

Let Them Eat Kale:
Food Insecurity Discourses in Richmond, BC

by

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BSc., Environmental Sciences, University of British Columbia, 2017

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department of Geography

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University of Victoria

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ABSTRACT

Household food insecurity is a persistent yet hidden problem in wealthy nations such as Canada, where it has in part been perpetuated through discourses and practices at the local scale. Drawing upon archival materials, participant observation of local food programs, and semi-structured interviews with food program clients and community facilitators, this study analyzes the ways in which household food insecurity has been framed within the context of Richmond, British Columbia. The study's findings suggest that discourses organized around the production and (re)distribution of food, rather than income inequality, have misdirected household food insecurity reduction activities away from the central issue of poverty. The present study therefore helps to draw attention to overlooked income-based frameworks, especially approaches that highlight the importance of political economy. It reinforces the inextricable link between health outcomes and the inequitable distribution of economic resources and political power – things that have become lost or concealed in various discourses on household food insecurity.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I entered graduate school as a positivist impervious to social intricacies and emerged from it as a critical researcher whose perspective has been deepened and enlivened. Here is everyone who guided me through this exhilarating and exhausting path. Foremost, my deepest gratitude goes to my supervisors, who graciously took me on during a time of supervisory upheaval and patiently supported me through the confusing evolution of my research, even in its dead ends. To Dr. Denise Cloutier, who drew me into the rich realm of qualitative research as an instructor, provided gentle counsel as a mentor, and reviewed my work with utmost care as an editor, holding me accountable to every instance of equivocating language. To Dr. Reuben Rose-Redwood, for always providing thoughtful and prompt feedback, teaching me to think critically about the world, illuminating theory as it applies to everything around us, and challenging me to seek justice in everyday spaces and practices. These lessons have contributed not only to knowledge, but also to character. I would also like to thank committee member Dr. Cindy Ann Rose-Redwood for her advice, insight, and interest in my project. As a whole, my committee encouraged me to conduct my analysis with nuance, an important reminder to me that the project of social justice is complex.

Besides my committee, I also extend my gratitude to other members of the department: Dr. Simon Springer, for initiating my graduate studies and introducing me to critical geography, Dr. Dennis Jelinski, for his support as a graduate advisor and professor, and Dr. Cameron Owens, for expanding my horizons and providing me with a travel/teaching/learning opportunity of a lifetime in Europe. His urban sustainability field course was certainly a highlight of my time at the University of Victoria, another one being the time when Dr. Denise Cloutier brought her adorable cat, Charlie, to class.

This research would not have been possible without research participants and the people who generously allowed me into their community. I am humbled by the resilience, dignity, and compassion that they exhibit. At the Richmond Food Bank, I would like to thank staff members and volunteers who welcomed my presence as a shadower/researcher. Many thanks also to the Church on Five community meal coordinator, who invited me to their program when no other churches would, and whose compassionate efforts have enriched the community in many ways.

Finally, I would like to thank my peers, friends, and family for their knowledge, companionship, and support during this time. My critical approach to this research was undoubtedly informed by my classmates, who diversified my perspective, as well as by participants from the Hua Foundation's Race and Food workshops, who led me to realize that my identity always matters, after nearly a quarter century of believing that it does not or should not. In daily life, I am deeply grateful for my best friend, with whom I commiserated and laughed; boyfriend, another conduit for complaint and comic relief; cat, whose soft fur is a proven calming agent, and my mother, who sacrificed so much, as immigrant parents often do, so that I could hold the privileges I enjoy today. Only when I developed a critical perspective, with the help of everyone mentioned above, did I understand the magnitude and inequity of these privileges.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of food insecurity operates on many scales, but it is directly experienced within the household. Food security is commonly accepted as the condition in which “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO 1996). Although this definition is intended to encompass food security across scales, its connotations and implications differ at every level, from the individual to the global scale. As I will discuss later in this thesis, confusion between different scalar dimensions of food insecurity often prevents appropriate responses. Food insecurity is commonly presented as the absence of the aforementioned conditions of food security, and it typically focuses on the socio-economic circumstances related to food deprivation (National Research Council 2006). Since these circumstances depend on household circumstances, the household forms the functional unit of analysis for food insecurity in a North American context (Tarasuk 2001b; National Research Council 2006). According to Health Canada (2012a), household food insecurity (HFI) refers to “the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet in terms of quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so” (also, see Davis & Tarasuk 2014).

HFI is closely associated with the financial ability to access food, alternatively described as “exist[ing] within a household when one or more members do not have access to the variety or quantity of food that they need due to lack of money” (Statistics Canada 2015), the “[lack of] financial ability to access adequate food” (Health Canada 2012a), or “the inadequate or insecure access to sufficient food because of financial constraints” (Dachner & Tarasuk 2018) in a Canadian context. The present study thus distinguishes HFI, which is largely determined by

consumer income, from the umbrella term of food security, which typically reckons with the production and distribution of food. Note that their fundamental resources in question, finances and food respectively, circulate through separate, albeit intersecting systems, in non-agrarian economies. The main causes and solutions to HFI do not reside within the food system itself, but within the social safety net, inclusive of the tax and transfer system and labour policies. In this thesis, I will also explore the complications of failing to recognize, or overzealously attempting to reconcile, this distinction. While the link between income and HFI is well-established (Che & Chen 2001; Lambert et al. 2012; Loopstra & Tarasuk 2013; Rose et al. 1999; Tarasuk 2017; Wight et al. 2012), other contributing factors, many related to income, include demographic traits such as single mother status, Indigeneity, minority status, disability, home ownership, and education level, as well as geographic characteristics including housing affordability and to a lesser extent, proximity to food outlets (Dubois & Tremblay 2014; Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk 2011; McIntyre et al. 2014; Olabiyi & McIntyre 2014; Power 2005; Provincial Health Services Authority 2016; Ricciuto et al. 2006; Sriram & Tarasuk 2016; Willows et al. 2009). Because income is widely accepted as the primary determinant of household food insecurity, patterns of inequitable food access tend to follow trends in economic inequality.

Although food insecurity is concentrated in lower-income countries in the Global South, it has been a growing concern within affluent yet unequal countries in the Global North where its prevalence is all the more jarring (Riches & Silvasti 2014). In 2012, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier DeSchutter, led an envoy to Canada, his first to an affluent, industrialized country. During his visit, he expressed moral outrage at the state of food insecurity in Canada, remarking that “it’s even more shocking...to see that there are 900,000 households in Canada that are food insecure and up to 2.5 million people precisely because this is a wealthy

country. It's even less excusable" (Postmedia News 2012). Using such dissonance as a framing narrative, DeSchutter's report reveals that Canada's status as a wealthy country, ranking 6th on the human development index, masks widening inequality within (DeSchutter 2012). The report condemns Canada's high incidence of hunger and poverty, particularly among Indigenous, Inuit, and Metis populations, due to inadequate social services, political marginalization, and the lack of a national food policy.

The food insecurity figures cited by DeSchutter (2012), who already found them to be unacceptable, still vastly underrepresent the magnitude of the problem. They were derived from food bank usage data, which actually underestimates food insecurity rates as reported in census data by 4-5 times (Loopstra & Tarasuk 2015). In 2011-2012, the latest Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) cycle with full participation across all provinces, 8.3% of households reported moderate or severe food insecurity, which has increased from 7.7% in 2007-2008 (Statistics Canada 2015; Health Canada 2012b). When HFI statistics include marginal food insecurity, referring to the psychological condition of "worry about running out of food and/or limited food selection due to a lack of money for food," the figure rises to 13% of households in 2011-2012, amounting to four million Canadians, including 1.15 million children (Tarasuk, Mitchell, & Dachner 2014). In 2014, 43.9% of low-income households, after adjusting for household size, as well as 60.9% of households reliant on social assistance, were food insecure, which suggests that both employment wages and social assistance programs are inadequate for fulfilling basic household needs (Tarasuk et al. 2016). It is worth noting that national estimates still underreport the incidence of HFI due to the exclusion of reserve and homeless populations in CCHS surveys (Loopstra & Tarasuk 2015).

As a serious public health concern, food insecurity is closely associated with poor physical, mental, and social health outcomes such as chronic disease, depression, and social isolation in both children and adults (Bhargava et al. 2012; Black et al. 2012; Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2007; Davison et al. 2015; Ford 2013; Seligman et al. 2010; Seligman & Schillinger 2010; Tarasuk et al. 2013; Vozoris & Tarasuk 2003). The fact that afflicted individuals typically belong to socio-economically marginalized populations compounds their susceptibility to these health consequences. Seligman and Schillinger's (2010) cycle of food insecurity and chronic disease describes the positive feedback between the two conditions: the inability to afford nutritious food leads to diet-related diseases, therefore increasing health care expenditures while decreasing employability, in turn limiting financial resources available for healthy food. Health care costs for severely food insecure households in Canada, including inpatient hospital care, emergency department visits, physician services, same-day surgeries, home care services and prescription drugs, are estimated to be 76% higher than those that are food secure, which presents an additional burden for households already facing financial constraints (Tarasuk et al. 2015; Bhargava et al. 2012). Given that HFI and its concomitant health impacts are disproportionately borne by those that are the most vulnerable, the incidence of HFI is not only a matter of health inequality, which refers to observed differences in health between population groups, but one of health inequity, which describes differences that are unjust or unfair (Canadian Institute for Health Information 2016).

Study Area

Health inequities tend to follow geographic patterns of economic inequality. Although Canada's Northern and remote communities contain the highest rates of HFI, its overall

prevalence is higher in urban areas (12.4%) than in rural areas (10.3%) (Tarasuk et al. 2016).

While this difference is not statistically significant, it is consistent with a rise in inequality that has been virtually exclusive to cities (CPA 2017). This is not to say that rural and remote communities are not experiencing inequality, but that its *increase* has been concentrated in larger urban centres. In Metro Vancouver, a city exemplifying vast socio-economic disparities, the increase in after-tax income inequality since 1982, as measured by the Gini coefficient, is currently 2.5 times higher than the national average (CPA 2017). Furthermore, from 1970 to 2015, the proportion of high-income individuals in this region increased from 12% to 20%, whereas the low-income population increased from 11% to 29% (Neighbourhood Change 2017a). Such inequality is linked to neoliberal policymaking and increasing housing costs, which compromise household financial security and, by extension, food security (Moos 2014). In 2011-2012, 11.8% of BC individuals, and 15.6% of BC children experienced food insecurity (Dachner et al. 2016). While previous studies have focused on Vancouver's inner city (Anema et al. 2010; Broughton et al. 2006; Miewald & McCann 2014; Miewald & Ostry 2014; Anema et al. 2010), less attention has been paid to its suburbs, where poverty may be hidden due to lack of visibility.

Although populations that experience HFI have historically been concentrated in city centre areas, research in the US suggests that suburban poverty has been increasing (Kneebone & Berube 2013; Shannon et al. 2017). This phenomenon is evident in Metro Vancouver, where maps displaying income over time show wealthy populations moving into the urban core as lower-income populations migrate to the suburbs (Neighbourhood Change 2017b). These changes arise from a combination of factors including gentrification of the urban core, uneven patterns of housing affordability, and the suburban settlement of immigrants who tend to have lower incomes (Kneebone & Berube 2013). An example of where this may – or may not – be

occurring is the Vancouver suburb of Richmond, as I will now discuss within the context of conflicting data.

In total, immigrants comprise 60.2% of the Richmond population, and 70% of residents are of Asian (predominantly Chinese) descent (Statistics Canada 2017). Unlike historically inner-city enclaves such as Vancouver's Chinatown, Richmond has been characterized as an affluent "ethnoburb," which describes the clustering of a particular ethnic minority within suburbs that may be more expensive (Li 2009). To support the perception of wealth, the average cost of homes is just over \$1 million (Cooper 2017), which is the third highest among Metro Vancouver neighbourhoods (Crawford 2018). Notably incongruous, however, are the 22.4% of Richmond households that reported low incomes, which is the highest rate among Metro Vancouver cities (Statistics Canada 2017). While the dissonance between these figures suggests local inequality, it also calls into question their accuracy. Policymakers and researchers suspect that Richmond's income statistics are heavily skewed due to the underreporting of income amid globalized wealth (Ferreras 2017; Young 2017).

At the same time, the media's sensationalized reporting on foreign wealth, whether it be in the form of luxury cars (Azpiri 2016), luxury apartments (Young 2017), "mega-homes" (Tomlinson 2016), empty speculation properties (Northam 2019), money laundering (Breakenridge 2019), or oftentimes, all of the above (Ip 2019), is disproportionate to its meagre coverage of low-income communities. Although foreign investment certainly exists to an unprecedented degree in Metro Vancouver, and has indeed contributed to the region's lack of housing affordability, this phenomenon tends to be portrayed in "over blown" (Cheung 2015) ways that "scapegoat," other, and incite resentment against racialized newcomers (Cheung 2015; Wong 2016; Yu 2015). Moreover, the media's fixation on the nouveau riche is disproportionate

to its meagre coverage of low-income communities, which tends to be undertaken with an equally voyeuristic gaze – what Wong (2016) considers to be “Downtown Eastside gonzo journalism” – even when it occurs. Both wealth and poverty are simultaneously sequestered and gawked upon; the magnitude of either may always be uncertain, but this study will try to consider these issues with more nuance than is conveyed in statistics and media narratives.

To some extent, Richmond’s influx of immigrant wealth subverts assumptions about immigrant populations’ heightened vulnerability to poverty (Ley & Smith 2008) and thus food insecurity (McIntyre et al. 2014). According to national census data, immigrant households in fact experience lower rates of HFI than those with Canadian-born respondents (Provincial Health Services Authority 2016b). This correlates to the low rate of food insecurity in Richmond, which is among the lowest in the region – again contradicting the city’s income data. By various measures, food insecurity is estimated to be 6.3% compared with Metro Vancouver’s average of 7.0% (My Health My Community 2019), 8% as opposed to 10% in Vancouver Coastal Health jurisdictions (Provincial Health Services Authority 2016c), and 8.3% to BC’s 11.8% (Provincial Health Services Authority 2016b). That the rate of 8.3% matches the national average, however, calls into question the city’s appearance of extraordinary prosperity. Richmond’s numerous food provisioning initiatives, such as grocery distribution and community meals, also suggest that HFI is a persistent, albeit hidden, problem in this neighbourhood.

While Richmond’s immigrant population as a whole may not be at particular risk of HFI, portions of this demographic may still face unique vulnerabilities due to settlement challenges. These barriers include a lack of financial resources, language barriers, and difficulty in finding employment (Smith & Ley 2008), which then hinders the ability to afford food, as evidenced by the increased risk of HFI among racialized workers (McIntyre et al. 2014). Immigrants at the

lower end of the income spectrum may have been obscured by the visibility of foreign wealth, generalized to Metro Vancouver's entire Chinese population in popular media. Against this backdrop, Texeira (2013) identifies increasing income inequality among immigrant populations in Surrey and Richmond, evidence of which I see in the present study. Due to the current lack of visibility and information regarding HFI in ethnic and seemingly affluent suburbs, I have selected Richmond, BC as my area of study.

