the worse practices of their close ties rather than against aspiration and the perceived better practices of their neighbors.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I had coffee with one of my key informants in the Turf – a biracial woman in her 20s who worked as a community organizer. During our time together, she spoke to me candidly about her life. She told me about growing up with her father in a neighborhood of Oakland not far from the Turf. Because her father was struggling with a drug addiction, she often went without food. She described the experience of being hungry for days at a time and the kinds of games she developed to numb and cope with the aching hunger. When she did eat, she ate mostly fast foods and pre-packaged foods – the foods of poverty that her father could afford. Eating these foods often caused her skin to break out, which led to frequent teasing from the kids at school. Now that she is older, she has developed awareness that what she ate growing up and how she felt about her body were linked. She shares with me, “now I know what I have to do. I have to eat better. There are these places that sell fresh juices. I wish I could go there everyday. I try to shop only at Trader Joe’s but its hard cause food is expensive. I wish I could afford to eat only fresh, organic, local food. Then, my skin would get better, I would feel better about myself, I would spend less money on makeup because makeup is so expensive. And then I would be happy!”

Two days later, as I scrolled through my Facebook feed, I came across a post from an acquaintance of mine. This single mother and woman of color shared a recent epiphany that she had regarding food. She wrote, “I started buying more expensive food for myself. I realized that it was a story I was telling myself that I didn’t deserve to buy the best quality food. But I do deserve the best quality food no matter what the price. I started buying more expensive food and now I feel better than I’ve ever felt. I’m so glad that I liberated myself from this limited thinking.”

I recount these two stories in the conclusion to this manuscript as a way to highlight one of my main arguments of this dissertation. Where we live, how much money we make, and our racial or class positions not only stratify access to objective health and wellness through food – health and diet quality for example. They also stratify access to subjective feelings of health and wellness through food. Because accessing wellness through food appear to people as a game through which they can receive emotional, symbolic, and physical rewards, the injustice of being forced to actualize these desires for nourishment through a stratified market that benefits the upper-middle class was at least partly veiled through the desires for wellness.

In chapters three, four, and five, I illustrated three relationships – ease, struggle, and distress – that emerged as central in the Oasis. I argued that these were relationships that centered aspirations to eat local, unprocessed, organic, non-GMO fresh foods in moderation and with ease as the North Star against which practice was measured. With an abundance of fresh food close to home, people in this neighborhood felt accomplished and a sense of wellbeing when they could use their material, symbolic, or emotional resources to easily eat these types of foods from day-to-day. However, when they assessed that they had failed to approximate their aspirations, they experienced distress and anxiety in part because living in this neighborhood meant that they were regularly confronted with others easily eating these types of food, which highlighted the gap between their aspirations and their practices.

Whereas the logic of accomplishment that emerged in the Oasis was in relation to ease accomplishing health and wellness, the logic of accomplishment that emerged in the Turf was in relation to daily survival in the face of overlapping scarcities. In chapter six and seven, I discuss two relationships – survival and accomplishment – that emerged as central in the Turf. These were relationships that centered distance from and survival despite proximity to abjection as the guidepost against which practice was measured. The residents in the Turf were everyday navigating life in a container of systemic degradation. Along with crippling poverty came a high likelihood that they or their family would experience incarceration, mental illness, physical illness or violence. Additionally, there were few avenues for upward mobility. Most residents never graduated from college, lived in unstable housing conditions and found that job opportunities were few and far between. Within these degraded conditions, they were also often treated with distrust and disrespect by corner store and grocery store employees, food giveaway volunteers, and state agency employees. In other words, their daily lives were occurring within a context of systemic, interrelating traumas with few pathways out.

