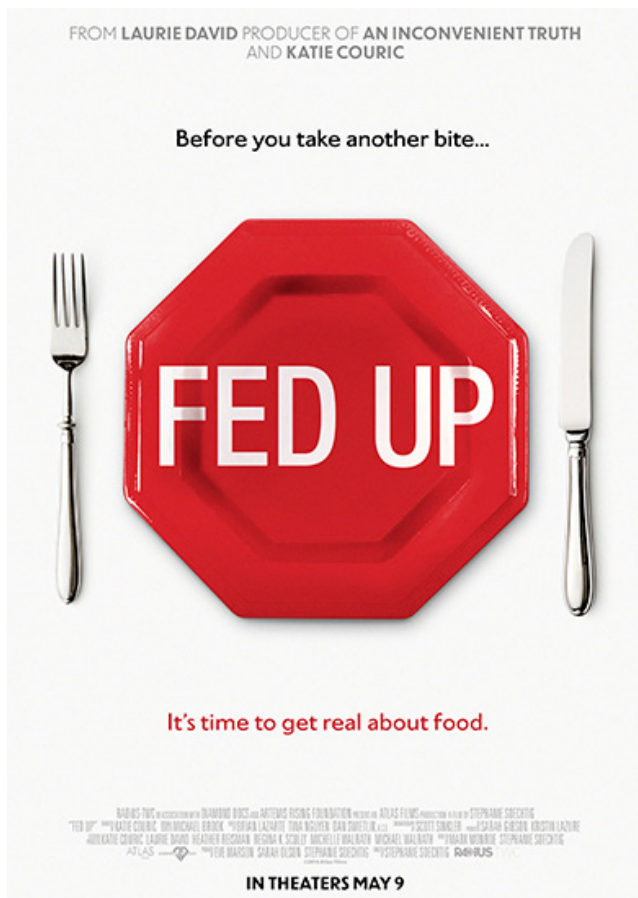


INFLUENCE | FILM CLUB

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Fed Up Discussion Guide

Director: Stephanie Soechtig

Year: 2014

Time: 92 min

You might know this director from:

Tapped (2009)

FILM SUMMARY

The sky is blue. The Earth is round. The ocean is deep. Americans are fat. This latest mantra, readily repeated across the globe, is beginning to resemble a universal truth. Is anyone responding to the warning calls, as obesity becomes more and more common amongst Americans? FED UP tackles the issue in 92 full minutes.

What began as a side story for journalist Katie Couric ballooned into headline news. Along with director Stephanie Soechtig, Couric investigates the reasons why an increasing number of obese Americans are suffering the consequences of being fed syrupy sweet lies. FED UP looks to the U.S.D.A., the food manufacturers, the unregulated media industry, and the nauseating increase in sugar in the majority of modern diets, and serves up a damning case against the current modus operandi in food production and its deathly detrimental effects.

Through interviews with medical professionals, scientists, politicians, and a number of American families, FED UP challenges widely upheld truths. Lessons passed on through generations - that lazy people get fat, that thin people possess will power, that exercise is the overriding solution to obesity, that the individual has the free will to ignore the indoctrinations of massive corporations charged with manufacturing malnutrition - are put to the test. The biochemistry of sugar is explained, financial forces are flushed out, mass media is questioned, diseases are addressed. The result is an unpalatable, nauseating stew of disturbing evidence.

FED UP completes its task of stirring up the stagnant pot of accepted truths. If the U.S. wishes to continue as a leading global power, fundamental changes are overdue. With the future leaders succumbing to obesity, presenting diabetes earlier than ever before, fearing heart attacks before they can even vote, who will stand proud and healthy before the rest of the world? It's time for the food industry to serve up the truth.

FILM THEMES

The definition of a sweet tooth is reexamined in FED UP's critical attack on the lethal properties of sugar, as the American food industry preys on the common citizen and obesity threatens to severely shorten lives.

SUGAR

Out of 600,000 food items available in the U.S., 80% of them have added sugar. As tons of the sweet stuff is poured gluttonously into our food and drinks, our waistlines respond by bulging outwards. With its exhaustingly addictive physical properties and scientifically proven detrimental effects on the body, sugar could be considered the big, bad wolf that must be banished from food production. Instead it has been knowingly, heartily added in nauseating amounts to nearly everything we've consumed over the last 40 years. However slyly saccharine is disguised, renamed, and hidden, sugar may be the end of us all.

THE MESSAGE VS. THE MESSENGER

The message is reiterated, repeated, rehashed, replicated: Will Power. Lazy, lethargic individuals get fat. Get up and move. Shake your body. The power is yours and yours only. But who is the messenger harking out this reprimand? The manufacturers, the food companies that knowingly place dollar signs before health, are the ones ruining real lives through misinformation and malnutrition. Once their falsely fortified products are consumed, gluttony and sloth rule, direct results of the biochemistry in people's bodies. Will power has been proven to be helpless in the face of addiction; and still the messenger shouts out the discomfiting "Move!" when the food they offer inspires quite the opposite.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The U.S.D.A., the government agency assigned the task of providing fact-based nutritional advice to the American public, is simultaneously charged with promoting the very industry that is sickening consumers. How can this body, part of an allegedly Democratic, free-for-all nation, function in a healthy, transparent manner? Virtually impossible. With financial gains driving the same individuals informing people on what to put into their mouths, the results are scandalous. The bulk of focus falls on promoting unhealthy products rather than encouraging unprocessed life choices. When the government is subsidizing research into financially motivated food manufacturers, an overweight nation becomes reality.