Research Goal, Objectives, and Questions

The goal of this study was to critically assess competing household food insecurity discourses and responses in Richmond, BC, from the vantage point of political economic theory. My objectives consist of, firstly, analyzing discursive formulations of HFI, and, secondly, examining how they affect responses to the issue within my study area of Richmond, BC. For the first objective, I conducted a content and discourse analysis of local news articles, web pages, policy documents, and reports to answer my first research question: how do organizations and the media frame household food insecurity in Richmond, BC? My initial expectation was that food-based frameworks such as food charity and community food security, which fail to respond to the income-driven problem of HFI, would dominate. Under the second objective, my second research question consists of the following: how does the discursive framing of household food insecurity affect responses to the issue? To answer this question, I conducted observations and stakeholder interviews at several community organizations to illuminate researcher, facilitator, and client experiences of HFI and/or its responses. I anticipated obtaining perspectives about poverty, an issue that is unlikely to be addressed in food-based community programs.

Combined, my objectives, questions, and attendant methods provided a foundation for deconstructing knowledge and power relations among HFI discourses and their resultant responses. The first question seeks to identify prevailing belief systems enshrined within HFI discourses, while the second illuminates the real-world ramifications of these frameworks. They operate under the assumption that discursive frameworks (mis)guide HFI-reduction initiatives according to hegemonic and anti-hegemonic structures, including neoliberalism and resistance to neoliberal policies. Since community food initiatives have been academically under-evaluated yet publicly overestimated, the present study helps to clarify their limited contribution with regards to alleviating material deprivation. This analysis helps to direct academic inquiry and public action towards activities that respond not only to the material condition of food scarcity, but more importantly, to the fundamentally inequitable distribution of economic resources and political power – things that have become lost or intentionally disguised in various HFI discourses.

Theory Framework

According to Mendly-Zambo and Raphael (2019), political economy is the most appropriate yet least utilized framework for HFI analysis and action: it illuminates the socio-economic and political conditions that produce HFI, one or both of which are commonly obscured in HFI discourses. Although the political economy of food and related structural frameworks are well-established in existing literature (Friedmann 1993; 2012; McMichael 2009; Bernstein 2016), the political economy of HFI is largely underdeveloped aside from Graham Riches' (1986; 1997; 2002; 2011; 2018) pioneering work in this field. In addition to Riches, the present study's theoretical approach also derives from Mendly-Zambo and Raphael's (2019)

political economic analysis of HFI discourses (2018), Fisher's (2017) indictment of corporate involvement in the anti-hunger movement, and Valerie Tarasuk's extensive work (Tarasuk 2001a; 2001b; 2017; Tarasuk & Beaton 1999; Tarasuk, Dachner, & Loopstra 2014; Tarasuk & Eakin 2005; Tarasuk, Mitchell, & Dachner 2014; 2016) in the related framework of social determinants of health (SDH). According to these perspectives, HFI is a result of neoliberal policies, mainly related to rollbacks in social welfare, that have had deep consequences for the ability to afford basic necessities such as food. This structural conceptualization of HFI differs from that of post-structural approaches, namely Gibson-Graham's (1996) notion of alternative economies, which underplay the power of neoliberal systems. In the present study, I argue that the neglect or concealment of neoliberalism in post-structural frameworks has reinforced, rather than undermined, political economic structures that produce HFI.

It is important to note that the production of food, a result of the food system, and the production of HFI, a consequence of policies affecting the social safety net, are distinct processes in non-agrarian economies such as those of Canadian cities. Studies related to the political economy of food often fail to distinguish between these disparate networks, or, similar to community food security and food charity discourses, problematically propose combining them as a solution. By focussing exclusively on the political economy of HFI, this study provides an underutilized political economic perspective to the topic of HFI and also separates HFI from other food-related topics in political economic literature such as food security at the community or national level. The present study recognizes the limits to holism and resists the interdisciplinary tendency *du jour* in food literature to draw misleading connections between disparate systems. By contrast, this thesis makes the case for defining system boundaries, which necessitates the exclusion of weak external linkages, and creating targeted solutions on a

problem-specific basis. The following section will show how this specific theoretical framework guides the study's methods, findings, reflections, and conclusions.

Structure of Thesis

Chapter 2 of my thesis begins with an overview of various HFI discourses including political economy. In particular, I explain how the problem of HFI is differentially defined and responded to accordingly among different discourses, and critique their utility, or lack thereof, in reducing HFI. I then elaborate upon the political economic discourse and justify my preference for adopting this theory as the basis of my theoretical framework for this thesis on responses to HFI in Richmond.

In Chapter 3, I describe my research methods, which comprised a discourse analysis of food program, policy, media, and related documents, interviews with food program facilitators and clients, and participant observations of food programs. To justify the selected methods, I discuss how they relate to my theoretical framework, and then explain their individual contributions. Next, I outline the logistics and procedures associated with each method. At the end of this chapter, I discuss the importance of triangulation and reflexivity with respect to methodology.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the textual analysis component of this study. Here, I examine key themes and paradigms prevalent in selected documents, and then categorize them into the discourses outlined in the literature review. In addition to their enumeration in a content analysis, this chapter also explores the politics concealed within HFI discourses in Richmond using critical discourse analysis methods. It pays particular attention to the social processes they uphold or resist as well as the voices that are silenced or amplified.

Chapter 4 concerns textual data, while Chapter 5 conveys the findings from my fieldwork. It begins with observations of the urban landscape at large, followed by participant observations conducted at select food programs. This sets the scene for a discussion of the key themes from my interview data. From interview transcripts, I exhibit evidence of HFI discourses as well as stakeholder perspectives and additional insights.

Whereas the previous two chapters highlight findings from the three methods individually, Chapter 6 synthesizes and contextualizes these different types of information. I triangulate answers to my research questions and then situate these answers within my selected theoretical approaches. More specifically, I explain how this study validates income-based frameworks, challenges food-based frameworks, and delineates current HFI research and action in light of discursive ambiguity.

After discussing this study in relation to the wider body of scholarship and activism, but before delivering key arguments and recommendations, I turn my analytical eye inwards to reflect upon the study itself in Chapter 7. Issues of consideration here may include theoretical and methodological constraints, limitations and potential areas of improvement to this study, and external factors, such as researcher/subject positionality, that may have influenced my conclusions. Notably, I am undertaking this research as a proponent of income-based frameworks, Richmond resident, Chinese-Canadian, food secure individual. These facets of my identity emerge to varying degrees of subtlety and intention, but they are equally important to acknowledge. Considering the conditioning effect of discourse (van Dijk 1996), including that of the present study, the intention behind this interlude from didacticism is to allow both the author and reader some distance and transparency to critically reflect upon the study's conclusions. To take them with a grain of salt, so to speak, if need be.

Following the introspection in Chapter 7, the final chapter provides a roadmap for future action against HFI. I begin with situating my recommendations within income-based approaches to HFI reduction and contrasting them to food-based responses. Under this approach, I outline steps to be undertaken by multiple actors, including government authorities, civil society, the media, and academia in particular. Within the academic realm, I provide suggestions for further research based on shortcomings, remaining knowledge gaps, and/or new areas of inquiry in existing literature, including the present study. Finally, I close this thesis by reiterating my initial goals, key arguments, and contributions of my findings ending with a brief summary of recommendations for policy responses, social advocacy, political action, and further academic inquiry.

Significance of Research

This study promotes a paradigm shift from the perpetual management of HFI through food to its meaningful reduction through income. To this end, my research challenges the popularity of food-based discourses that obscure poverty, while drawing attention to income-based frameworks that emphasize this root cause. In particular, I demonstrate the overlooked utility of political economic theory, which is the only framework that indict the wider political project of neoliberalism. Political economy therefore offers a necessary counterpoint to frameworks that at best, ameliorate, and at worst, exacerbate, the social consequences of neoliberalism, including pervasive HFI. Given the competing influence of these frameworks, the present study underscores the role of discourse in both preserving and resisting systems of injustice, sometimes simultaneously.

2. A SMORGASBORD OF DISCOURSES

While the urgency of household food insecurity (HFI) is widely accepted, there are numerous, often competing, discursive framings of HFI as a “problem,” each of which propose different solutions. These differences are important because language is not a neutral medium of representation, but a mechanism for constructing social realities (Foucault 1972). The resultant realities are often built along underlying paradigms that follow the boundaries of professional training, intellectual conditioning, personal values, and ideological dispositions (Kuhn 1970), the last of these being emphasized in present the study’s critical discourse analysis. Language therefore plays a crucial role in legitimizing or discrediting knowledge, and consolidating or undermining power, for HFI-reduction activities (Foucault 1972; Mendly-Zambo & Raphael 2019). This phenomenon can be seen in the latest Canada Food Guide (Government of Canada 2019a), which was launched to both fanfare and criticism. Proponents of the Food Guide praised its more holistic approach, promoting the social benefits of eating together as well as its new emphasis on fruits, vegetables, and plant protein as opposed to the now-obsolete categories of meat and dairy (Beck 2019; Mah et al. 2019). On the other hand, many critics lamented the Food Guide’s failure to address economic constraints: they argue that it is time and money, rather than food knowledge, that food insecure households truly lack (Crowe 2019; Taylor 2019; Saul 2019). While these arguments perhaps go beyond the intended role of the food guide, they evince the competing nature of its surrounding discourses.

What the polarized responses to the Canada Food Guide have in common is a recognition of the performative power of text and imagery. As an authoritative document in the Canadian consciousness, the Food Guide actualizes and silences a variety of paradigmatic themes

including nutritional well-being, environmental sustainability, community development, and anti-poverty sentiments. All of these ideas belong to broader discourses that shape the issue of HFI. In Canada, competing discourses can be loosely categorized as follows: food-based frameworks (including nutrition, charitable food distribution, and local food production) and income-based frameworks (including social determinants of health, the anti-poverty movement, and political economy) (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael 2019; Suschnigg 2012). Supplementary discourses that pervade or accompany many of these discourses include food environments, the concept of the undeserving poor, and the right to food (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk 2009; Fisher 2017; Riches 2018). In this chapter, I will outline the aforementioned main and secondary discourses, which are summarized in Tables 1 and 2 respectively, and then justify my selection of political economy as the primary theoretical framework for the present study.

Table 1.

Summary of primary Household Food Insecurity (HFI) discourses.

	HFI Discourse	Context	Politics	Designation of Responsibility	Dominant Activities	Common Terms and Concepts
Food-based discourses	Nutrition/dietetics	Food insecure individuals experience micro/macro nutrient deficiencies that can affect health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears apolitical and scientifically objective • Individualizes blame for dietary outcomes without addressing social constraints to these outcomes under neoliberalism 	Individuals	Provision and evaluation of health education and information provision, skill development, and counselling	wellness, healthy food choices, food literacy, food skills, food environments, agency, education
	Food charity	Charitable-based food (re)distribution activities such as food banks and meal programs can reduce HFI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears apolitical and universally appealing • Covertly facilitates rollback neoliberalism and fosters "uncritical solidarity" in society 	Communities and corporate charity	Provision of charitable collection and distribution of food	hunger, fight against hunger, food waste reduction
	Local food movement	Community- based food production initiatives can reduce HFI by increasing local food access and availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears apolitical or anti-hegemonic • Covertly or unintentionally facilitates and obscures rollback neoliberalism 	Communities	Development of community-based initiatives that provide people with local access to food	community development, sustainability, food security, food sovereignty, agency, empowerment
Income-based discourses	Anti-poverty movement	HFI is rooted the inability to purchase food due to poverty, which results from deficient social services and policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports increased social spending • Does not explicitly resist neoliberalism 	Senior governments	Advocacy for poverty reduction through increases to social services	human rights, social services (e.g. income supports, affordable housing, healthcare coverage), labour regulations
	Social determinants of health	Public policies that contribute to social inequity are the source of HFI and its adverse health outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspires to political objectivity and rationalism • Analyzes and advocates for public policies without addressing their underlying politics 	Senior governments	Research and advocacy for public policy responses to HFI	poverty, public policy, health (in)equality, social services, labour regulations, liberal welfare state
	Political economy	Powerful forces benefit from the public policies (i.e. rollbacks to social services) that create HFI as well as ineffectual activities to manage it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on neoliberal structures that shape public policy • builds political movements to oppose these structures 	Neoliberal systems, including senior governments and the corporate sector	Research and organizing to resist structures that inequitably distribute economic resources and political power	neoliberalism ("roll-back" and "roll-out"), subsidiarity, social services, labour regulations, liberal welfare state

Note. Adapted from "Competing Discourses of Household Food Insecurity in Canada," by Z. Mendl-Zambo & D. Raphael, 2019, Social Policy & Society, 18(4), 536. Copyright by Cambridge University Press.

Table 2.

Summary of secondary Household Food Insecurity (HFI) discourses.

HFI Discourse	Context	Politics	Designation of Responsibility	Dominant Activities	Common Terms and Concepts	Associated Primary Discourses
Food environments	Food choices and nutritional status are influenced by one's physical and sociocultural surroundings	Problematizes place instead of economic inequality caused by neoliberalism	Individuals and communities	Development of "community food assets" such as community gardens, community kitchens, and healthy grocery retail	food deserts, community food assets, healthy food choices, healthy food retail, wellness	Nutrition/dietetics, local food movement
Deserving and undeserving poor	Some economically vulnerable groups deserve assistance more than others on account of perceived personal flaws or poor lifestyle choices	Blames deficient circumstances on individuals instead of the neoliberal systems that have left them without resources	Individuals	Social services and community programs that favour the "deserving" poor (e.g. children, families, older adults) while missing or punishing populations considered to be "undeserving" (e.g. unemployed individuals, people with substance abuse issues)	victim-blaming, fixation on child poverty, punitive welfare	Food charity, nutrition/dietetics, local food movement, anti-poverty movement
Right to food	Adequate food is a universal and inalienable human right	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income-based interpretation: implicitly challenges roll-back neoliberalism by reinforcing the central role of the state • Food-based interpretation: implicitly reinforces roll-back neoliberalism by framing decentralized food initiatives as means to the right to food 	Federal government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income-based perspective: ensuring government accountability to welfare entitlements through international agreements, institutional arrangements, and collective action • Food-based perspective: increasing food access and availability within communities 	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), legal obligation, international law	Political economy, social determinants of health, anti-poverty movement, local food movement

Main (Dis)courses

Food-based Frameworks

Nutrition/dietetics

From a nutritional perspective, the discursive basis of the Canada Food Guide, HFI represents nutrient deficiencies generated by consumer choices, dispositions, and behavior (Labonte 1993). Nutritional initiatives focus on promoting “food literacy” and “healthy lifestyle choices” through health education, skill development, and counselling (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael 2019). Such strategies may enhance the positive outcome of knowledge, but this is not a determinant of HFI. In a study of national Canadian Community Health Survey data (Huisken et al. 2016), adults in food insecure households did not report lower food preparation skills or cooking ability than those in food secure households, and neither variable predicted HFI when demographic characteristics were accounted for. This study suggests that the capital in short supply is not food knowledge, but socio-economic resources. The ability to act on food skills is limited by economic and social access to healthy foods, which require money, time, and appropriate facilities to prepare (Power 2005; Raine 2005).