Within this context, how, what, where, and whether one ate was one of many stressors. Whereas the residence in the Oasis were working to be healthy, the residence in the Turf were working not to be unhealthy. Therefore, they experienced any practice that allowed them to distance themselves from need, hunger, or disease as an accomplishment. Those who experienced food through survival, felt accomplished when they could make it from day to day despite extremely limited resources, even if the food that they ate within this context would eventually make them ill. Those who experienced their relationship with food as accomplishment felt accomplished when they were able to eat better than the survivors, even if their daily food consumption practices were not objectively as healthy as they believed them to be. Unlike Bourdieu's hypothesis, however, as well as the moral imagination of the black, poor inner city resident who is joyous in their abject eating, these respondents knew very well that they were looked at as abject. They also knew well that their socially structural location within the symbolic and physical city meant that the food available to them was low quality and could make them sick. Faced with routine degradation, they learned to manage and make peace with what they could eat, minimize shame, and maximize feelings of accomplishment in their daily practice by identifying themselves as survivors. In other words, in as far as respondents in both the Oasis and the Turf regularly ate foods considered unhealthy, it was not the result of a culture of poverty. Rather it was a result of a logic of accomplishment that emerged as a result of making it work in a context of overlapping structures of racialized poverty and where the worst foods were the cheapest foods to procure.

What everyone in my study had in common was a deep desire to feel nourished as well as a sense that it was up to them to accomplish this through their individual choices from day-to-day. When they failed to do this, they felt the repercussions in and on the body and this often caused distress that needed to be managed. Strikingly, those who lived in the middle class community of the Oasis, were themselves middle-class, or had some level of education, believed that they *deserved* wellness through food and just needed to use knowledge to discipline their body's desires. Those who were poor, black, and living in the inner city had no illusions that they could truly access wellness through

food. Instead, they understood that everyone considered them already, always ill. What was true across my sample was that everyone wanted eat better, to feel better, and to stay healthy. However, all in all, the white upper-middle class and those with advanced educations were the only group of respondents who articulated an easy time both aligning their daily food consumption practices with their aspirations and “successfully” shielding themselves from the threat of abjection. Doing so afforded them emotional dividends that made them happy to continue purchasing more expensive food items rather than challenge why the “best” foods were more expensive to begin with. By looking at people’s food related aspirations and daily practices, and how these aspirations and practices are mediated by race, class, and place, I hope to have shown that we cannot understand how structures of poverty and racism lead to stratified patterns of food related health disparities unless we look also at how wealth and privilege lead to stratified access to wellness. They are two sides of the same coin.

The ethical eating ethos that is spreading across the country like wildfire tells us that our liberation from potential illness is located in our individual consumption choices. This conceals that, perhaps, the fact that our wellness seems to be something outside of ourselves that we purchase for sale is the problem in the first place. Perhaps, more deeply, people’s longing for wellness through food is a longing for a corrective to the ache of alienation that rises up from within us, communicating to us that living and working within advanced capitalism means that overall we are not well, we are not nourished, and we are not free. But as this dissertation illustrates, this ethos leaves unincorporated those who are always left unincorporated and used to being so— the black, poor living in the inner city. This is in part because people see the pathway towards wellness as one in which they opt into a particular kind of middle-class consumption practice that protects from both disease and those who embody the risk of disease – the black, poor living in the inner city. If we are to truly address why, as McMillan says in her National Geographic article, the gap in diet quality has widened between the haves and the have-nots, we must consider how capitalism benefits from people aspiring to be able to spend more on “good food” as well as people failing to be able to do so. What is needed are systemic overhauls that address poverty, racism, and disparate access to food simultaneously for everyone not just the poor who live in food deserts. Doing so necessitates disinvesting ourselves from the wellness incentives offered to us if we play the games of getting our health and wellness through the market. Until health through food is a universal human right and not a privilege accessed through capitalism, our interventions will inevitably continue to disproportionately benefit those who are already always most well, leaving everyone else to struggle.

