

Putting dietary restrictions on the table: On hospitality and (epistemic) ableism at shared meals

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- Graphic by Amy Sly used in *The Kitchn* blog post by Durand (2012).
  - Commenter Cynthia Bertelsen: “I must say I long for the days, when people came to dinner, they ate what the frazzled cook placed in front of them.”
  - Commenter westfield replies: “Really? I have Celiac disease. Would you serve me bread and say I ought to eat it because you are frazzled? How is that hospitality? If having guests frazzles you then you should not have them” (Durand 2012).





# I argue that...

- People with food allergies and relevantly similar “gut issues” can be subject to forms of *testimonial injustice* and *testimonial smothering* about their gut issues
- These forms of epistemic injustice can cause various moral and material harms and impede good hospitality
  - Hospitality is a morally valuable practice!
- Hosts should practice epistemic humility toward guests and work to undercut testimonial smothering around gut issues

## Gut issues

- Concept adapted from Jane Dryden (2021)
- What is important for hospitality is **the fact that an eater may be harmed in a relatively quick, direct, and predictable way by ingesting or being exposed to a certain food or ingredient** – not the specific mechanism of harm.
- Gut issues include food allergies, intolerances, celiac disease, and Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

But you're not  
*really* allergic (or  
intolerant or  
celiac or...)

- “Most cases of (self-) reported food allergies lack scientific rationale” (Haeusermann 2015, 370).
- 19% of US adults report at least 1 food allergy, but only 10.8% are estimated to “actually” have one (Gupta et al. 2019).
- In one UK survey, 20% of the population reported food intolerances, but double-blind placebo-controlled food challenges showed less than 2% had “true reactions to food” (Turnbull, Adams, and Gorard 2015, 5).
- “Many patients believe that they are allergic or intolerant to certain foods, solely on the basis of self persuasion” (Ortolani and Pastorello 2006, 473).

# Testimonial Injustice

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- Occurs when an audience fails to give a person's testimony an appropriate level of credibility on the basis of an identity prejudice
- Testimony from members of this group is disbelieved or taken less seriously than it would be otherwise (Buchman, Ho, and Goldberg 2017, 35).
  - “You're never sure if it's just 'cos they don't like it or whether they actually can't [eat that food]” (Nettleton et al 2010, 298).

# Testimonial Injustice

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- Testimonial injustice directed at those with gut issues occurs in a context where the person's testimony carries particular epistemic importance
  - Symptoms are private (occurring “internally” or in private locations like bathrooms) and taboo to discuss in public
  - Widespread misunderstandings of gut issues

# Testimonial Injustice

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- Moral concerns
  - Disrespects people as knowers
  - Risks harming guests with food
  - Prevents hosts from fulfilling their obligations of hospitality

# Testimonial Smothering

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- “If a speaker recognizes that an audience... is unlikely to give her adequate uptake, she'll choose not to speak” ([Ivy] 2016, 442).
  - Dryden notes a general reluctance to “speak up” about gut issues (2021, 17).
  - Some teens conceal their celiac disease from others to avoid disbelief and accusations that they are “making it up,” or “being self-important” (Olsson et al. 2009, 982).
  - “I’m afraid I’ll just eat it [the culprit food] and then I think to myself, OK, for the next few days I’m just going to have to hide away quietly” (Nettleton et al. 2010, 296).

# Testimonial Smothering

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- Moral concerns
  - Risk of physical harm from culprit foods
  - Neither guest nor host can fulfill responsibilities of hospitality
    - Hosts: responsibility to accommodate
    - Guests: responsibility to inform hosts of needs

How not to be  
the “worst host  
ever”

- *Epistemic humility* is key
  - “A commitment to make realistic assessment of what one knows and does not know, and to restrict one's confidence and claims to knowledge only to what one actually knows about his/her specialized domain” (Ho 2011, 117).
- Acknowledge and counter context of testimonial smothering

# Selected sources

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