In spite of these barriers, numerous studies have shown that low-income households already demonstrate immense resourcefulness in preparing food on a budget (Tarasuk 2001a; Douglas et al. 2015; Desjardins 2013; Dachner et al. 2010; Engler-Stringer 2011). Such findings call into question the suitability of nutrition initiatives designed for HFI reduction, which are predicated upon the condescending notion that food insecure individuals lack the motivation or skill to cook healthy foods. This stereotype is perpetuated by healthy eating proponents such as Michael Pollan, who fetishize the preparation of meals from scratch – an ideal that holds little relevance to HFI (McLaughlin et al. 2003; Fisher 2017). McLaughlin et al. (2003), for instance,

did not find an association between the frequency of meals prepared from scratch and the severity of HFI in a sample of women seeking charitable assistance. The effect of consumer choice on HFI is ultimately negligible considering structural limitations to those choices.

By placing responsibility for dietary outcomes on the individual, albeit with periodic acknowledgements of financial constraints, the nutritional approach decontextualizes and depoliticizes food insecurity (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael 2019). Following the tradition of scientific objectivity, food insecurity becomes a matter of nutritional imbalance rather than social inequality – an apolitical issue to be solved in isolation from its societal causes. Even if nutrition programs successfully produced behavioural changes, an outcome for which there is little evidence beyond modest and short-term improvements (Loopstra 2018), they do not address various other social determinants of health (SDH) in which HFI is embedded, such as income (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael 2019). Income, along with the SDH framework, will be further developed later in this literature review. Although nutritional discourses may mention the underlying issue of poverty, governments and charitable food programs frequently ignore these recommendations in favour of politically neutral nutrition initiatives (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael 2019). Food banks have increasingly shifted their discourse from hunger to nutritional health, increasing supply of healthy foods and incorporating nutrition programs. Although these measures certainly improve food bank practices, they are confined to the “nutrition safety zone” wherein poverty advocacy is largely absent (Fisher 2017). The following subsection will elaborate upon this absence in food charity discourse.

Food charity

The predominant food-based response to HFI is charitable food assistance, which includes food banks, soup kitchens, and other feeding programs. These programs attempt to

reduce HFI by re-distributing excess food to vulnerable individuals. Although initially intended to be a short-term, emergency solution, such food charity programs have become a permanent fixture in Western countries and the lives of many of their residents since the 1980s, when neoliberal policies resulted in retractions to the social safety net and heightened economic inequality (Power 1999; Riches 2018; Mendl-Zambo & Raphael 2019). Contrary to the popular conception of food banks as emergency sources of aid, a growing body of North American evidence suggests that food bank utilization is in fact a long-term subsistence strategy for a large proportion of clients (Daponte et al. 1998; Kicinski 2012; Holmes et al. 2018). The expansion of food banks across the country evinces not only widespread food insecurity, rates of which exceed the number of food bank users by a factor of 4.6 times (Loopstra & Tarasuk 2015), but the institutionalization of the large-scale, warehouse food bank model we are familiar with today (Riches 2018; Tarasuk, Dachner, & Loopstra 2014; Riches & Tarasuk 2014). Food Banks Canada currently runs over 644 food banks to serve a total of 850,000 individuals every month (Food Banks Canada 2018). That food charity and food insecurity have become such normalized, acceptable conditions of wealthy countries is alarming: it points to a failing social safety net that food banks were not designed to compensate for and should never have to fulfill. Food banks are jointly criticized by (yet in many cases, such as nutrition demonstrations held at food banks, joined up with) virtually all of the other discourses in this section despite their competing rationales and proposed alternatives.

Political economists and SDH proponents argue that food banks not only ignore, but also reinforce, root causes of hunger (Riches & Tarasuk 2014; Tarasuk, Dachner, & Loopstra 2014; Fisher 2017; Riches 2018). They create the illusion that we are solving HFI while leaving structural problems, namely inadequate social policies and programs, intact. The public approval

of food banks already requires some degree of doublethink: to support their existence uncritically, as popular media tends to do, is to be complacent to the unjust conditions that make them necessary. After all, benchmarks for food bank efficacy can be inversely interpreted as metrics of societal failure, particularly on the part of the government. For example, Food Banks Canada (2016) presents the 4,426,221 “meals served” and 863,492 “people helped” in March 2016 as organizational accomplishments when they are by the same token tragedies of a broken social safety net. If the goal is to eliminate HFI, then the aim should be to make the demand for food banks obsolete (Fisher 2017; Riches 2018). Instead, the food bank system has focused on expanding operations and increasing supply, which has the additional effect of placating urgency for social assistance reform. In other words, food banks are primarily concerned with “feeding the need,” thereby reinforcing dependency on food banks, instead of “shortening the line,” which is to reduce the need for food banks (Fisher 2017). This occurs because there are stakeholders with vested interests in maintaining dependency on the food charity sector.

The irony of the food bank model is that it relies on donations from corporations (eg. Walmart) that do not pay their employees living wages, which is a significant contributor to HFI (Fisher 2017; Riches 2018). Due to their extensive control, food charity discourses portray corporate donors as part of the solution to hunger without holding them accountable for their role in creating it through exploitative labour practices. For these entities, food bank donations are a relatively cost-effective method of cloaking culpability for HFI under a banner of social and environmental responsibility, with the added benefits of tax credits and convenience of disposal for food waste (Riches 2018; Fisher 2017; Suschnigg 2012). Meanwhile, many governments indirectly support food charity through donations, the provision of tax credits, and supportive policies in order to offload HFI action onto communities as well as the corporate sector, which is

a beneficiary of this arrangement (Tarasuk, Dachner, & Loopstra 2014; McIntyre, Patterson, Anderson, & Mah 2016). The BC government, for instance, contributed \$10 million to Food Banks BC to expand refrigeration capacity in lieu of developing an anti-poverty strategy at the time (Government of British Columbia; Mendl-Zambo & Raphael 2019). However, it is encouraging to see that the BC government has since unveiled its first poverty reduction strategy, with a goal of reducing overall poverty by 25% from 2016 levels by 2040 (Government of British Columbia 2019).

Food banks, along with their donors, often frame food redistribution as a “win-win” for people and the environment due to its twin outcomes of feeding people and diverting food waste. Similar to community food security discourse (see below), food charity discourse problematically conflates environmental and social systems by constructing false synergies between them. In addition to their limited efficacy for reducing HFI, food banks may perversely encourage wasteful food production to sustain operations (Fisher 2017; Riches 2018). Riches (2018) highlights the absurdity of using the symptom of a wasteful food system to treat that of a malfunctioning social safety net, which only reinforces the deficiencies of both. The redistributive nature of food charity also means that the food is typically subpar in quality and attached to social stigma – essentially “leftover food for left behind people” (Riches 2018 p. 2; Riches 2011; Tarasuk & Eakin 2005). In recent years, however, many food banks have attempted to increase the nutritional content of foods, as mentioned previously, along with the dignity with which they are accessed (Campbell et al. 2013). For many food insecure households, food bank groceries are a necessary, albeit imperfect, supplement to inadequate diets constrained by financial resources. Food charity may play a role in provisional relief, but its institutional entrenchment has problematically contributed to the chronic nature of food insecurity in Canada.

Local food production: community food security and food sovereignty

Community-based initiatives belonging to the local food movement are commonly presented as ethical antitheses to food banks, a claim that I question in the present study. Within this movement, two frameworks that frequently include HFI reduction activities are community food security (CFS) and food sovereignty. The main objective of the CFS framework is to increase community involvement in local food systems to promote environmental sustainability, community development, social responsibility, and access to healthy foods (Heynen et al. 2012). The rationale behind this approach is to disrupt unjust, unsustainable, and unhealthy global supply chains by restoring control over food production and distribution to communities (Kraak et al. 1999). CFS projects typically assume the form of alternative food distribution networks such as farmers markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA) as well as neighbourhood-run programs such as community gardens, kitchens, and workshops, some of which overlap with nutritional programs (Power 1999). While these initiatives have traditionally catered to privileged social identities, many CFS programs now target vulnerable populations. In CFS discourse, networks of social support create avenues of access to local, healthy foods for food insecure individuals (Heynen et al. 2012; Gottlieb 1996; Allen 1999).

Although community food initiatives may confer important benefits such as mental health and social connectedness to HFI individuals, their utility with regards to material food deprivation is limited. A wide body of research suggests that community food programs, even those that are designed for HFI individuals, have limited efficacy and/or capacity for reducing HFI (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk 2009; Tarasuk & Reynolds 1999; Loopstra & Tarasuk 2013; Raine et al. 2003; Tarasuk 2001a; Seed et al. 2014; Wong & Hallsworth 2016). In a study of low-

income families in Toronto, for instance, Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009) found that community food programs failed to reach those that were most vulnerable and were not associated with increased household food security even among participants. There are several explanations for their inability to reduce HFI. Firstly, program capacities are often constrained by insecure and/or insufficient resources such as funding, volunteers, and jurisdiction by nature of the CFS framework's community scale (Loopstra & Tarasuk 2013; Tarasuk 2001a). Secondly, program participation is limited by personal circumstances such as physical ability, time, money, and energy which are often in short supply for target populations (Loopstra 2018; Loopstra & Tarasuk 2013; Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk 2009). Therefore, community food programs paradoxically require a baseline level of livelihood stability that food-based activities can enrich, but never establish. By retaining a focus on food, CFS initiatives fail to address the underlying cause of HFI: poverty (Power 1999; Tarasuk 2001a; Hamelin et al. 2010; Dietitians of Canada 2005). This oversight is the most significant reason behind their inability to decrease HFI.

Even if they produce/provide adequate food at low or no cost, CFS programs – existing precariously themselves – can never eliminate the uncertainty with which participants access food in the absence of real purchasing power. Beyond a misleading nominal similarity, community food security, which predominantly responds to a broken food system, has very little to do with HFI, which is a symptom of the broken social safety net. To weave these issues together is, in this study's view, to partake in flawed systems thinking, perhaps originating from the food justice movement's goal of removing barriers between producers and consumers. Such confusion also highlights the importance of scale differentiation: while food production may improve food security for the community, this effect does not necessarily percolate to households, which experience food insecurity for reasons largely external to the food system.

Despite impacting dietary outcomes on an individual and irregular basis, community initiatives largely fail to match the pervasive and persistent scale of HFI. Counterintuitively, *household* food insecurity is a *population* health problem that generally demands interventions from senior governments (Tarasuk 2017). These centralized solutions are prioritized within income-based frameworks, which will be discussed later in this review.

Food sovereignty is closely related to, and in many cases interchangeable with, community food security, but it is more politically radical than its reformist counterpart (Heynen et al. 2012; Giminez & Schattuck 2011). Under this framework, urban food insecurity represents a cumulative result of the commodification of food, exploitative supply chains, social inequalities produced through urban planning and zoning, and the inequitable distribution of wealth (Heynen et al. 2012). Although the last topic is the focus of this study, it is insufficiently addressed relative to other aforementioned factors within food sovereignty discourse. From a food sovereignty perspective, local initiatives such as urban agriculture and community programs represent resistance to unjust neoliberal networks. This is certainly true for neoliberal food networks, but it may not be the case for neoliberal welfare policies. While food sovereignty correctly politicizes food insecurity as the political economic framework does, it does so through the lens of the food system, which does not represent the source of HFI in wealthy countries. Therefore, food sovereignty is primarily related to the political economy of food, rather than the political economy of HFI, which is the topic of the present study. To subvert asymmetries of power, the food sovereignty framework advocates for returning agency over food systems, currently concentrated among corporations and governments, to local communities (Patel 2009). Food sovereignty's concept of decentralization closely resembles that of the CFS framework with the exception of the role of the state. CFS proponents are receptive to collaboration with

governing institutions, whereas food sovereignty proponents view the state as an obstacle to food system autonomy. They typically reject top-down provisioning in favour of systems of mutual aid (Heynen et al. 2012) and view the state as an obstacle to food system autonomy, change, and knowledge (Patel 2009).

As a result, food sovereignty proponents consider producers and consumers under welfare regimes to be passive recipients of policy, aid, and subsidy as opposed to shared stakeholders in the food system (Pimbert 2009). They instead emphasize dismantling neoliberal food networks and strengthening local food networks as a solution to food insecurity (Suschnigg 2012). While the food sovereignty movement rightfully envisions locally produced food for all (Heynen 2012), it may be unrealistic to expect urban food insecure populations to produce their own food, purchase subsidized local food, regularly attend food programs, rely on redistributive food initiatives, and/or adopt agrarian livelihoods. Other than farm employment, for which there are limited opportunities in urban environments, these activities would not necessarily resolve HFI anyway due to their inability to increase incomes. In fact, the food sovereignty movement's aversion to state intervention is ideologically inconsistent with income policies, which happen to be the most effective responses to HFI.

From a political economic perspective, the food sovereignty movement's language of empowerment – “autonomy,” “self-sufficiency,” and “agency” – paradoxically overlaps with neoliberal idioms of individualism. This may not be coincidental. In a sense, community food initiatives belong to a wider pattern of downloading social services to communities, and responsibility over household circumstances to individuals in neoliberal regimes (McClintock 2014; Pudup 2008). In this study's view, the theme of empowerment is too often misdirected at community food production instead of household purchasing power, the latter of which

necessitates state intervention. If agency is the operating principle in food sovereignty, there is no agency in the inability to buy food on one's own terms – even with the unlikely capacity for self-sufficient food production.

Just as local food movement activists criticize the anti-poverty movement for its failure to address structural inequalities within the food system (Suschnigg 2012), so do anti-poverty and SDH proponents express skepticism with the ability of local food initiatives to challenge structural inequalities that produce poverty in society (Tarasuk 2001a; Power 1999). Although Suschnigg (2013, p. 236) reassures readers that “food sovereignty advocates would not be opposed to...income security measures recommended by anti-poverty activists,” it is not sufficient to “not be opposed to” these measures. Rather than such discursive ambivalence, income security deserves at least as much importance/attention as is ascribed to food system interventions in food insecurity discourses, if not more so given the inextricable link between food deprivation and income. By revolving around the food system, food-based discourses often obscure this crucial connection even if they engage in social action around other issues such as community development (Power 1999).