References

- Adelman, Miriam and Lennita Ruggi. 2008. "The Beautiful and the Abject: Gender, Identity and Constructions of the Body in Contemporary Brazilian Culture." *Current Sociology* 56(4):555–86.
- Agardh, Emilie, Peter Allebeck, Johan Hallqvist, Tahereh Moradi, and Anna Sidorchuk. 2011. "Type 2 Diabetes Incidence and Socio-Economic Position: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *International Journal of Epidemiology* dyr029.
- Ahern, Melissa, Cheryl Brown, and Stephen Dukas. 2011. "A National Study of the Association Between Food Environments and County-Level Health Outcomes." *The Journal of Rural Health : Official Journal of the American Rural Health Association and the National Rural Health Care Association; Washington* 27(4):367–79.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 1 edition. New York: Routledge.
- Alkon, Alison Hope. 2012. *Black, White, and Green: Farmers Markets, Race, and the Green Economy*. University of Georgia Press. Retrieved June 4, 2017 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46nh81>).
- Alkon, Alison Hope. 2013. "The Socio-Nature of Local Organic Food." *Antipode* 45(3):663–80.
- Alkon, Alison Hope and Julian Agyeman. 2011. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*. MIT Press.
- Beaulac, Julie, Elizabeth Kristjansson, and Steven Cummins. 2009. "A Systematic Review of Food Deserts, 1966-2007." *Preventing Chronic Disease* 6(3). Retrieved November 24, 2015 (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2722409/>).
- Biltekoff, Charlotte. 2013. *Eating Right in America: The Cultural Politics of Food and Health*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Braveman, Paula A., Catherine Cubbin, Susan Egerter, David R. Williams, and Elsie Pamuk. 2010. "Socioeconomic Disparities in Health in the United States: What the Patterns Tell Us." *American Journal of Public Health* 100(Suppl 1):S186–96.
- Burdette, Hillary L. and Robert C. Whitaker. 2004. "Neighborhood Playgrounds, Fast Food Restaurants, and Crime: Relationships to Overweight in Low-Income Preschool Children." *Preventive Medicine* 38(1):57–63.
- Cairns, Kate and JosÃ© Johnston. 2015. *Food and Femininity*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

- Cannuscio, Carolyn C. et al. 2013. "Urban Food Environments and Residents' Shopping Behaviors." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 45(5):606–614.
- Cannuscio, Carolyn C., Amy Hillier, Allison Karpyn, and Karen Glanz. 2014. "The Social Dynamics of Healthy Food Shopping and Store Choice in an Urban Environment." *Social Science & Medicine* 122:13–20.
- Cannuscio, Carolyn C., Eve E. Weiss, and David A. Asch. 2010. "The Contribution of Urban Foodways to Health Disparities." *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 87(3):381–93.
- Conrad, Peter. 1992. "Medicalization and Social Control." *Annual Review of Sociology* 18(1):209–32.
- Conrad, Peter. 2007. *The Medicalization of Society: On the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders*. 1 edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Counihan, Carole M. 1992. "Food Rules in the United States: Individualism, Control, and Hierarchy." *Anthropological Quarterly* 65(2):55–66.
- Counihan, Carole and Penny Van Esterik. 2013. *Food and Culture : A Reader*. New York : Routledge, 2013.
- Crawford, R. 1980. "Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life." *International Journal of Health Services: Planning, Administration, Evaluation* 10(3):365–88.
- Cummins, Steven and Sally Macintyre. 2006. "Food Environments and Obesity-- Neighbourhood or Nation?" *International Journal of Epidemiology* 35(1):100–104.
- Darmon, Nicole and Adam Drewnowski. 2008. "Does Social Class Predict Diet Quality?" *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 87(5):1107–17.
- Derbyshire, Stuart W. G. 1997. "Culture of Fear: Risk Taking and the Morality of Low Expectation." *BMJ* 315(7111):823.
- Desmond, Matthew. 2014. "Relational Ethnography." *Theory and Society* 43(5):547–79.
- Drewnowski, Adam and Nicole Darmon. 2005. "Food Choices and Diet Costs: An Economic Analysis." *The Journal of Nutrition* 135(4):900–904.
- Ettorre, Elizabeth. 2010. *Culture, Bodies and the Sociology of Health*. New edition edition. Farnham ; Burlington, VT: Routledge.
- French, Simone A. 2003. "Pricing Effects on Food Choices." *The Journal of Nutrition* 133(3):841S–843S.

