

Clean Eating: How the Language of Diet Culture Assigns Moral Judgements to Food Choices

In this paper, I take a linguistic approach to analyze the way in which we talk about food and how the language we use to categorize foods assigns moral judgement to them. To argue this, I examine the roots of the terms “clean” and “junk” food and how these terms are now used to place foods into categories of acceptableness and “rightness.” Working from the research of Matt Fitzgerald, Christy Harrison, and The National Eating Disorders Association on the connections between the language we use to talk about food and eating behavior, I also discuss how people are shamed for their food choices because of this system of morality that rules food culture in modern America. In this paper, using examples from studies, personal connections, and theoretical research, I argue that the main reason behind our modern society’s twisted perceptions of what is “good for them,” what should be cut out of diets, and what is guaranteed to make them gain weight is the language fitness bloggers, health movement voices, and dieticians use to generalize food under various umbrellas of benefits and harms. I want to argue that people use the language of food description such as carbs, calories, and diet to impose limits that can sometimes become extremely restrictive on their own behaviors, and this shows that the language we use to talk about food has moral, even psychological power over most people. My paper can be delivered in 20 minutes and I will need a computer to show my PowerPoint.