Another fallacious argument, in my view, is that local food networks (e.g. farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture boxes, community food programs) are wholly superior to their conventional counterparts (e.g. supermarkets) for consumers. This statement may be especially untrue for low-income populations, who are often unable to meet the elevated prices and/or social capital that local food commands (Dixon et al. 2007). Although community food programs have made encouraging efforts towards inclusivity by providing local food at low or no cost, they still reinforce a two-tiered society separated into those who can afford local food and those who cannot (Power 1999). In terms of health, the Provincial Health Services Authority

(2016a) found no evidence to support the popular perception that local and organic foods are more nutritious or safe compared to conventionally-produced foods. That being said, the lack of pesticides in organic foods may still be advantageous to health (albeit at a disadvantage in price). Another notion that is relevant to health promotion, but not necessarily to HFI, is that cheap junk foods in supermarkets influence dietary choices. As I have discussed previously, HFI is not a matter of choice; it is ultimately a matter of income, increases of which would also likely expand the consumption of local and healthy foods. The mutual benefit of increased income to local food markets and HFI reduction is much more suitable, yet less popular, than the flawed logic of mainly growing or redistributing food for food insecure individuals.

In this vein, income and food systems are not diametrically opposed, but potentially complementary in spite of their contradictions. Food Secure Canada, a coalition of organizations and individuals organized around food sovereignty, is an exemplar in moving beyond binaries without causing discursive ambiguity. Among its five major recommendations for a national food policy, the human right to food is the first, which suggests its relative importance. Under this objective, Food Secure Canada proposes creating an income floor, through national and provincial poverty reduction strategies, to ensure that all Canadians can afford food (Food Secure Canada 2017). They differentiate food system issues into five different themes, including healthy and sustainable food, sustainable food systems, food and reconciliation, and more voices to the table, demarcating food insecurity from these other issues. This approach demonstrates that income advocacy can occur alongside food system reform as long as they are framed as separate components to the wider project of food justice. Although the present study is derived from SDH and political economic frameworks, it could theoretically belong to streams of food justice that prioritize this perspective.

It is worth noting that reducing food insecurity through food production can be highly effective in other contexts. Food insecurity in Indigenous communities, unlike in the general Canadian population, is tightly entwined with the food system. Self-sufficiency in food acquisition is especially important for northern Indigenous communities amid lack of food affordability due to distance from markets, the uncertain effectiveness of the federal food subsidy program, *Northern Nutrition in Canada*, diminishing access to traditional foods, and not least the imperative for decolonization (Dachner & Tarasuk 2018). Even in these environments, however, financial resources are essential for accessing food through market channels *and* traditional foodways, which returns to the central problem of inadequate income (Pirkle et al. 2014). In the Global South, smallholder food production is a firmly established poverty reduction strategy, one that is heavily featured in development discourses (Patel 2009). According to Lipton (2005), virtually every instance of mass poverty reduction in modern history, documented in Western industrialized countries and fast-growing Asian countries, began with increases to employment income through increased productivity on family farms. Nevertheless, this idea is no longer applicable to urban areas in industrialized countries due to a limited land base, lack of natural resources, declining agrarian labour force, and industries that have shifted away from agriculture (Bernstein 2014). In CFS and food sovereignty initiatives in cities, food production typically represents a direct supply of food rather than a source of livelihoods for vulnerable individuals. Community-level initiatives mainly offer *food-based* responses to the *income-driven* problem of HFI, and therein lies their inadequacy as solutions (Collins et al. 2014).

Income-based Frameworks

Social determinants of health

By contrast to food-based responses, income-based approaches directly address and foreground HFI's root cause of poverty. Chief among income-based HFI discourses is the Social Determinants of Health (SDH) framework, which recognizes that health outcomes are predominantly influenced by socio-economic circumstances rather than lifestyle choices or community interventions (Mikkonen & Raphael 2010). It explicitly situates inequitable health outcomes within differential social locations, determinants of which include income, education, employment/unemployment, early childhood development, housing, social exclusion, social safety networks, health services, gender, race, disability, and food insecurity (Raphael 2009). Since many of these markers are interrelated, food insecurity is itself determined by a number of the aforementioned factors, a primary predictor being income. As a result, SDH literature frequently attributes food insecurity to public policies that have led to a lack of purchasing power for food (Raphael 2004; McIntyre 2003; McIntyre, Wu, Fleisch, & Emery 2016). To illustrate the inadequacy of social welfare in Canada, the average social assistance payments to a single employable adult in 2007 was a mere 40% of the low-income cutoff (LICO), which defines "income thresholds below which a family will likely devote a larger share of its income on the necessities of food, shelter and clothing than the average family" (Suschnigg 2012; Statistics Canada 2012). In 2014, 60.9% of Canadian households whose predominant source of income was social assistance were food insecure, but HFI is a pervasive issue even for households reliant on employment income, which comprise 62.2% of the HFI population (Tarasuk et al. 2016). These statistics point to major inadequacies in both social welfare and employment wages.

Due to the strong association between household income and HFI, proposed solutions to HFI in SDH discourse focus on policy-based poverty reduction strategies. They include increases to social assistance rates, housing affordability, and the minimum wage, as well as reductions to childcare and the age of pension eligibility (McIntyre & Rondeau 2009; Emery & McIntyre 2013). As an alternative to piecemeal welfare policies and programs, SDH proponents have also advocated for a universal basic income that can reach all who are vulnerable to food insecurity on the basis of insufficient income (Tarasuk 2017; McIntyre & Anderson 2016). The low rate of food insecurity among Canadian seniors is commonly cited as evidence for the protective effect of a guaranteed, stable, and increased income (Emery et al. 2013). According to basic income advocates, the logical course of policy action is to extend this benefit to all Canadians, regardless of age, below an income threshold (Tarasuk 2017). By preventing diet-related diseases, costs to provincial governments would partially be offset by reductions to healthcare expenditures (Tarasuk 2017). Such arguments, however, presume that public institutions act objectively and rationally, in the best interests of the citizens they purport to serve (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael 2019). The fallacy in this assumption arises because the policymaking process is not neutral, but fraught with political ideology and power (Kingdon 1984). In practice, policy decisions are at least as ideological as they are logical – an underacknowledged consideration that is emphasized in political economic discourse, as I will later explain.

Anti-poverty movement

The SDH framework is closely aligned with the anti-poverty movement, which similarly links the prevalence of HFI to inadequate income supports. This association is supported by the relative absence of hunger from the end of the Great Depression, when the Canadian social safety net grew out of recognition that structural poverty alleviation requires macroeconomic

state intervention, until the beginning of the 1980s, after which rollbacks to social programs and services caused widespread income insecurity and therefore, food insecurity (Power 1999). The social safety net consists of a collection of governmental services, such as social assistance, disability payments, employment insurance, universal healthcare, and public housing, that protect citizens from poverty. According to an anti-poverty perspective, as with the SDH framework, the solution to HFI is a living income for all, administered through either substantial improvements to safety net services and the minimum wage, or the introduction of a basic income (Suschnigg 2012). Unlike many SDH proponents, however, some anti-poverty activists see food charity as a necessary service until social assistance reform is implemented. Anti-poverty rhetoric may even permeate food charity discourse, as exemplified in Food Bank Canada's annual Hunger Count reports, although these documents typically stop short of implicating the corporate sector, which is a major source of donations, for its failure to provide living wages to workers.

Moreover, the anti-poverty movement is less comprehensive than SDH: it selectively focuses on income while neglecting other social determinants of health and food insecurity, such as Aboriginal status, race, and gender. Nevertheless, SDH and anti-poverty frameworks lie in close proximity such that they are mutual subjects of criticism. From a food production perspective, the anti-poverty and SDH frameworks' fixation on the social safety net fails to account for the injustices within the food system, and also allows globally exploitative economic relationships to remain (Suschnigg 2012). Within the context of this study, I address exploitative labour practices that have failed to provide a living wage to workers in general, including but not limited to those within the food system. However, I limit the scope of my analysis to wealthy countries due to the specific circumstances that produce HFI in these regions, which differ

greatly from those in other parts of the world. In ensuing sections, I will define the study's theoretical and topical boundaries.

Political economy

Political economy generally concerns all the politico-economic relations associated with the control of people, processes, or things. While classical political economy was founded upon Enlightenment ideals of empiricism and rationality, emphasizing mathematical laws and relationships that underlie social relations, the introduction of Marxist theory in the 19th century marked a disciplinary shift towards the radical inquiry commonly associated with the social sciences today (Mosco 2014). Although Karl Marx continued in the tradition of formulating economic laws, a prominent example being the labour theory of value, his major innovation was to link these laws with systems of injustice. Social relations embedded within production, he argued, are entirely obscured when they are transposed into economic relations, thus creating conditions for labour exploitation (Marx 1867). While political economy analysis has since expanded far beyond issues of labour, Marxist theory has largely inspired the geographic discipline's contemporary emphasis on social relations that are organized around power, or the ability to control other people, processes, and things (Mosco 2014). Researchers who emphasize the processual aspect of political economy tend to portray systems of economic injustice, namely neoliberalism, as dynamic conditions rather than end states (Wilson 2004).

In the present study, political economy provides insight into the social, economic, and political processes that produce HFI, as manifested in discourse. From this perspective, discursive mechanisms reveal and conceal, but do not necessarily construct, the structures that underlie HFI. Accordingly, I apply a predominantly structural, rather than poststructural,

approach to the present study's critical discourse analysis, which will be explained in chapter 3.

Although SDH and anti-poverty discourses closely resemble political economy in their structural analysis of social and economic processes, these discourses eschew what is arguably the most important aspect of HFI reduction: politics. To illustrate, McIntyre, Patterson, Anderson, and Mah (2016) attribute inadequate policy action over decades of rising HFI to the influence of politics, which is underacknowledged by SDH proponents. Rather than appealing strictly to rationalism, as SDH discourse does, Medly-Zambo & Raphael (2018) argue that policy advocacy should reflect the inherently political nature of policymaking. In this manner, political economy builds upon the structural socio-economic perspective afforded by SDH to situate causes and response to HFI within the political realm. I therefore consider political economy to be the most appropriate framework for examining HFI in countries with sufficient yet inequitable socio-economic resources, and deficient levels of political support, for resolving the issue. These conditions apply to liberal welfare states such as Canada.

Manufacturing household food insecurity

For this study, the political economic product in question is not food as a resource, but HFI as a condition. In industrialized nations, processes that produce food, the domain of the former, operate very differently from those which put food on the table, concerning the latter. The majority of political economic analysis and related frameworks concern food as a resource, which only tangentially relates to HFI in wealthy countries. Such analyses implicate the industrial food system, which is structured such that fruits and vegetables command higher prices than market-saturating processed foods, cereals, and junk foods (Dixon et al. 2007; Friel & Lichacz 2010; Stuckler & Nestle 2012; Stuckler et al. 2012). The relative accessibility of energy-rich but nutritionally inadequate food products has resulted in the proliferation of obesity,

diabetes, and other diet-related diseases, which disproportionately affect low-income populations (Dixon et al. 2007; Friedmann 2012). Although healthy foods are expensive compared to unhealthy foods, the overall price of food, including fruits and vegetables, has decreased significantly since the advent of industrial agriculture (albeit at the expense of producer livelihoods and environmental resources) (Hazell 2010). In this sense, the industrial food system, notwithstanding its massive social and environmental consequences, has improved nutritional outcomes for virtually all consumers (Pingali 2012).

The prevalence of HFI today in spite of food affordability suggests that the limiting factor to adequate and healthy food is consumer income, which is the focus of the political economy of HFI, rather than cost, a subject of the political economy of food. In affluent countries such as Canada, particularly in urban areas, household privation is largely unrelated to food production. However, political economic literature about food in a global context (Friedmann 1993; Friedmann 2012; McMichael 2009; Bernstein 2016) tends to blur that distinction. This is why the present study specifically focuses on political economy *qua* HFI in Canadian cities. Although food system analysis is certainly very important, even existential considering its manifold crises, it lies beyond the purview of this study. Thus, I will only examine food systems at their point of interface with HFI, which may assume the form of food banks, community kitchens, or community meals. From an income-based perspective, the emergence of HFI in Canada, following a period of relative absence, can be directly traced back to the politically induced growth of income inequality in the 1980s (Power 1999).

Political economy of HFI in Canada

Given the inextricable link between income and food, we must first look to macro-scale processes that have produced the concomitant rise of income inequality, and resultingly, food

insecurity. Contrary to the capitalist myth of market self-regulation, today's widespread income inequality is not a naturally occurring economic phenomenon, but the result of calculated and sustained political intervention. Hence, it is crucial to note that it has not always been the status quo. Between the Second World War and the mid-1970s, income inequality in Canada declined in large part due to a robust Canadian social security system, which grew out of a recognition that structural forces responsible for poverty require macroeconomic state intervention (Procyk 2014; Power 1999). As mentioned previously, food banks were virtually nonexistent in Canadian society during this time, after which they proliferated amid newly-increasing inequality beginning in the 1980s. The rise of inequality, and therefore food insecurity, occurred when industrialized nations abandoned Keynesian economic principles, characterized by financial regulation and social spending, in favour of neoliberal rollbacks to such policies. They have eroded social services to the extent that public spending, as a percentage of GDP by federal and provincial governments, is now at 1960s levels (Langille 2016). Over the past several decades, neoliberalism has guided Canadian policies towards financial deregulation, free trade, minimized government, and reduced taxation at the expense of adequate wages, secure employment, and social assistance programs that respond to citizens' financial, health, and social needs – food being among the most basic of these (Riches & Tarasuk 2014). Below I explain how these macro-level interventions have increased income inequality and food insecurity by restructuring the labour market, reducing redistributive income measures, and increasing aggravating factors, before describing the exacerbating effect of the urban environment.

Bifurcation of the labour market

The rise of market income inequality, referring to inequality in the sum of employment-related, investment, and private pension income can be attributed to declines in the

manufacturing sector, secure employment, minimum wages, and collective bargaining. At the global scale, economic globalization has led to declining employment opportunities and wages in industrialized countries, which struggle to compete with countries in which people are paid less for the same services, a process known as “offshoring” (Procyk 2014). These careers have been replaced by jobs in the technological sector, requiring higher levels of skill and education (Procyk 2014), as well as in the service industry, which typically provide lower wages and precarious employment, referring to short-term, part-time, and/or contract jobs (Noack & Vosco 2011). While skilled workers in Canada have not experienced significant growth in income (Green & Townsend 2013), the rise of precarious employment, often occurring in the service industry, has been a significant contributor to income inequality. The bifurcation of the labour market was accompanied by an erosion of job protection measures. The minimum wage, an important safeguard against income inequality, has failed to compensate for inflation: in most jurisdictions, its value decreased substantially between the mid-1970s and mid-1990s (Battle 2015). Labour unions, which traditionally played an important role in improving income security and working conditions for employees have also declined amid neoliberal resistance to collective bargaining. According to Statistics Canada (2018), union membership has fallen from 37.6% of employed individuals in 1981 to 28.8% in 2014. The combination of low wages, precarious work, and deteriorating job protections has left many Canadians in food insecurity, with over 60% of food insecure households reliant on employment income as opposed to income assistance payments (Tarasuk & Dachner 2014).