- Frohlich, Katherine L. and Louise Potvin. 2010. "Commentary: Structure or Agency? The Importance of Both for Addressing Social Inequalities in Health." *International Journal of Epidemiology* 39(2):378–79.
- Gartman, David. 1991. "Culture as Class Symbolization or Mass Reification? A Critique of Bourdieu's Distinction." *American Journal of Sociology* 97(2):421–47.
- Gibson, Diane M. 2011. "The Neighborhood Food Environment and Adult Weight Status: Estimates from Longitudinal Data." *American Journal of Public Health* 101(1):71–78.
- Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory; Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago, Aldine Pub. Co. [1967].
- Glassner, Barry. 1999. "The Construction of Fear." *Qualitative Sociology* 22(4):301–9.
- Guthman, Julie. 2008. "'If They Only Knew': Color Blindness and Universalism in California Alternative Food Institutions." *The Professional Geographer* 60(3):387–97.
- Guthman, Julie. 2011. *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism*. 1 edition. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hart, Caroline Sarojini. 2012. *Aspirations, Education and Social Justice: Applying Sen and Bourdieu*. A&C Black.
- Hart, Caroline Sarojini. 2016. "How Do Aspirations Matter?" *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 17(3):324–41.
- Hayes-Conroy, Allison and Jessica Hayes-Conroy. 2010. "Visceral Difference: Variations in Feeling (Slow) Food." *Environment and Planning A* 42(12):2956–71.
- Hayes-Conroy, Jessica and Allison Hayes-Conroy. 2013. "Veggies and Visceralities: A Political Ecology of Food and Feeling." *Emotion, Space and Society* 6:81–90.
- Howlett, Elizabeth, Cassandra Davis, and Scot Burton. 2016. "From Food Desert to Food Oasis: The Potential Influence of Food Retailers on Childhood Obesity Rates." *Journal of Business Ethics* 139(2):215–24.
- Inagami, Sanae, Deborah A. Cohen, Brian Karl Finch, and Steven M. Asch. 2006. "You Are Where You Shop: Grocery Store Locations, Weight, and Neighborhoods." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 31(1):10–17.
- Johnston, Josée. 2008. "The Citizen-Consumer Hybrid: Ideological Tensions and the Case of Whole Foods Market." *Theory and Society* 37(3):229–70.

- Johnston, Josee and Shyon Baumann. 2009. *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*. 1 edition. New York: Routledge.
- Kwan, Samantha. 2009. "Framing the Fat Body: Contested Meanings between Government, Activists, and Industry*." *Sociological Inquiry* 79(1):25–50.
- Lin, Biing-Hwan, Michele Ver Ploeg, Panagiotis Kasteridis, and Steven T. Yen. 2014. "The Roles of Food Prices and Food Access in Determining Food Purchases of Low-Income Households." *Journal of Policy Modeling* 36(5):938–52.
- Mason, Katherine Abigail. 2012. "Bearing Class: Citizenship, Status, and the Maternal Body." *eScholarship*. Retrieved June 4, 2017 (<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/7ss5r8kp>).
- McClintock, Nathan. n.d. "From Industrial Garden to Food Desert: Demarcated Devaluation in the Flatlands of Oakland, California." *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*. Retrieved June 24, 2017 (http://www.academia.edu/2080750/From_Industrial_Garden_to_Food_Desert_Demarcated_Devaluation_in_the_Flatlands_of_Oakland_California).
- McLaren, Lindsay. 2007. "Socioeconomic Status and Obesity." *Epidemiologic Reviews* 29:29–48.
- McLeod, Jane D., Christy Erving, and Jennifer Caputo. 2014. "Health Inequalities." Pp. 715–42 in *Handbook of the Social Psychology of Inequality, Handbooks of sociology and social research*. Dordrecht: Springer Sciences and Business Media.
- McLeod, Jane D., Edward J. Lawler, and Michael Schwalbe. 2014. *Handbook of the Social Psychology of Inequality*. Dordrecht : Springer, 2014.
- McMillan, Tracie. 2014. "Gap in Diet Quality Between Wealthiest and Poorest Americans Doubles, Study Finds." *National Geographic*, September 2. Retrieved June 23, 2017 (<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/09/140901-american-diet-obesity-poor-food-health/>).
- Mendoza, Ronald U. 2011. "Why Do the Poor Pay More? Exploring the Poverty Penalty Concept." *Journal of International Development* 23(1):1–28.
- Miech, Richard A. et al. 2006. "Trends in the Association of Poverty with Overweight among US Adolescents, 1971-2004." *JAMA* 295(20):2385–93.
- Morland, Kimberly B. and Kelly R. Evenson. 2009. "Obesity Prevalence and the Local Food Environment." *Health & Place* 15(2):491–95.
- Morland, Kimberly, Steve Wing, Ana Diez Roux, and Charles Poole. 2002. "Neighborhood Characteristics Associated with the Location of Food Stores and Food Service Places." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 22(1):23–29.

