

Introduction to College Writing Supplementary Materials

Welcome!

This packet supplements the presentation slides for the Writers' Centre "Introduction to College Writing" workshop, available on the Centre website.

On the following pages, you can find:

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2) Sample CSI Essay Page 3

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If you have any questions, feel free to email Professor Tyagi at ila.tyagi@yale-nus.edu.sg.

A 10-Step Guide to College Writing

Step 1

Read the assignment prompt carefully.

Step 2

Set aside specific times in your schedule to work on the assignment.

Step 3

Narrow down an essay topic.

Step 4

Create a rough essay outline.

Step 5

Develop your argument by drafting your thesis statement.

Step 6

Write one topic sentence for each main point you want to make in your essay body.

Step 7

Flesh out the introduction around the thesis statement, the body paragraphs after the topic sentences, and draft the conclusion.

Step 8

Cite your sources.

Step 9

Show your essay to someone: professor, Writers' Centre peer tutor, friend.

Step 10

Proofread, proofread, proofread before submission.

Sample CSI Essay

(See “How to Write a Great CSI Essay” at Yale-NUS Writers’ Centre website → Resources for additional guidance.)

Veganism: How Socioeconomic Forces Shape Normative Eating Behaviors

Introduction

In recent years, veganism has gained significant traction in mainstream culture. One sign of the times: a quick search in YouTube today for vegan recipes yields nearly four million videos, of which a growing number are posted by creators who dedicate their entire channels to promoting veganism. This begs the question: why are so many people becoming vegan? Even more importantly: why do we eat what we eat? This paper explores the role that social forces play in food consumption and the extent to which individuals exercise personal agency in their food choices. I will first explain the forces that influence food consumption, focusing on socioeconomic forces for the sake of brevity. I will then discuss the recent emergent vegan movement and examine whether individuals who adopt veganism truly exercise personal agency in their decision. My argument will be that although individuals possess the capacity to reconstruct their eating behavior and exercise some level of agency in that decision, they ultimately exist within an inescapable system of social controls that shape their dietary habits.

Socioeconomic Determinants of the Choice of Diet

Arguing the limitations of nutrition as an approach in studying eating habits, Patricia Crotty (1993) wrote that there exists a “domain of behaviour, culture, society and experience” surrounding food consumption that goes unexamined in nutrition studies (109). Indeed, the

scientific discipline of nutrition has largely ignored the social nature of dietary choices, which is a central component of how individuals decide what to eat. The health benefits of a plant-based diet (Craig 2009), for example, are insufficient in explaining changes in normative eating behaviors. One study conducted by Marcia Hill Gossard and Richard York (2003) concluded that meat consumption is “a practice embedded within a complex of social forces” (7). In the following paragraphs, I will explain how socioeconomic determinants specifically have contributed to existing eating norms.

Peter L. Berger (1963) characterizes the class system determined by economic criteria as “[the] most important type of stratification in contemporary Western society” (79). Citing Max Weber, Berger (1963) explains that “one’s class position yields certain probabilities, or life chances, as to the fate one may expect in society” (79). This socioeconomic reality also affects food consumption. Studying the relationship between social class and diet quality, Nicole Darmon and Adam Drewnowski (2008) found that groups of higher socioeconomic status (SES) were more likely to consume whole grains, low-fat dairy products, lean meats, and fresh vegetables, while “the consumption of fatty meats, refined grains, and added fats was associated with lower SES groups” (1109). They suggested that the “observed SES gradient in diet quality may be mediated by” the lower costs of unhealthy foods, the lower accessibility to grocery stores in lower-income neighborhoods, as well as the lack of nutritional knowledge and interest in cooking within lower SES groups (1111). In light of this realization, it comes as no surprise that in Gossard and York’s study (2003), subjects “in laborer occupations eat both more beef and total meat than those in either service or professional occupations” and “people with more education eat less beef and total meat” (6). Social class exerts substantial influence on meat consumption, as a lower SES is more conducive to unhealthy eating habits.

This relationship between social class and meat consumption highlights the existence within lower SES groups of a descriptive norm regarding meat consumption, which Robert B. Cialdini (2003) claims is a highly persuasive social force. A 2013 study (Prinsen, de Ridder, and deVet) confirms Cialdini's argument about descriptive norms in the context of food consumption —when subjects saw previous participants selecting healthy foods, they were more likely to choose healthy foods. As a result, since individuals of lower SES groups view eating meat as what people of their social class typically do, they consume increased levels of meat as compared to those from higher SES group.