Broken tax and transfer system

In spite of increased market income inequality during the 1980s, the Canadian tax and transfer system, which redistributes income to individuals requiring financial support, was

initially able to offset this growth insofar as after-tax inequality remained stable during this period (Procyk 2014). After-tax inequality was not as evident until the 1990s, when Canadian governments critically weakened the corrective function of the tax and transfer system. Previously compensating for more than 70 percent of the rise in income inequality, tax and transfers offset merely 40 percent of the increase in market income inequality after the mid-1990s (OECD 2011). At the federal level, the reduction of transfers was predominantly enacted through cuts to one of Canada's most important income security programs, Employment Insurance, as well as the abolition of the Canada Assistance Plan, which formerly obliged the federal government to pay for 50 percent of provincial costs for social programs (Riches & Tarasuk 2014; Riches 1997). The successor to the Canada Assistance Plan, the Canada Health and Social Transfer, resulted in \$7 billion in cutbacks to provincial funding for health, education, and most importantly, welfare (Riches 1997). By downloading social program expenditures and responsibilities to provinces, the federal government further eliminated its obligation to uphold national welfare standards, which used to enable sufficient financial access to food (Riches & Tarasuk 2014). Beyond government authorities, I see food banks and community food programs as an extension of such subsidiarity, with governments further offloading social responsibilities onto communities and even individuals. This concept recurs not only in the present study, but also in critiques of neoliberalism in various contexts including community development and health (Ayo 2010; Cheshire & Lawrence 2006; MacCleod & Emejulu 2014; McClintock 2014; Trnka & Trundle 2014; Whiteside 2009).

In addition to deficiencies in transfer programs, the financial pool from which transfers are drawn have substantially decreased due to reductions in taxes. In the corporate sector, the general tax rate fell from 36 percent to 15 percent, and capital gains taxes were reduced by a

third since the mid-1990s (Stuckey & Yong 2011). For the general population, tax rates fell by an average of 2 percent between 1990 and 2005, with the tax rate for the top 1 percent in the income distribution falling by 4 percent despite greatly increased earnings (Lee 2007). Furthermore, the reduction in the number of federal tax brackets from 11 to 4 in 1988 had the effect of increasing taxes for bottom earners while decreasing taxes for those at the top of the income distribution (Dahlby & Ferede 2011). In sum, reduced taxation for high income sectors of the population, combined with diminished social spending for low income populations, have severely neutralized the equalizing effect of government income redistribution programs, which formerly protected people from food insecurity. As I have discussed in this literature review, the redistribution of food is no substitute for sufficient income, which is a key component to HFI reduction.

Aggravating factors

Neoliberalism has not only altered the distribution of income, but also the ways in which money is spent or invested. These secondary factors, including rising costs of living and the concentration of capital, have indirectly widened wealth disparities by limiting economic mobility (Procyk 2014). The shift away from government regulation to market-driven price adjustments has increased the costs of basic living necessities and has also displaced these costs from the government and employers onto individuals. The rise of precarious employment, for instance, has led to a reduction in people covered by employment benefits such as prescription drug coverage and pension payments, potentially decreasing money available for purchasing food (PEPSO 2013). Additional financial burdens are disproportionately borne by middle- and low-income households, which may be driven into debt in order to afford basic necessities such as shelter, food, childcare, and healthcare. Increasing costs of living can be buffered by incomes

that are indexed to inflation; however, such protection is virtually nonexistent for populations that are most vulnerable to food insecurity, including those employed in precarious work or reliant on social assistance, rates of which often remain stagnant for long periods of time (Dachner & Tarasuk 2018).

Household food insecurity in Canadian cities

The juxtaposition of scarcity and excess in Canada is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in major cities, which have been sites of rising income inequality (CPA 2017). At the urban scale, social inequalities are often exacerbated by a lack of affordable housing, the marginalizing effect of economic development, and urban planning/zoning decisions that foster these conditions (Murie 2005). Policies that support aggressive entrepreneurialism undermine social welfare or investment in favour of attracting wealth (Peck & Tickell 2007). To illustrate the influence of the built environment on HFI, Sriram & Tarasuk (2016) found that higher area-level shelter costs were associated with an increased risk of HFI in Canadian Metropolitan Areas. This correlation demonstrates the tradeoff between basic living necessities: vulnerable households typically compromise food expenses to fulfill housing costs, which are inelastic relative to food (Sriram & Tarasuk 2016).

In Metro Vancouver, the housing market has concurrently driven the accumulation of wealth for investors, who owned 25 percent of all Vancouver condominiums in 2016 (Kalman-Lamb 2017). The average cost of rental housing in Vancouver has increased 22.3 percent since 2011, with 46 percent of renters facing unaffordable housing referring to shelter costs that exceed 30% of before-tax household income (Kalman-Lamb 2017). Such rapid escalation of housing costs is a result of a neoliberal policy environment that has, since the mid-1990s, encouraged speculation in the housing market, economic development, foreign investment, and

an immigration system that privileges wealth (Moos & Saburskis 2010; Ley & Tutchener 2001; Ley 2017). Although there is evidence that the cost of food has also been rising across Canada in recent years (Dalhousie University & University of Guelph 2019), it is only one of many components to the costs of living, which are altogether secondary factors to income in determining household food insecurity. In a report on food costing in BC, for instance, the BC Centre for Disease Control (2018) emphasizes that the strongest predictor of food insecurity is not the price of food, in spite of its increasing trend, but household income.

Altogether, household food insecurity is predominantly a function of income stability and security, and secondarily influenced by access to savings and assets, chief among them home ownership and costs of living (Dachner & Tarasuk 2018). The inextricable link between financial resources and food insecurity is well understood, with proven historical and contemporary solutions assuming the form of income policies (Procyk 2014; Emery et al. 2013; Tarasuk 2017). In light of firmly established causes and solutions, the missing element to HFI action, it seems, is political will. Yet the majority of discourses, especially those that have captured public attention, depoliticize food insecurity and distract from its underlying cause of poverty. Many of these discourses unnecessarily, inappropriately, and/or inaccurately redefine the problem within the contexts of consumer behaviour, food systems, or food redistribution, and misdirect responses accordingly. They may even suit the neoliberal agenda of downloading responsibility to communities and individuals despite some of their claims, particularly within the local food movement, to anti-hegemonic resistance. The local food movement may simultaneously resist and facilitate neoliberalism within the food system and social safety net, respectively – and vice versa for the political economy of HFI. These contradictions, among many others to be reckoned

with in this study, highlight the multi-faceted nature of neoliberalism, the subjectivity of resistance, and the difficulty in discerning between the two, if at all possible.

Supplementary Discourses

Food Environments

There are also a variety of secondary discourses that recur, to varying degrees of suitability, among the main theoretical frameworks described previously. The first of these is the concept of *food environments*, which concerns the relationship between built and social environments and dietary outcomes within a community or region (Glanz et al. 2005). It operates from the idea that food choices and nutritional status are influenced by one's physical, economic, policy, and sociocultural surroundings. The term encompasses a broad range of factors including geographic proximity; food access and availability; food promotion and pricing; food labelling; nutritional composition of foods; and the retail environment (Lana et al. 2017). Within the discourses discussed previously, it is commonly utilized within the nutritional framework, due to their shared emphasis on consumer behaviour, as well as CFS, because of its community scale. In food environments literature, the term *food deserts* is frequently used to describe regions of low access to affordable and nutritious food, typically occurring in low-income areas (Lewis 2015).

This phenomenon is less applicable to Canadian cities, where food retail does not tend to cluster in wealthier neighbourhoods (Black 2015). Instead, Canadian literature suggests that central urban areas, containing inner city neighbourhoods, may have even better food access than those that are more affluent or suburban (Apparicio et al. 2007; Black et al. 2011). Although this minimizes the marginalizing effect of uneven development on HFI overall, low income

populations residing in more affluent neighbourhoods or suburbs such as Richmond may face additional barriers to acquiring food in the form of longer distances to food outlets, inadequate public transit, and lack of access to a private vehicle (Black 2015). Although geography may exert some influence on food insecurity outcomes, poverty remains the overriding determinant of HFI in most cases. While the body of research into Canadian food environments is still in its early stages of development, Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2010) found that neighbourhood characteristics did not affect household food security in low-income families residing in Toronto. For these families, high rates of food insecurity still occurred in regions with good geographic food access, and it was not mitigated by proximity to food retail or food programs. By contrast, food insecurity was directly associated with household demographic factors including income and income source. Although low perceived neighbourhood social capital was associated with the risk of food insecurity, this effect became negligible once household demographic factors were accounted for. These findings reinforce the link between HFI and household, rather than neighbourhood, characteristics.

Food environments discourse, particularly with reference to food deserts, is often presented in the form of maps. Although maps may elucidate spatial disparities in socio-economic conditions, they ultimately pathologize place instead of systemic inequalities relating to urban development and the distribution of wealth. Shannon (2014) suggests that the omission of political economic factors in maps often has real-world implications for regulating hunger under the façade of political neutrality. As a spatial, rather than political, problem, food deserts become something that can be solved using superficial solutions, such as building a supermarket, without redress to social injustices that produce scarcity within neighbourhoods (Shannon 2014), and much more importantly, households.

In food charity and CFS discourses respectively, the neoliberal solution at work may not necessarily be the blatant symbol of a supermarket, but a more savoury one of food banks and “community food assets” including community gardens, community food markets, and community kitchens. Simply placing food resources, even ones that are low- or no-cost, within vulnerable neighbourhoods does not redress the problem of fundamentally deficient incomes. Moreover, these resources often fail to reach those who need them the most for reasons unrelated to proximity, namely their lack of basic necessities such as income, time, housing, and childcare (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk 2009; Loopstra 2018; Dietitians of Canada 2005). Some food amenities may in fact create zones of social exclusion by, intentionally or otherwise, inviting wealth and development – a process Quastel (2009) calls “eco-gentrification” in reference to Vancouver’s green economy. This is particularly true for community gardens: in addition to being physically and socially inaccessible for many food insecure participants, they can potentially raise property values in surrounding areas. Although the present study may account for the influence of food environments, including its gentrifying effects, it ultimately considers HFI to be a financial, rather than spatial, problem. While these issues are often interrelated, income is the main subject of my analysis because it represents the strongest determinant of HFI.

The Deserving and Undeserving Poor

The distinction between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, referring to the idea that some economically marginalized groups deserve assistance more than others, pervades most of the discourses outlined in this section. These categories originate from the Calvinist conception of idleness as a sin, with New England colonists providing aid only to those whose destitution resulted from unpreventable circumstances (Fisher 2017), as well as the Victorian concept of less eligibility, which mandated that welfare should never exceed lowest wage labour

in order to discipline the labour force and exert downward pressure on wages (Riches 2018). Such attitudes converged in Canada, which owes its ideological heritage to both sides of the Atlantic, and has in recent decades, found new life in punitive welfare policies across wealthy OECD countries (Riches 2018). They also prevail in popular media, which differentiates between people in poverty through no fault of their own, and those who are supposedly to blame for their circumstances. Such assignment of blame belongs to the neoliberal rhetoric of individualizing societal liabilities and limiting social obligations to those who have succumbed to these liabilities. The “deserving” poor typically comprise children, families, disabled individuals, individuals with mental illness, older adults, and veterans, whereas their “undeserving” counterparts consist of those with substance abuse issues, single mothers, and others with perceived personal flaws or poor lifestyle choices (Fisher 2017).

Although anti-hunger advocates generally resist these categories, they inevitably invoke them to appeal to popular opinion and political pragmatism. Media produced by food banks, for instance, often feature images of children and families, while anti-poverty discourses sometimes fixate on child poverty (Fisher 2017). Not only does this do a disservice to the “undeserving poor,” hiding substantial portions of the population, it also casts a victimizing, emotionally manipulative gaze on the “deserving poor” (Fisher 2017). Considering the fraught nature of representing these populations, the present study itself will try to avoid depicting abject poverty in this way.

Assortative assistance and attention may advance HFI reduction in some respects while perpetuating inaction in others. Provincial and federal policies reflect biases towards “deserving” subsets of the population, as evidenced by elevated income assistance for families and elderly individuals. Although rates of food insecurity are higher among households with children under

the age of 18, the majority of food insecure households do not include children (Tarasuk 2017).

According to census data, the largest proportion (43%) of food insecure households in fact consists of unattached adults (Tarasuk et al. 2016). Poverty reduction initiatives that target households with children, which are typically cornerstones of provincial poverty reduction strategies, therefore miss a large proportion of the food insecure population. BC's first poverty reduction strategy, for instance, aims to reduce child poverty by 50% by 2024, compared with its reduction target of 25% for the general population (Government of Canada 2018). Although the poverty reduction strategy represents an important step towards HFI reduction, the child poverty target could have applied to the population at large. For Canadian seniors, Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement payments have been very effective at protection against HFI; due to its success, SDH proponents argue that this basic income model should extend to everyone below a defined income bracket, regardless of age (Tarasuk 2017). Canada's National Poverty Strategy promises new supports for families, low-income seniors, individuals suffering from mental illness, low-income workers, and individuals seeking employment (Government of Canada 2018). These are all groups that are vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity, so it is an encouraging development in that regard. Noticeably absent, however, are unemployed individuals who are unable to work. This omission perhaps exists to deter unemployment, continuing in the Victorian Poor Laws' tradition of punishing under-participation in the labour market. While discourses and policies relating to food insecurity should recognize needs and vulnerabilities specific to demographic groups, they should not discriminate on the basis of whether target populations "deserve" assistance or not. Everyone, after all, deserves to eat; it is a basic human need, and as some may say, a human right.

The Right to Food

If conservative media portrays the “undeserving” poor as entitled, they are correct: everyone should be entitled to adequate and nutritious food, not least in affluent countries such as Canada. The right to food is enshrined in various international guidelines and agreements beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, which states that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food” (UN General Assembly 1948). It was then reinforced at the 1996 World Food Summit, in which heads of state and governments recognized “the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger” (FAO 1996). Thereafter, it was further defined by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1999 as “the right [of] every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, [to] have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement” (United Nations Human Rights 2010). Although human rights discourse is generally directed towards the Global South, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, highlighted its renewed relevance to the affluent Global North during his visit to Canada in 2012 (De Schutter 2012). He drew attention to decades of neoliberalism, in Canada and other OECD nations, that has ignored the basic needs of vulnerable populations, leaving them reliant on charitable food banking (Riches 2018).