LACK OF POLITICAL WILL

"We've placed private profit and special interests ahead of public health," Doctor David Ludwig stated. The U.S., the richest nation in the world, is arguably killing its own citizens, serving the junkiest school lunches, marketing tainted, misguided lessons to the most susceptible. In a place where industry is valued more than health, no wonder the nation is sicker than ever. When schools rely on the funding they receive from unhealthy food providers and retailers are given free reign to market their products to the wide-open minds of the future leaders of the country, no wonder the masses sop up the unhealthy and bodies bulge beyond belief. A politically weak nation is an unwell nation.

"We are not going to exercise our way out of this obesity problem."

Margo Wootan

"America is still insufficiently alert to the damage we are doing long-term to our collective health by too much sugar intake."

President Bill Clinton

"Targeting young children is simply immoral."

Michele Simon

"Sugar is poison."

Robert Lustig

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. Name one word to describe the overriding feeling you had directly after watching FED UP?
2. Have you ever been personally affected by obesity?
3. Besides eating less processed foods, what other everyday steps can the average family take to combat obesity?
4. Do you feel you eat a healthy diet? What, if any, aspects of your eating habits would you change?
5. Describe your average daily food intake.
6. Do you consume sugary beverages? Do you consume dietary or light products?
7. Why is the U.S. leading the world in obesity? What is it about the American system that has allowed the food industry to let this problem get so out of hand?
8. Do you think the film placed too much focus on sugar as the primary culprit in obesity? What, if any, factors were overlooked in the wider issue of obesity?
9. What stereotypes do you have of overweight people? Do you think excessive weight gain can be connected to character traits? Or is pure nutrition at the heart of obesity?
10. What was served in your school cafeteria? Do you have any experience of what is offered in school cafeterias in your community nowadays?

NOTES:

FILM FACTS:

- Journalist Katie Couric had the initial idea for FED UP, subsequently approaching Stephanie Soechtig, having appreciated her documentary “Tapped” about the bottled water industry. 95% of the staff working on the film was women. FED UP is Katie Couric’s debut as a film producer.
- Michelle Obama’s anti child obesity campaign - Let’s Move! - was launched in 2010, on the same day that President Obama created the Task Force on Childhood Obesity. Beyoncé Knowles and Swizz Beatz created a song entitled “Move Your Body” for the Let’s Move workout.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) first recognized obesity as a global epidemic in 1997. In 2013, the American Medical Association (AMA) classified obesity as a disease. Once a problem exclusive to high-income countries, obesity now affects people across the globe, with sub-Saharan Africa being the only place where it is not common and undernutrition still prevails. Urban communities have experienced the greatest increase in obesity.
- Mexico leads the world in obesity rates, with 7 out of 10 Mexicans classified as overweight and 34% obese. The U.S. comes in second place, followed by the U.K., Canada, and Australia. 62% of the world’s obese live in developing countries.
- In Saudi Arabia, which has one of the fastest growing economies of the world, around 70% of the adult population is overweight.
- Sugar has been produced in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh since ancient times. Crusaders brought sugar back to Europe after their visits to the Holy Land during the 1100s, and Christopher Columbus first introduced sugar to the New World from the Canary Islands in 1492. As the human palette adjusted to the taste of sugar in food, major social and economic changes took place, driving extensive colonization of tropical, sugar-producing nations.
- Excluding artificial sweeteners, the average American consumed 65 pounds of refined sugar and 68 pounds of corn-derived sweeteners in 2008. Brazil produces more sugar than any other country, followed by India, with the U.S. coming in sixth place.
- In 2013, 42 million preschool children globally were overweight.
- The more common type of diabetes - Type 2 - is triggered by being overweight or obese. The consumption of excess amounts of food stresses the membranous network inside of cells, in turn leading to high concentrations of the sugar glucose in the blood. 44% of diabetes’ cases worldwide can be attributed to obesity.
- In Quebec, Sweden, and Norway, advertising to children under the age of 12 is illegal. Advertising to children in the United States, on the other hand, is unregulated, and the average American child sees 20,000 commercials a year.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Consider hosting a screening and discuss the film afterwards.
2. Consider becoming involved in some capacity with [The Obesity Society](#) that is seeking to find ways to combat the obesity epidemic in the U.S, through research, education, and advocacy,
3. Decrease the amount of processed food in your diet. Eat real, unadulterated food.
4. Support [Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood](#), working to take away power from commercial marketers and protect the most vulnerable sector of society: children.
5. Get involved with [Corporate Accountability International](#) that work for health, human rights, and the environment.

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.