It is important to note that another determinant of meat consumption is the economic and political power that the meat industry has gained over the years. As Gossard and York (2003) commented in their study, “the economic elite control consumer preferences through means of social, psychological, and cultural manipulation—for example, by the use of advertising” (2). The meat industry, in other words, exerts the second and third dimensions of power as coined by Steven Lukes (1974), because it shapes the very wants of consumers. In this sense, meat-eating norms have been largely determined by the meat industry's corporate interests. It is thus unsurprising that meat consumption for much of the world is a “deeply engraved social norm and habit” (Raphaely and Marinova 2016, 268). Just as individuals' socioeconomic statuses control the foods that they can afford to consume and contribute to the normative eating patterns within their social class, external forces exerted by the meat industry also establish and reinforce normative eating habits of the general public.

Veganism and Personal Agency

With this understanding of socioeconomic determinants and normative eating behavior in mind, we can now examine the recent growth of veganism. Kathryn Asher and Che Green's survey (2014) revealed that more than fifty percent of vegans and vegetarians cited health, taste preferences, animal protection, or environmental concerns as reasons for their dietary decisions. To add, food photographer Maria Siriano confesses, "the hardest part of going vegan hasn't been cravings, which are surprisingly few..., [for] me, the social ramifications of going vegan were far more discouraging" (Siriano 2017). Asher and Green's study along with Siriano's comment underline an important fact: on a microlevel of analysis, the individual does exercise some level of personal agency in their decision to become vegan. Cutting out animal products for personal and altruistic reasons requires tangible sacrifice and independent action, especially when meat consumption is the norm. In line with the previous analysis of socioeconomic forces, individuals of lower SES groups exercise even more personal agency when they decide to become vegan, as meat consumption is a greater descriptive norm within their social class. In this sense, individuals do possess personal agency and exert pressure to their social milieu in their dietary decisions.

On the macro-level of analysis, however, individuals are still part of a greater system of socioeconomic controls, and their decision to become vegan does not remove them from this system. The reality is that the main demographic group of vegans and vegetarians in the United States are "middle-class and upper-class individuals" (Lindquist 2013). Asher and Green's survey (2014) also displayed an obvious positive relationship between education level and identification as vegan or vegetarian. Essentially, when an individual from a higher SES group makes the decision to become vegan, there exists an illusion of personal agency, because, in fact, the individual is acting within the boundaries of their socioeconomic reality. The implications of

these studies are similar for individuals from a lower SES group, who are also constrained by the realities and norms of their social class when they make decisions about their diet. Rather than an illusion of personal agency, however, their location in the class system yields norms that discourage them as a whole from choosing plant-based diets. Moving beyond the scope of socioeconomic forces, the fact that veganism is now trendy also contributes to the idea that individuals' decision to become vegan is the result of greater social forces. According to the Plant Based Foods Association, plant-based food companies in the United States is growing faster in sales than the entire food business in general (Strom 2016). This trend isn't restricted only to North America; data from Google Trends shows a spike in "vegan" searches over the past five years in countries like Israel, Australia, and Germany (2017). We refer again here to Asher and Green's survey (2014), which found that 63 percent of former vegan and vegetarian subjects disliked the fact that their diet made them "stick out from the crowd" (10). Although this observation explains why former vegan and vegetarians opted out of their lifestyle, it supports the overarching argument that individuals' eating habits are heavily shaped by their social context. We can assume that individuals are less likely to adopt veganism if it was not trending, because there would exist less social forces (i.e. desire to be part of a fad) pushing the individual to exert pressure against meat-eating norms and incentivizing them from sticking out from the crowd.

Conclusion

The role that social structure and personal agency plays in shaping food consumption is perhaps best illustrated by the analogy of a dog's toy ball (Haslanger 2015, 114-115). After a treat has been stuffed into a hole in the ball, while it is free to move within the ball and exert

some levels of pressure against the ball, its behavior is determined by the ball's movement. In the same way, although individuals are able to exercise some levels of personal agency in their dietary habits, their behavior is still bounded by the parameters of the social structure in which they live. My analysis mainly highlighted the effects that socioeconomic forces have upon normative eating behavior, but, as I tried to show in the previous paragraph, there also exist other factors that represent other limits to our behavior as individuals. This understanding of social forces and food consumption creates further implications for public health and environmental studies as it provides the social impetus of unhealthy and environmentally unsustainable eating habits.

References

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Sample LH1 Essay

(See additional LH1 sample papers, and close reading guides, at Yale-NUS Writers' Centre website → Resources.)

[Student name]

Professor [Name]

Literature and Humanities 1

[Date]

How are tensions in power relations between characters brought out in Sima Qian's writings?