Un-coincidentally, right to food language is virtually absent within food charity discourse, but appears frequently in food justice, SDH, anti-poverty, and political economic frameworks, because the right to food implies the redistribution of wealth rather than food within high-income countries. A common misconception of the right to food is that it is synonymous

with the right to be fed, which entails the provisioning of food – something that food charity can accomplish to some extent. Rather, it describes state obligations to allow people to feed themselves with dignity, whether through producing or purchasing food:

Individuals are expected to meet their own needs, through their own efforts and using their own resources. To be able to do this, a person must live in conditions that allow him or her either to produce food or to buy it. To produce his or her own food, a person needs land, seeds, water and other resources, and to buy it, one needs money and access to the market. The right to food requires States to provide an enabling environment in which people can use their full potential to produce or procure adequate food for themselves and their families. (United Nations Human Rights 2010, pp. 3-4)

Among the two aforementioned avenues for food procurement, food insecurity discourses are divided in how they conceptualize the right to food. Food sovereignty and community food security discourses tend to emphasize food production, which is more applicable to Indigenous communities and the Global South, whereas SDH, anti-poverty, and political economic discourses are primarily concerned with the ability to purchase food, which is the main mode of food acquisition within industrialized, urban environments. And as we can see from the quote above, it is much more feasible for governments in wealthy nations to provide “money and access to the market” than it is for them to provide “land, seeds, water, and other resources,” especially in urban environments.

The centrality of market-based access to food also calls into question the dichotomization of rights and commodities in some rights-related discourses, particularly in the case of food sovereignty. To recognize that food is a human right is also to acknowledge that it is a commodity – one that requires fundamentally adequate incomes to purchase. As such, it is not something that can be entirely redistributed or grown. Even when food production represents a source of livelihoods rather than subsistence, as is promoted within the food sovereignty

framework, it typically (but not necessarily) depends on systems of commodification to generate income for producers.

In the present study's view, it is the government's responsibility to ensure that all livelihoods, including but not limited to those of food producers, are secure in order to achieve the right to food. Its failure to do so in recent decades points to a different system of commodification: that of welfare entitlements (Riches 2002). Under neoliberal regimes, personal welfare becomes entirely conditional on the ability to participate in a labour market that cannot produce necessary jobs and adequate incomes (Riches 1997). To maintain the commodification of social rights, neoliberal governments frequently deny and depoliticize the existence of deprivation and hunger.

In response to these deflective tactics, Riches (2018) sees the right to food as an enforceable right for which the State is a “primary duty bearer” to be held legally accountable by international entities such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR), the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (OPESCR), the FAO Right to Food team, the UN Human Rights Council, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. This is where the present study diverges slightly from Riches’ approach. He may be placing too much faith in governments that, as per his own analysis, played a significant role in creating widespread food insecurity. International coalitions, even those functioning to uphold human rights, contain sets of countries engaged in neoliberal trade networks (e.g. OECD countries). By framing rights as claims that are “actionable through courts,” Riches (2018) assumes the impartiality of legal systems that may function to preserve, rather than resist, systems of oppression such as neoliberalism. If Riches criticizes the de-politicization of hunger, the solution cannot be to rely on institutions that maintain a façade of

objectivity. While I generally agree that the State should be the main guarantor of rights, and international bodies an important source of public accountability, it envisions communities as significant sources of political pressure. Even when Riches (2018) addresses the role of civil society in realizing the right to food, he does so within the context of enforcing international law.

Fisher (2017), by comparison, assigns more significance to the role of public advocacy. From his perspective, the right to food inadequately accounts for citizen pressure occurring outside of the government sphere, but nevertheless represents an important educational and organizing tool. He advocates for increasing public participation particularly among economically marginalized communities, who are often “missing from the table” regarding the conversation about hunger and poverty. That way, Fisher (2017) argues, “they begin to see themselves as actors in their own lives rather than being acted upon” (p. 3). Perhaps this is the type of agency, more so than that which is exercised over food production, that is the missing ingredient in HFI advocacy.

Contextualizing and Politicizing Hunger

From a political economic perspective, none of the remaining primary and supplementary discourses perform *both* of these crucial functions: contextualizing and politicizing food insecurity. Most of the discourses, with the notable exception of food charity, recognize that the causes and solutions to food insecurity lie upstream from food itself. Where they differ, however, lies in what “upstream” entails. Nutritional, food production, and food environment frameworks misattribute food insecurity to deficiencies in food skills, local food production, and food outlets, respectively. The first two premises are notably inconsistent with Huisken et al.’s (2016) finding that neither food skills nor gardening activity were associated with rates of HFI in nation-wide

census data. The third was challenged by Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2010), who found no association between neighbourhood characteristics and HFI outcomes in Toronto. All of these studies instead indicate that HFI is inextricably linked to household demographics, most significantly poverty, which is the true problem “upstream” (Loopstra 2018). While the SDH framework correctly situates HFI within rising income insecurity in Canada, it inadequately addresses the neoliberal politics behind this phenomenon. Conversely, food sovereignty proponents appropriately resist the political project of neoliberalism, but unsuitably focus on the food system rather than the social safety net. Out of the discourses described in this literature review, political economy is the only one that connects politics to the primary socio-economic barriers to food. According to Meldly-Zambo and Raphael (2019), it is the least considered discourse in HFI literature due to the dominance of depoliticized narratives. This study will therefore contribute to the missing discussion, with the exception of Graham Riches’s body of work and Meldly-Zambo and Raphael’s (2019) review of HFI discourses, about the power and politics behind HFI. These factors are frequently overlooked because hunger reduction strategies are attractive only if they are considered apolitical.

Food banks, soup kitchens, community gardens, community kitchens, and nutrition education initiatives enjoy popular support across all sectors of society because they appear politically benign. Tellingly, food charity organizations tend to employ the term “hunger” instead of HFI. This has the effect of evoking the physiological feeling that is universally understood, while separating that feeling from the socio-economic circumstances of the household (National Research Council 2006; Riches 2018). Although the viscerality of hunger may inspire action in civil society, such action is often directed towards charitable initiatives that perpetuate, rather than reduce, HFI. In Chapter 8, I suggest alternative terms that combine understandability with

context, such as “domestic hunger in the rich world,” utilized by Riches (2018), and “food poverty,” the preferred variant of “Household Food Insecurity” in the UK. Following in the American tradition of framing social change in militaristic terms (e.g. “war on drugs,” “war on poverty”), food banks also use the phrase “fighting hunger” in public communication, evoking an unending battle against an ambiguous, unnamed enemy (Fisher 2017). As a result of the manipulative effect of hunger terminology, food deprivation becomes something that everyone, regardless of politics, can rally behind in isolation from its social, economic, and political drivers. This phenomenon, the misguided public support for food charity, is what Riches (2018) calls “uncritical solidarity.”

The contribution of political economy, then, is to inject critical insight into social action. It draws attention to the powerful institutions and interest groups maintaining the conditions that produce HFI. The militaristic rhetoric in “fighting hunger” is especially befitting considering the “hunger-industrial complex” food bank operations have spawned. Much like the military-industrial complex, a mutually beneficial alliance has formed between anti-hunger groups and corporations (Fisher 2017), with food bank warehouses serving as barracks armed with donations. Due to the profitability of this arrangement, neither party is truly interested in ending the hunger they are purporting to fight and implicitly perpetuating. While community meals, gardens, and kitchens may experience much less corporate influence, and represent preferable responses in this regard, they often operate in ways that divert attention from the politics behind an unravelling social safety net. Page (2002), for instance, suspects that the Cameroonian government superficially placated social unrest over salary reductions for civil servants by encouraging the expansion of urban agriculture. He views these initiatives as an “anti-politics machine,” which describes the achievement of sensitive political operations through seemingly

unrelated, apolitical acts. This phenomenon also manifests itself in Canadian cities, where urban gardening initiatives are problematically presented as solutions to HFI.

Alternative Economies

According to a prominent poststructuralist approach to political economy, however, community responses to HFI are already inherently political: they represent alternative economies that exist outside of unjust political economic structures, namely neoliberalism (Gibson-Graham 1996). Operating under the principle that language constructs power, Gibson-Graham (1996) suggests that imaginative discourses legitimize and strengthen non-neoliberal worlds, whereas critical discourse about neoliberalism paradoxically actualizes its authority. From this perspective, community-based food initiatives, which often run on donations and volunteer labour, may represent alternative economies predicated on compassion rather than commodification. To some extent, they exist outside of dominant economic networks that distribute resources inequitably. But for that very reason, alternative economies are also ill-equipped to resolve systemic problems requiring centralized policy responses. In a review of measures to reduce HFI in high-income countries, Loopstra (2018) noted that community-level initiatives, such as food banks and community food programs, have limited impacts for HFI reduction, whereas government-administered social protection measures such as social assistance programs, cash transfers, and food subsidies are highly effective on a population scale. While community initiatives may alleviate hunger for small samples of the population, which is nonetheless an important function in society, they do not typically represent dignified and/or reliable sources of food in the long term. Even among participants, these programs respond to

neither the inability to acquire food in “socially acceptable ways,” nor the “uncertainty that one will be able to do so” as encapsulated in Health Canada’s (2012a) definition of HFI.

Furthermore, the community’s discursive silence about the entities responsible for HFI may function to preserve rather than undermine their power. As mentioned previously, the concept of “agency” in food sovereignty discourse may be construed as a code word for responsibility and blame. The discursive displacement of responsibility from governing institutions to municipalities and communities, in the case of the local food movement and food charity, or individuals, as exemplified by the nutritional framework, mask neoliberal retractions to the social safety net without adequately compensating for its functions (McClintock 2014; Pudup 2008; Riches 2018; Medly-Zambo & Raphael 2019; Fisher 2017). Nevertheless, alternative economies, such as community food initiatives, are systems over which communities have more direct and immediate control, as opposed to macro-scale structures such as government policies.

Although alternative economies may not necessarily reshape unjust political economic structures, they may provide some support within its interstices. Compared with the relative anonymity of government income assistance, food programs designed for food insecure individuals tend to reinforce the neoconservative notion that the individual, rather than social structures that have left him/her without resources, is to blame (Power 1999). This applies not only to food banks, but also to some community food and nutrition programs that are seen as more dignified alternatives. However, the present study recognizes the importance of hosting safe and inclusive spaces such as community food programs, which carry the underutilized potential for bringing politically and economically marginalized voices “to the table.”

Community initiatives could indeed represent powerful resistance so long as they are sources of appropriate political action rather than “uncritical solidarity” (Riches 2018). While Riches (2018) employs this term to describe support for food charity only, I extend this term to other discourses that similarly depoliticize or decontextualize food insecurity. I therefore apply a predominantly structural approach to HFI, as described at the beginning of this literature review, while critiquing the post-structural notion of alternative economies. However, this perspective may not necessarily be antithetical to other approaches that merge post-structuralism with political economy, such as post-structural political economy (PSPE). It is a knowledge-production theory that emphasizes the constitutive interplay between imaginaries, political projects, institutional arrangements, and geographical scales (Wetzstein & Le Heron 2010). Although I do not explicitly draw upon this framework, PSPE’s “attention to both the discursive and material, to the politicised and discursive construction of knowledge and to the material and institutional contexts of economic processes” (McGuirk & Dowling 2009, p. 124) nevertheless resonates with the present study’s methodology, which will be outlined in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

Using a political economic perspective, this literature review aimed to critique competing HFI frameworks and, amid their lack of discursive consensus, clarify the condition’s drivers and solutions. I have demonstrated that HFI is a problem rooted in income rather than food, and that its reduction is a responsibility of the state rather than one of communities. To this end, income-based discourses focused on poverty reduction are generally much more suitable, yet much less popular, than food-based frameworks organized around food provisioning, production, or education within the community. More specifically, political economy is thus far the only

framework that adequately addresses the social, economic, and political phenomena producing HFI. The lack of recognition for these factors, among policymakers and society at large, has been largely responsible for the continued rise of HFI over 30 years of institutionalized food banking (Riches & Tarasuk 2014) and the recent growth of community food programs. The politicization of HFI, however, does not need to reinforce the immutability of its overarching institutions and policies; rather, it can open new possibilities for changing them. Even though community-based food initiatives are ill-equipped to resolve material deprivation, they represent potential arenas for political action against poverty and on a deeper level, neoliberalism. Thus, the intention behind the present study is not only to uncover the oppressive politics behind some of these programs, but also to explore new discursive opportunities for fostering political resistance, or “critical solidarity,” within their ranks. Just as discourse reinforces systems of injustice, so can it consolidate power for anti-oppressive movements.

3. METHODS

Moving forwards from my theoretical framework of political economy in previous chapters, this chapter will detail methods that operate within this framework and attendant research procedures. Since Household Food Insecurity (HFI) metrics are already continually monitored in Canadian Community Health Survey cycles, and reported by the University of Toronto's PROOF research team led by Valerie Tarasuk, the present study will focus on the politics and experiences behind these numbers. It follows a periodically resurfacing (under)current of economic geography, including political economy, that merges politics and method on local scales (Barnes et al. 2007). To assess the inherently political ways in which institutions frame and respond to HFI, I performed a combination of discourse analysis, participant observations, and stakeholder interviews about organizations related to HFI reduction in Richmond, BC. I then triangulated these different methods and sources of data to validate and enrich research findings. The present study examines reality as portrayed in discourse, observed by me, and experienced by participants, and then synthesizes these representations to reveal their continuities and contradictions.

Textual Analysis of HFI Documents

In order to illustrate the influence of language on HFI responses, I conducted a discourse and content analysis on documents pertaining to HFI in Richmond or its encompassing regions, such as Metro Vancouver or the province of BC. Considering the present study's predominantly structuralist approach to the political economy of HFI, the discourse analysis builds upon primarily Marxist, and to a lesser extent, Foucauldian, theoretical streams. Since the distinct, albeit intertwined, theoretical roots of these streams are seldom acknowledged by urban

geographers (Lees 2004), I will first explain the two major frameworks I have hybridized within this study. By integrating the two approaches to discourse analysis, I am combining the Marxian framework's attentiveness to "who said what to whom, where, when and how" (Lees 2004, p. 103) with the Foucauldian strand's wider analysis of the constitutive power of rhetoric.