- Nestle, Marion. 2002. *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Oyserman, Daphna. 2007. "Social Identity and Self-Regulation." Pp. 432–53 in *Handbook of Social Psychology*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Oyserman, Daphna, Stephanie A. Fryberg, and Nicholas Yoder. 2007. "Identity-Based Motivation and Health." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 93(6):1011–27.
- Page-Reeves, Janet, Amy Anixter Scott, Maurice Moffett, Veronica Apodaca, and Vanessa Apodaca. 2014. "'Is Always That Sense of Wanting ... Never Really Being Satisfied': Women's Quotidian Struggles With Food Insecurity in a Hispanic Community in New Mexico." *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 9(2):183–209.
- Pampel, Fred C., Patrick M. Krueger, and Justin T. Denney. 2010. "Socioeconomic Disparities in Health Behaviors." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36(1):349–70.
- Pearson, Tim, Jean Russell, Michael J. Campbell, and Margo E. Barker. 2005. "Do 'food Deserts' Influence Fruit and Vegetable Consumption?—a Cross-Sectional Study." *Appetite* 45(2):195–97.
- Rabi, Doreen M. et al. 2006. "Association of Socio-Economic Status with Diabetes Prevalence and Utilization of Diabetes Care Services." *BMC Health Services Research* 6(1):124.
- Rose, D. and R. Richards. 2004. "Food Store Access and Household Fruit and Vegetable Use among Participants in the US Food Stamp Program." *Public Health Nutrition* 7(8):1081–88.
- Slocum, Rachel. 2011. "Race in the Study of Food." *Progress in Human Geography* 35(3):303–27.
- Small, Mario Luis. 2009. "'How Many Cases Do I Need?' On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research." *Ethnography* 10(1):5–38.
- Smoyer-Tomic, Karen E., John C. Spence, and Carl Amrhein. 2006. "Food Deserts in the Prairies? Supermarket Accessibility and Neighborhood Need in Edmonton, Canada." *The Professional Geographer* 58(3):307–26.
- Tang, Xuyang et al. 2014. "Associations between Food Environment around Schools and Professionally Measured Weight Status for Middle and High School Students." *Childhood Obesity* 10(6):511–17.
- Travers, Kim D. 1996. "The Social Organization of Nutritional Inequities." *Social Science & Medicine* 43(4):543–53.

- Veit, Helen Zoe. 2013. *Modern Food, Moral Food. [Electronic Resource] : Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, [2013].
- Wang, DD, CW Leung, Li, and et al. 2014. "Trends in Dietary Quality among Adults in the United States, 1999 through 2010." *JAMA Internal Medicine* 174(10):1587–95.
- Webber, Caroline B., Jeffery Sobal, and Jamie S. Dollahite. 2010. "Shopping for Fruits and Vegetables. Food and Retail Qualities of Importance to Low-Income Households at the Grocery Store." *Appetite* 54(2):297–303.
- Williams, Peter, Phil Hubbard, David Clark, and Nigel Berkeley. 2001. "Consumption, Exclusion and Emotion: The Social Geographies of Shopping." *Social & Cultural Geography* 2(2):203–20.