Primarily a historical record, Sima Qian's writings in *Shi Ji* naturally follow the lives of monarchs and people of power around them. However, power relations between the characters in his writings are often not straightforward. In particular, the events under *The Biography of the Marquis of Huai-yin (Han Hsin)* are of interest because power relations surrounding the character Han Hsin tend to fluctuate greatly. With this chapter under consideration, I argue that tensions in power relations are brought out when power oscillates between two parties, such that who is truly in control becomes debatable. In this essay, I will focus on three instances of tension in power relations, beginning with tension between Han Hsin and the people, subsequently the tension between Han Hsin and his enemies, and finally, the tension between Han Hsin and his king.

The first instance is observed between Han Hsin and the people. In a relationship of society and the individual, it is natural to assume the former, being more numerous, as more

powerful. The Huai-yin villagers exert their power upon Han Hsin during the episode when Han Hsin is made to crawl between the legs of a young butcher who takes the lead in ridiculing him. The villagers appear more powerful through repetition of insulting and derogatory words “coward” and “nothing” which carry a tone of putting someone in their rightful (lower) place (*Han Hsin*, pp. 209). Their power is further emphasised through the setting, of which the humiliation takes place “in front of a crowd of people” akin to a public spectacle where Han Hsin is an object for ridicule (*Han Hsin*, pp. 209). Han Hsin’s powerlessness is also exemplified by the gap in dialogue, whereby Han Hsin is a mute character in this episode, portraying him as accepting and subservient-like when he obeys the young butcher. Meanwhile, Han Hsin’s lack of response can also be interpreted as a sign of strength if we consider later events. The battle with Chao parallels the Huai-yin episode where Han Hsin (and his forces) are likewise silent yet the latter eventually wins “deceptively” (*Han Hsin*, pp. 216), suggesting the casting aside of dignity and silence as long-sighted endurance for a more decisive comeback – a sign of wit. The people’s mocking thus becomes more of loquaciousness and the stark contrast between them and Han Hsin marks the sharp difference between their intelligence. This applies for the young butcher’s case as well, for we learn the sense of ease Han Hsin expressed through the words “of course” when he mentioned the possibility of killing him during the ridicule episode yet actively “put[ting] up” with it portrays Han Hsin as self-confident and in control (*Han Hsin*, pp. 228). It begs the question who is truly more powerful due to these disparities in virtues, thus causing a tension in the relation of power between Han Hsin and the people.

The second instance of tension in power occurs between Han Hsin and his enemies. In the case concerning Lord of Kuang-wu, their relationship is one of captor and prisoner. Through the victorious Han Hsin’s commanding tone in words like “issued orders” and “questioned”, the

captured Lord of Kuang-wu's polite and non-assertive words like "suggested", "beg" and "in my humble opinion" alongside self-depreciating words "defeat" and "not qualified" (*Han Hsin*, pp. 216-218), their relation seems clearly distinguished whereby Han Hsin is more powerful than Lord of Kuang-wu. However, this is made complex as Han Hsin asked Lord of Kuang-wu for advice in a diplomatic manner. From how Han Hsin took the trouble to sit Lord of Kuang-wu in the "seat of honour" befitting a "teacher" (*Han Hsin*, pp. 216), he is giving a supposed enemy respect and recognition. Han Hsin's diction also includes "beg" (similarly used by Lord of Kuang-wu), "honour of waiting upon [Lord of Kuang-wu]" and repeated use of "listened" (*Han Hsin*, pp. 217). All of which effectively humbles Han Hsin's position to that of an inadequate and reverent student which in doing so elevates Lord of Kuang-wu's status. From this, it is evident their power relation is of captor-and-prisoner yet something more at the same time. Hence, whether Han Hsin or his enemy holds more power in said context is debatable and this complicates the power relation between them.

The third instance that showcases this recurring tension in power falls between Han Hsin and his king, Gaozu (also referred to as King of Han). Between a king and his subject, it is natural to assume Gaozu as the authority figure of the two. Indeed, through Han Hsin's subservient attitude – seen from his action of "bow[ing]" (*Han Hsin*, pp. 211), his worry of territory being taken "away from him" (*Han Hsin*, pp. 227), his gratitude in repeatedly emphasising Gaozu sharing "his own" possessions (*Han Hsin*, pp. 225), and how he established himself as "prisoner" to Gaozu (*Han Hsin*, pp. 230), it is clear Han Hsin views himself as subject to the king who has power over his life and possessions, a relationship driven by a mix of fear and loyalty. Yet tension arises because Gaozu's behaviour reflects otherwise. During the fourth year of Han, Gaozu voices his frustration with seemingly childish "curs[ing]" of Han Hsin for