In the Marxist strand, discourse analysis is a tool for revealing hidden hegemonic rhetorical practices that serve vested interests (Lees 2004), assuming that they produce ideological agendas, social formations, and movements within their respective political economies (Hall 1996). It offers not only an analysis of language, but a critique of ideology. According to Marx, ideologies represent false, unjust, or inadequate belief systems (Herzog 2018) that are socially contrived and perpetuated through language (Fairclough & Graham 2002). From his perspective, a fundamental function of discourse is that of power and domination, wielded by social groups with preferential control over public discourse and, as a result, the minds and actions of society (van Dijk 1996). Applying this framework to the present study, I attempt to uncover the concealed project of neoliberalism within dominant HFI discourses as well as to demonstrate the anti-hegemonic potential of more critical alternatives.

While the Marxian approach begins with a predetermined network of political actors, its more common Foucauldian counterpart takes discourse as part of the process by which things, identities, and relations are constructed (Lees 2004). This type of discourse analysis operates from Foucault's notion that discourses are not only representations of reality, but actively constitute "regimes of truth," describing systems of power that dictate the selective enshrinement of knowledge into "truth" (Foucault 2000). Lees's (2004) interpretation of the term as "the acceptable formulation of problems and solutions to those problems" directly relates to my inquiry into the ways in which HFI is framed and responded to. Contrary to the post-structural

conceptualization of truth as an entirely discursive product, however, I am operating from a realist perspective that posits differential levels of inherent verity in HFI discourses. Therefore, the present study's critical discourse analysis is mainly Marxian while accounting for Foucauldian processes of knowledge domination and exclusion.

In order to reconcile Marx's notion of ideological falsity with the Foucauldian suspicion of truth and falsehood, I invoke Herzog's (2018) argument that "ideologies are...not false in an absolute sense but in the sense that they lead to, hide or justify what is not justified by society itself [: social suffering]." Mutual to these approaches is the unacknowledged understanding that suffering is unacceptable in society yet covertly perpetuated by systems of power. Regardless of theoretical differences, both approaches share the idea that discourse plays a crucial role in producing or reproducing the political order, whether it is one of social inequality, as generated by neoliberalism in this case, or resistance to such in the form of critical solidarity. Just as dominant discourses reproduce hierarchies of power, so can alternative discourses challenge such structures, as demonstrated by Knezevic's (2014) study regarding participatory approaches to food insecurity research.

I primarily follow Waitt's (2016) template for conducting a discourse analysis, while interspersing its steps with content analysis procedures. First, I compiled documents related to food insecurity or community food initiatives including local news articles, web pages, and reports, and policy documents (Table 3). At this stage, I cross-referenced documents with one another in order to account for intertextuality, which describes the co-construction of meaning looking across multiple texts and active audiences. Outside the parameters of my project, I situated my sources within a wider body of literature, including but not limited to that reviewed in Chapter 2, to recognize their discursive underpinnings. This process of contextual immersion,

referred to as “familiarization” (Waitt 2016), in fact began many years prior to the present study – a lifetime in the making, even – due to my preexisting ties to my study area. Such embeddedness inevitably influenced my research results, as I will discuss later. Before proceeding with analysis, then, I reflected upon my positions and preconceptions with respect to the research topic, including my status as a Richmond resident, Chinese-Canadian, researcher, and proponent of income-based approaches to HFI. The purpose of this step is to defer my personal perspectives in order to be able to perceive the authors’ constructed reality. While initiated prior to the discourse analysis, and prepared iteratively in notes taken throughout the study, my statement of positionality was eventually incorporated into Chapter 7, which concerns reflexivity.

After preparing my methodological *mise en place* (kitchen setup), I proceeded with reducing, transforming, and combining the raw materials for a discourse and content analysis. The first step for both modes of analysis consisted of coding, which serves two primary purposes of organization and interpretation (Waitt 2016). Using NVivo software, I designated the discourses identified in the literature review as categories before identifying and listing codes under these categories. In this case, the number of documents and appearances for each category were tabulated and graphed to roughly illustrate, rather than rigorously quantify, the relative prevalence of each discourse.

Table 3.

List of discourse analysis materials including document type, number of documents, title, and source

Web pages		Reports		News articles		Policy documents	
Title	Source	Title	Source	Title	Source	Title	Source
1 About - Richmond Poverty Response Committee	Richmond Poverty Response Committee (2019)	Annual Report 2017	Sharing Farm (2017)	B.C. can learn from others to reduce hunger	Robertson (2012)	Community Wellness Strategy	City of Richmond (2018)
2 About Us - Richmond Food Bank Society	Richmond Food Bank Society (2019)	Community Meal Report	Richmond Food Security Society (2010)	City council shows its hunger for Richmond Food Charter	Wood (2016)	Regional Food System Action Plan	Metro Vancouver (2016)
3 About Us - Richmond Food Security Society	Richmond Food Security Society (2019)	Conversation Circles Final Report	Richmond Poverty Response Committee (2017)	Cooking up a storm in Richmond's friendship kitchen	Campbell (2016)	Richmond Food Charter	Richmond Food Security Society (2016)
4 Community Meal Missions	Peace Mennonite Church. (2019)	Face of Child Poverty in Richmond	Richmond Children First (2013)	Faith is alive in Richmond for threatened homeless food aid program	Campbell (2017)	Social Development Strategy	City of Richmond (2013)
5 Community Meal Outreach Ministries	Gilmore Park United Church (2019)	Food Banks and the Dependence Myth	Food Banks Canada (2014)	Hungry' for food security	Wood (2015)		
6 Community Supports and Connections	Family Services of Greater Vancouver (2018)	Household Food Insecurity in BC	Provincial Health Services Authority (2016)	I'm homeless, not hopeless	Campbell (2017)		
7 Food for Life - What We Do	Church on Five (2019)	Richmond Action Forum Report	Richmond Poverty Response Committee (2017)	Richmond Sockeyes help fight loneliness and raise hope at community dinner	Xiong (2019)		
8 Home - Richmond Food Security Society	Richmond Food Security Society (2019)	Richmond Food System Assessment	Richmond Food Security Society (2006)				
9 Our Programs	St. Alban Anglican Church (2019)						
10 Supporting Food Banks throughout the Province	Food Banks BC (2019)						
11 Vision, Mission, Goals	Food Banks BC (2019)						
12 Walmart's Fight Hunger. Spark Change. Campaign - Giving love in your local community	Food Banks Canada (2019)						
13 We Are The Sharing Farm	Sharing Farm (2019)						
14 Where you live could influence what you eat	Vancouver Coastal Health (2018)						

Note. References for sources in Bibliography

In addition to coding on NVivo, I also utilized the software's frequency functions to generate lists of 30 most frequent words for different categories of documents, as well as frequency queries for terms of interest, such as "income," "poverty," "hunger," and "food insecurity." These words and phrases functioned as indicators for HFI discourses within different document types and sources. The tallying and ranking of discourses represents a content analysis in which qualitative data are quantified according to chosen concepts, in this case HFI discourses. Since such categorization is highly subjective (Carney 1972), I explained associations between terminology and HFI frameworks when I invoked them.

Following coding and data visualization, I returned to my theoretical framework of political economy to reflexively analyze the patterns drawn from the content analysis and beginning phases of the discourse analysis. This step restored the critical position I temporarily suspended prior to the de-construction of HFI discourses, allowing me to interpret the "regimes of truth" over which they preside. I was particularly alert to the presence or absence of discussion about income in documents created by community organizations, local authorities, and the media. Equally important to the institutional commission of truth is its omission, which silences dissent to systems of power. To illustrate, the lack of acknowledgement for food insecurity's root cause of income signals the practice of obscuring, and thus enabling, neoliberal "rollbacks" to the social safety net. In addition to the presence/absence of words and concepts, I utilized quotes and excerpts from texts to provide context and complexity that may have been lost to data abstraction.

Although critical discourse analysis typically concerns spoken and written discourse, its application could also extend to urban landscapes. Bridge (2004), for instance, uses language as an extended metaphor for the city, citing de Certeau's (1984, p. 97) claim that "[t]he act of

walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or the statements uttered.” I followed in expanding the critical eye from text to landscape in order to illustrate continuity between language, reality, experience, and perception. In my study area, for instance, popular discourses permeate the landscape (and vice versa) in ways that shape the geographic imaginaries of community members, who then construct spaces of HFI reduction according to prevailing frameworks. Even though I did not conduct a fully-fledged discourse analysis on the landscape, I incorporated critical insights about relevant urban environments into the study’s observational component, which will be detailed in the following section.

Observations

Discourses manifest themselves not only in text, but also within the perceptions, experiences, and interactions of everyday life. These phenomena, captured via observations and interviews, add depth to my cross-section of the structures and processes producing HFI. In the observation component, I perceived, with varying degrees of immersion, the general atmosphere, physical setting, and participants within three food program sites in Richmond, BC. Before commencing fieldwork (observations and interviews), I obtained approval for my methods from the University of Victoria’s Human Research Ethics Board.

First, I visited the Sharing Farm, a farm producing food for the food bank, where I conducted a visual appraisal of its premises. Since it did not have ongoing programs at the time of my wintertime visit, I did not observe participants at this site. More in-depth observations occurred at the Richmond Food Bank, where I volunteered weekly as a wellness centre attendant for a period of three months. From here, I witnessed food bank operations and informally interacted with other volunteers, who were aware of my identity as a researcher, and clients, who

were not, as per my volunteer duties. I took notes about these observations after my shifts to avoid interfering with my volunteer role, disrupting food bank services, causing discomfort to participants, and betraying my position as a researcher to clients. I did not disclose this information to clients out of respect for the food bank's policy of client privacy, which also prevented me from interviewing food bank clients. In seeking a space where I could both observe and interview clients within food program environments, I obtained permission to do so for one community meal hosted by Church on Five. Dining alongside participants, I experienced the food program firsthand as a client, and chronicled its flow, sights, sounds, and tastes after the meal. In the next section, I will detail research methods for interviews conducted here and at other study sites.

Interviews

The methods described thus far exclusively concern the written expression of discourse producers and myself. In order to capture the perspectives of frontline stakeholders, hitherto missing from the present study as well as HFI discourse at large, I interviewed food insecure individuals as well as facilitators with whom they interact. Compared with the engineered and detached nature of text, interviews add significant detail to academic abstraction, “messy complexity” to its “tyranny of theory” (Cawthorne 2001). They remind researchers that the minutiae of everyday life may or may not fit grand theoretical models traditionally favoured in the field of economics, including political economy (Cawthorne 2001). With this in mind, I situated interview perspectives within broader political economic processes while maintaining values of subjectivity and non-generalizability in qualitative research.

Since qualitative methodology prioritizes depth over scope, I opted for a small sample size of 12 participants consisting of community program facilitators ($n = 8$) and their food insecure clients ($n = 3$), along with an additional formerly food insecure respondent who serves as both a facilitator and a client. Table 4 outlines both groups of respondents' affiliated organization types, as well as their association with HFI. Although I selected the majority of facilitators from food programs, I also included facilitators who interact with food insecure individuals through other services such as poverty advocacy or immigration settlement. For food insecure and formerly food insecure respondents, three were referred to me through facilitators, and one was directly encountered during a participant observation, with permission from the program facilitator. Once potential respondents were selected, I provided a letter of information and consent form, via email to facilitators, and in-person immediately prior to interviews with clients, to outline the terms of their involvement. As an incentive for participation, I provided a \$50 donation to the organizations of facilitators, and a \$15 honorarium to clients to encourage participation. Respondents signed consent forms either prior to or at the beginning of interview sessions. Whenever possible, I interviewed participants within their everyday environments, in this case food programs or preferred food outlets, in order to minimize their discomfort and immerse myself within their worlds. This is especially important considering my outsider status as a researcher, which presented potential barriers in familiarity and rapport (Dowling 2016). However, I also provided the option of telephone interviews in case it was more convenient for respondents.

Table 4.

Interview respondents by category, organization type, and association with HFI

	Category	Organization Type	Association with HFI
Respondent 1	Facilitator	Poverty advocacy organization	Advocates for Richmond's low-income population
Respondent 2	Facilitator	Food bank	Facilitates food bank operations
Respondent 3	Facilitator	Food Bank	Facilitates food bank operations
Respondent 4	Facilitator	Church	Facilitates community meal
Respondent 5	Facilitator	Settlement services agency	Interacts with food insecure individuals; promotes free income tax clinics at the food bank
Respondent 6	Facilitator	Farm	Facilitates farm that supplies produce to the food bank
Respondent 7	Facilitator	Family service agency	Facilitates community kitchens
Respondent 8	Facilitator	Family service agency	Interacts with food insecure families; works at daycare within the food bank
Respondent 9	Client + Facilitator	Poverty advocacy organization	Formerly food insecure; advocates for Richmond's low-income population
Respondent 10	Client	Church	Food insecure
Respondent 11	Client	Family service agency	Food insecure
Respondent 12	Client	Family service agency	Food insecure

At the data collection stage, I followed Guion et al.'s (2001) guidelines for conducting in-depth interviews. The first step was to clarify the purpose of the interviews, and then identify the attendant information I am seeking to gather. My intention behind facilitator interviews was to further uncover the influence of discourse on HFI reduction activities, as well as proximal information about the food insecure population, whereas the goal of interviews with clients was to obtain insight into direct experiences of food insecurity. Based on these objectives, I designed two sets of open-ended interview questions, one for facilitators, and another for clients, which were reviewed by my supervisors (see Appendix). I followed these questions during interviews,

which were semi-structured, while allowing for flexibility and other directions of conversation. In addition to asking questions, I actively listened to, observed, and reacted to respondents as I guided them through the interview. Because of the need to attend fully to respondents and put them at ease, I waited until after the interview to take notes about observations, impressions, interpretations, and other comments. I recorded interviews onto a cell phone or laptop, and then used NVivo software for both transcription and coding.

Discourse and Content Analysis of Interviews

I then analyzed interview transcripts by identifying key patterns, trends, and contradictions among them (Cope 2016; Seale & Kelly 2004). I modelled this process after the study's textual analysis because to a large extent, I interpreted interview responses as discourse. The discursive function of speech illustrates the ways in which discourse shapes the thoughts and actions of actors, particularly food program facilitators who administer HFI reduction activities. Interview responses may or may not belong to HFI discourses, but personal perspective is nevertheless inseparable from social influence. Even if the distinction between discourse and perspective is unclear, I attempted to account for both of these aspects in my coding structure. The coding tree for interview data was therefore adapted from that of the textual discourse analysis, with more intricate pathways leading into the everyday experiences of study respondents. As in the textual content analysis, I created tables and graphs using these codes, and also generated a word frequency list to show the relative prevalence of each discourse. Since the continuum of these experiences can never be fully abstracted into categories, Cope (2016) advises maintaining a balance between authenticity and data reduction. I therefore utilized emergent discursive patterns to sketch, rather than model, political and economic structures that

shape experiences of food insecurity. According to Guion (2001), the next step is to verify interview data through triangulation, a concept I will describe in the following section with application to all methods employed in this study.

