Embodied Insecurity: Understanding Obesity and Motherhood in Houston, TX

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Background

- **Energy Input-Output Model:** diet/exercise balance
- **Deprivation:** Food deserts, lack of healthcare access, cause weight gain
- **Medicalization/"Cartesian Corpse":** Role of stress, reduces stigma
- **Insecurity:** "Encompasses resource scarcity, resource access and lifestyle concerns" (Drewenowski).

Question

This project seeks to understand obesity’s relationship with insecurity, with focus on its embodied experience and reproduction in immigrant women in a community health setting.

Methods

- Study Site: HOPE Clinic
  - Surveys
  - Interview Guide
- Participant Observation

Analytical Tools

- **Structural Insecurity:** Offer links the stress of insecurity to obesity rates in the United States and other English-speaking market-liberal economies, claiming that "obesity is a personal disorder that is mostly inflicted by society" (Offer 2012).
- **Habitus:** "Structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu 72).
- **Embodiment:** Through the body we learn and observe taken-for-granted aspects of daily life. Bodies are socially informed, and reveal the "deepest dispositions of the habitus" (Bourdieu 1979)

Findings

"My weight? I am pregnant!"

- Traumatic, Insecure childhood
- Refugee status
- Security as a mothering role
- Security conveyed through food and feeding

Discussion

- Broad structures of insecurity relate to trends in obesity but cannot predict outcomes on an individual scale
- **Habitus:** insecurity is ingrained
- Food and feeding are performances of insecurity
- Food and feeding are performances of cultural reproduction
- Motherhood meant exemption from medicalized categories of weight
- Warin (2007); "be ample"
- Warin (2007): to "have it all" takes time away from children and is "selfish" (Warin et al).
- **Bad Mothers**
  
  Gender, class, childhood experience cannot be separated from feeding and self understood weight

Further Research

- More interviews and surveys
- Offer (2010) surveys globally
- Expand focus to caregiver role as a whole rather than "mothers"
- Additional questions: surveillance