not “com[ing] to aid [him]” despite “hoping day and night” (*Han Hsin*, pp. 222). This attitude paints Gaozu as powerless without Han Hsin, so much that he can only engage in passive longing for support from the more powerful. The alliteration of “f” sounds from Gaozu being “finally forced to flee” after being cornered in the battles with Ch’u conveys a sense of resignation in line with how Gaozu “feared and hated [Han Hsin’s] ability” (*Han Hsin*, pp. 224 and 229). Han Hsin is further elevated in K’uai T’ung’s counsel. K’uai T’ung repeats the phrase “the fate of these two kings lies with you” to stress Han Hsin as pivotal to the Han-Chu struggle; his doubling of the future tense phrase “will win” conveys a sense of certainty and dispels doubt in Han Hsin’s power and influence (*Han Hsin*, pp. 223-224). K’uai T’ung’s use of hyperbole “the whole world will respond to your call” further raises Han Hsin to a god-like status which culminates with Gaozu installing Han Hsin as a legitimate king (*Han Hsin*, pp. 222 and 225). From these opposing evidences, we come to question if the kingship Gaozu holds truly makes him stronger than Han Hsin, or if the latter’s merit in warfare overshadows his king and thus pushes the power balance in his favour, thus evoking tension.

To summarise, the abovementioned instances provoke further thought on what we as readers may initially assume about the more powerful as recorded by Sima Qian. Through various literary and dramatic techniques, tensions between various figures of power take shape. In a sense, I believe this also makes Sima Qian’s writings more nuanced through the revelation that these are very real historical characters who are often very complex after all. Such examination on their complicated power relations may thus shed light on various significant power struggles which are probably what makes history dynamic and interesting to begin with.

[1183 Words]

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Sample PPT1 Essay

(See additional PPT1 sample papers, and writing guides, at Yale-NUS Writers' Centre website
—> Resources.)

Becoming Just by Doing Just Things Student 123456

At Book II.4 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle has already argued for an account of virtue on which so-called “moral virtues” such as temperance, courage, and other ways of acting, are acquired by habit. Further, he has argued that a person becomes virtuous by doing virtuous things (*NE* II.1, 1103a32-1103b2). However, this claim seems subject to an immediate objection, which is that it has the causal order reversed: shouldn't we say instead that if someone does virtuous things, people are already virtuous? In what follows, I show how Aristotle's answer to this question relies on the distinction between an action being virtuous and an agent being virtuous. Aristotle argues that in order for a person to be characterized as virtuous, they must perform virtuous actions in a certain way, which requires three necessary conditions.

We can say that Aristotle's argument aims at identifying the necessary and sufficient conditions for a person to be virtuous. While it is necessary to be virtuous that some performs virtuous acts, this is not sufficient. If this were sufficient to be virtuous, then someone who does something virtuous merely by accident would be a virtuous person. However, this is not the case. Take, for example, the virtue of courage, which is displayed especially in fearful situations (II.1, 1104a). Rescuing a helpless child who has fallen onto railway tracks in the path of a rapidly approaching train seems to constitute an act of courage. However, if the person who performs this action is wearing headphones and is unaware that the train is coming, then we would not call

the person courageous. This example illustrates why Aristotle thinks further conditions must be met for a person to be called virtuous.

To identify which conditions must be in place for a person, and not just the act, to be virtuous, Aristotle explores a proposed analogy with arts such as language and music. The objection has stated that people who do grammatical or musical things count as grammarians and musicians, and so, by analogy, someone who does virtuous things counts as a virtuous person. In what follows, Aristotle will show that even on this analogy, doing virtuous acts does not alone guarantee being a virtuous person. Further, he will show that the analogy fails to hold at a crucial point.

Aristotle considers different ways that a person can perform a grammatical action. First, one could do so “by chance,” that is, by accidentally happening upon a grammatical construction (1105a22). Suppose a very young child, uttering different syllables in a playful manner, accidentally utters a correct Mandarin word. She has performed a grammatical action, but we would not call her a grammarian. Likewise, a person who accidentally moves a person in danger —perhaps they were simply in their way—would not count as being a virtuous person. By analogy, this shows that an additional necessary condition for being virtuous is choosing the virtuous action (1105a30).

Still, acting virtuously and choosing the virtuous action are not together sufficient for being a virtuous person. This is because, on analogy with speaking grammatically, one could simply follow instructions and succeed in performing a grammatical action. For instance, the child learning Mandarin could repeat a sentence her instructor gave her. Although she has spoken a grammatical sentence and chosen to utter the sentence, we still would not call her a grammarian. In the domain of virtue, a child who is told to return a toy stolen from a playmate

has performed a virtuous action, and does so by choice. However, she is not yet virtuous. What is required is for her to choose the act on her own, without additional reasons such as that someone has told her. Virtuous actions must be things she chooses “for their own sakes,” that is, that she finds intrinsically valuable (1105a32).

The third and final necessary condition Aristotle identifies is for the virtuous action to “proceed from a firm and unchangeable character” (1105a33). At this point, however, he observes that the analogy between the domain of the arts and the domain of virtue fails. This is because what constitutes a grammatically good sentence or a musically good composition is the result (1105a26-29). In contrast, Aristotle has already argued that the goodness of virtue is in the manner of performance of the virtuous action (I.8, 1097a14-18). The manner of acting is an essential part of the action’s being virtuous. This is why Aristotle says that the person who does virtuous actions “as just and temperate men do them” counts as virtuous (I.8, 1105b5-11). In other words, if someone is performing a virtuous action which is characteristic for them, they are acting virtuously.

Even though Aristotle argues that the analogy with music is not complete, since in music, the focus is on the musical composition or its performance, and not the musician’s character, we can illustrate his point about habitual character with musicians. In fact, he makes this point earlier (II.1, 1103b8-10). To be a good lyre-player, one must practice. On one’s first day of lyre lessons, the resulting music will not be very good. Perhaps after one or two years of constant performances, a lyre-player becomes good. When she performs a piece of music with a musical ear and dexterity, she is not a good lyre-player because of that single performance. Rather, she performs that piece of music in a way that a good lyre-player does: with skills which have become part of her ordinary way of playing the lyre. On this analogy, then, a virtuous person

who saves a child on railroad tracks is not a virtuous person because of that single action. Rather, she saves the child in the way that a virtuous person does: with knowledge, because she intends to do a virtuous thing and not because of external pressure, and out of a habitual reflex. Like the lyre-player, she might not even think about her action as she leaps onto the tracks.

In conclusion, although we might be tempted to say that if someone does a virtuous action, then they are a virtuous person, Aristotle argues that virtuous action alone is insufficient for being a virtuous person. Reasoning by partial analogy with artistic actions, he shows that there are three additional necessary and together sufficient conditions for a virtuous action. Finally, even though the analogy with art is partial, when we focus on the habitual nature of musical training, we can see that, on Aristotle's account, the virtuous person, becomes this way after habituation, which is what makes their actions virtuous—that is with knowledge, correct intention, and from habitual nature.

[1095 words]

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Sample Essay Grading Rubric

	Thesis	Work with Texts	Organization	Presentation
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex, nuanced interpretive thesis. • Thesis is articulated clearly from the outset. • Thesis is aware of its situation within a larger conversation or problem. • Thesis is consistently developed and present through essay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses textual evidence with confidence and authority. • Student’s ideas in control throughout paper. • Text evidence used well to both support and complicate the thesis. • Student-centered connective thinking cuts across readings in unanticipated ways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, fluid, logically connected. • Strong use of topic sentences and other guideposts for the reader. • Strong use of transitions and connective language between and within paragraphs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only minimal or no errors. • Likely to exhibit eloquence or an elegant writing style through rich but appropriate vocabulary, varied sentence structure, etc.
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thesis articulated fairly clearly from the outset. • Thesis as articulated accurately describes essay’s actual discussion. • Thesis may be somewhat limited or developed in a repetitive way. • Advances independent ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes some interpretive risks with texts (e.g., “text suggests <i>x</i>”). • Uses a variety of textual evidence (quotation, paraphrase, form, etc.). • Text(s) used in service of project and to provide support for it; student’s voice predominant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained meaningful structure, controlled development of thesis. • Reasonable coherence through smoother and consistent use of transitions and topic sentences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal errors in grammar or spelling. • Minimal or no errors of citation or formatting (spacing, margins, page numbering, etc.).

C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thesis emerges at end of or during essay from discussion of the text. • Takes clear larger position at least once (e.g., a moment that declares what this essay generally argues). • Thesis may be vague or general. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate reading comprehension. • Adequate use of textual evidence. • Sense that student’s voice is contributing to or moderating the conversation. • Some convincing close reading. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some coherent relationships between paragraphs through use of transitional language. • Paragraphs may exhibit “emerging topic sentences” (i.e., focus is stated at end, after discussion). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence-level errors do not significantly impede meaning. • Some mechanical, citation, and/or formatting errors. • Incomplete list of work cited.
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