Validity

After having obtained different forms of data, from diverse sources, by various means, I then synthesized, cross-referenced, and compared these multitudes of information. This process, known as triangulation, enhances the validity of findings by contributing to a multi-dimensional understanding of the issue, filling knowledge gaps, identifying inconsistencies, and verifying data (Stratford & Bradshaw 2016). Through triangulation, I located unifying messages, or the lack thereof, within and across discourse, observational, and interview sources. Most importantly, I compared media and institutional representations against those created by myself, community program facilitators, and clients to shed light on the influence and accuracy of HFI discourses. Following the synthesis of data, I further triangulated my findings by confirming, contextualizing, or contradicting them using previous literature. This is where I utilized findings to support or refute my theoretical framework. Even when qualitative data supports theory, however, it requires subjective interpretation in order to do so (Cawthorne 2001).

Hence the need for reflexivity and transparency, which represent crucial sources of validity in addition to triangulation (Cope 2016; Cawthorne 2001). Reflexivity, or the self-examination of how researchers and subjects influence the research and one another, is crucial at every stage of research. According to Kitchen and Tate (2000), the research process is not a one-way production of knowledge, but a continuous dialogue with the research question(s). This entailed constantly questioning the ethics of my methods, as well as their utility with respect to

my research objectives and theoretical framework, and then revealing these questions. While study limitations and preconceptions are inevitable, acceptable, and even suitable, they require honesty and transparency on the part of the researcher (Cawthorne 2001). Acting on this imperative, I wrote a statement of positionality as a way of making my socially engrained perspectives explicit (Waitt 2016). This was to avoid passing my subjective conclusions off as objective truths – part of the mechanism by which discourse enshrines perspective into knowledge. In the literature review, I emulated the objective tone of SDH and some political economic discourses due to their heavy influence on my study; at the reflexivity stage (see Chapter 7), however, I eventually questioned this posturing. As a discourse producer myself via the present study, I did not wish to replicate the very systems of power I sought to criticize.

Conclusion

I applied a structuralist approach to the political economy of HFI using a combination of discourse analysis, observations, and stakeholder interviews. Each of these methods uncovered different dimensions to the multifaceted realities of HFI: the critical discourse analysis deconstructed systems of knowledge and power within text; my observations offered glimpses into spaces of HFI reduction initiatives; and interviews gave voice to stakeholders in HFI reduction. By triangulating from these different approaches, I was able to outline political and economic structures, rooted in discourse and mediated by stakeholders that produce and maintain HFI. Despite enhancing veracity, triangulation represents a calculus of knowledge that approximates, but never reaches, elusive kernels of “truth.” Yet to a certain extent, my methods, and those of qualitative research in general, also account for the subjectivity of reality among texts and multiple social actors, not least including myself. In this case, validity is primarily

derived as much from reflexivity and transparency as it is from accuracy. It was therefore crucial for me to openly reckon with research decisions and positions, and invite readers to do the same. That is my responsibility to the power of interpretation and representation in qualitative research.

4. READING BETWEEN THE LINES: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE AND CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DOCUMENTS RELATED TO HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY

Categorization of Discourses

Based on discursive categories and mechanisms established in the literature review, I will now identify these phenomena among HFI-related documents pertaining to my study area. In terms of categories, all of the literature review's discourses manifested themselves, often simultaneously, within texts analyzed ($n = 33$). These include news articles ($n = 7$), municipal and regional policy documents ($n = 4$), reports ($n = 8$), and websites ($n = 14$) produced by a cross-section of relevant local organizations and regional authorities. With respect to primary discourses, the majority of documents contained evidence of food charity ($n = 18$ files) and local food movement ($n = 13$) discourses, followed by nutritional ($n = 9$), anti-poverty ($n = 7$), social determinants of health (SDH) ($n = 6$), and political economic discourses ($n = 3$), respectively (Table 3). Further categorization of these data indicates that the incidence of food-based approaches ($n = 27$), including food charity, local food movement, and nutritional discourses, outnumber those of income-based approaches, referring to anti-poverty, SDH and political economic discourses, by nearly three-fold ($n = 8$). Many documents also included secondary discourses of the deserving and undeserving poor ($n = 10$), the right to food ($n = 8$), and food environments ($n = 5$). From my analysis, as introduced in the literature review, these discourses affect HFI by influencing perceptions about its context and politics, both of which contain ideas about responsibility, blame, and participation (in no particular order). The following sections will elaborate upon their mechanisms of (de)contextualization and (de)politicization, moving from

the general presence/absence of key concepts (Table 5, Figure 1) to specific examples drawn from texts.

Table 5.

Prevalence of main household food insecurity discourses in texts analyzed by number of documents and number of appearances within all documents

	Discourses	Documents	Appearances
Food-based discourses	Food charity	18	31
	Local food movement	13	40
	Nutrition	9	19
Income-based discourses	Anti-poverty	7	17
	SDH	6	17
	Political economy	3	6

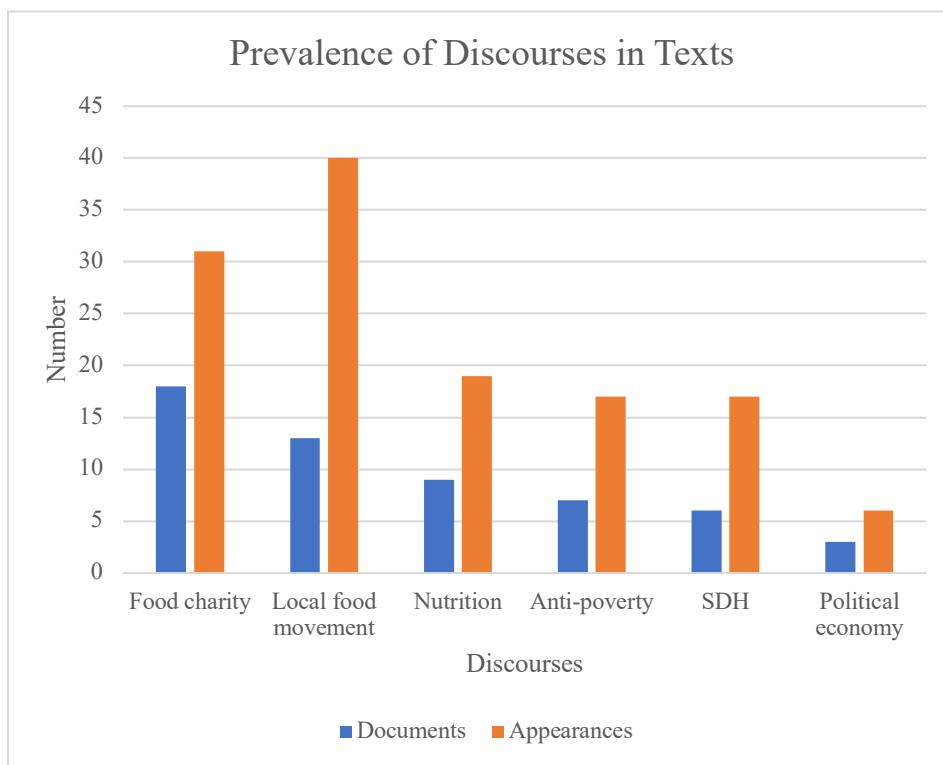


Figure 1. Bar graph showing the prevalence of topics reflecting the main HFI discourses by number of documents¹ and appearances.

¹ See Table 1 in Chapter 3 for document sources.

Discursive Mechanisms: Contextualization and Politicization

Context

The dominance of food-based, as opposed to income-based, approaches in the documents analyzed here suggests that the former has obscured the latter. Discourses organized around food have separated food insecurity from a declining welfare state and re-contextualized the issue within the food system and/or consumer behaviour. Word frequency counts show that income, despite being the primary determinant of food insecurity, did not appear at all within the top 30 most frequently used words in websites, news articles, and policy documents – media that best capture the attention of the public and policymakers (Table 6). By contrast, mention of “farming,” “agriculture,” and “meals” within these lists once again highlights the disproportionate attention paid to food-based initiatives. The high frequency of income within reports, while encouraging, is likely due to the overrepresentation of anti-poverty and SDH discourses within this category. Documents were selected based on their relevance to HFI, meaning that various reports regarding the food system alone were excluded from this analysis. Therefore, this selection may be more indicative of inattention to income relative to the food system than it is about the recognition of income. Moreover, the relatively inaccessible nature of report formats, compared with news and website materials may create a disconnect between academic and public knowledge about HFI. The only document that explicitly uses the term “household food insecurity” in BC is a report produced by Provincial Health Services Authority (2016b), which links the matter to household characteristics, chief among them being income, written from a social determinants of health (SDH) perspective. However, such contextualization of HFI has failed to find its way into public communication materials analyzed in this study. Instead of “household food insecurity,” materials produced for non-academic audiences often use

related terms including “wellness” (the 9th most frequent word among policy documents), “hunger” (18th in web pages, 25th in news articles), and “food security” (“security” is 15th in news articles) (Table 6). As I will explain in the next several paragraphs, these terminological choices provide further insight into the literature review’s discussion about the de-contextualization of HFI.

Wellness

Most notably, “wellness” ranks above “poverty” in frequency for all documents (Table 6, column 2), with one policy document (City of Richmond 2018) entirely dedicated to community wellness. As a concept closely related to the nutritional framework, “wellness” implies that dietary outcomes are the result of lifestyle choices without addressing socio-economic limitations to these choices. Even when limitations to these choices are addressed, they tend to be presented in the form of spatial, rather than financial, constraints. This only returns HFI reduction activities to the domain of the community on the premise of establishing food outlets and programs in specific neighbourhoods. A blog post by Vancouver Coastal Health, for instance, states that “the convenience of nearby food sources might be impacting your eating habits,” a finding obtained from a study conducted in Richmond (Vancouver Coastal Health 2018). The spatial correlation may in fact be more indicative of household characteristics, which were not specified to be taken into account, than it is of food environments. Hence, the website’s recommendation of simply “increasing healthier food options in Richmond neighbourhoods” likely missed the underlying problem of inadequate financial resources within households.

Table 6.

Frequencies for the top 30 words categorized by documents analyzed

All documents			Web pages		News articles		Policy documents		Reports	
Rank	Word	Count	Word	Count	Word	Count	Word	Count	Word	Count
1	foods	1490	foods	222	food	124	community	869	foods	1607
2	community	1309	community	125	community	76	City	621	community	582
3	city	693	banks	88	program	57	developments	526	health	451
4	health	662	volunteer	46	people	56	Social	522	insecurity	377
5	socially	644	canada	46	feature	50	Strategy	506	household	352
6	developments	605	meal	42	strollers	49	Foods	499	poverty	335
7	services	546	programs	41	homeless	46	Action	462	programs	329
8	strategy	545	society	37	may	40	Plans	443	children	306
9	action	543	support	36	get	34	wellness	432	families	284
10	program	531	donations	35	help	32	services	358	services	272
11	plans	497	live	33	weekly	31	Health	336	organized	256
12	wellness	492	director	32	city	30	Local	296	income	256
13	support	433	local	31	lands	24	program	295	access	249
14	local	386	walmart	30	church	23	Support	267	provide	248
15	families	374	new	30	security	23	governments	251	living	239
16	children	374	families	30	centre	22	partners	231	systems	228
17	insecurity	366	sharing	28	farming	22	vancouver	222	support	227
18	household	358	hunger	28	years	21	Years	216	security	219
19	poverty	344	years	27	per	20	Activity	192	farms	213
20	years	340	healthy	27	faith	20	Policy	192	people	208
21	governments	323	time	26	support	19	Builds	192	reports	207
22	provide	322	people	26	meals	18	residents	191	canada	191
23	people	318	church	26	aid	18	Provide	184	developments	187
24	living	290	change	26	dinner	18	implement	171	school	178
25	vancouver	288	services	25	hunger	18	Healthy	167	needs	177
26	needs	272	blog	25	delivery	18	opportunities	165	project	176
27	partners	262	helping	24	local	18	Housing	164	participation	174
28	works	258	events	23	also	17	neighbourhoods	164	agriculture	171
29	accessing	250	vancouver	22	hopeless	17	School	163	socially	167
30	report	240	farm	22	ian	17	accessing	160	using	164

Note. The length of 30 was selected to maintain a balance between range and significance.

Hunger

The word “hunger,” appearing in eight documents, was commonly used in food bank websites or news articles written about food charity. As mentioned in the literature review, its usage effectively removes food scarcity from its circumstances of financial deprivation. For example, Food Banks Canada erroneously frames corporate charity as a solution to HFI (when it is very much part of the problem) by equating “food insecurity” with “hunger,” a de-contextualizing tactic described in the literature review. One of these documents is a celebratory blog post about a donations campaign by Walmart – one of the worst offenders in terms of failing to pay its employees a living wage (Fisher 2017). Commending the noblesse oblige of corporate donors such as Walmart in this manner hides their responsibility for perpetuating HFI, and facilitates their institutional entrenchment within charitable organizations. Entitled “Fight Hunger. Spark Change,” Walmart’s campaign follows a familiar discursive patterns in employing militaristic rhetoric and depicting ambiguous social transformation. From a political economic perspective, Walmart is only fighting to maintain the neoliberal status quo. According to the blog post, Walmart is “[working] to address food waste and food insecurity by supporting the work of the food bank network in Canada” (Food Banks Canada 2019). This statement transforms the root problem of inadequate income, for which there is no mention in the blog post, into a matter of food redistribution. In doing so, it normalizes both a wasteful food system and a deficient social safety net, even suggesting that the “food bank network” can fulfill the role of the latter.

In a separate report, Food Banks Canada once again references “food insecurity” to deny “the corrosive idea that aid leads to dependence [which] is central to the debate about how to best address food insecurity and poverty in Canada and elsewhere.” Although this phrase places

food insecurity in proximity to poverty, it positions food banks as a solution to food insecurity without addressing poverty reduction for the remainder of the report. The report even references Riches (1986) in order to misrepresent and refute his words about “creating new forms of dependence (on the food banks)” (p. 122). While Riches is actually referring to inadequate income policies that have led to dependence on food banks, the report misinterprets his notion of dependence as the offensive suggestion that food banks create laziness among recipients. His words of criticism, as with the condition of HFI, have been taken out of context.

Food security

In addition to food redistribution, other discourses misrepresent food insecurity within the context of food production. While “food security” can at times indicate household food security, with only one document utilizing the term in this manner, it typically connotes community food security, which is the concept that is invoked in 11 documents. The Richmond Food Security Society, whose reports and website materials were analyzed in this study, is dedicated to “food security” in this manner. “Food insecurity,” on the other hand, typically refers to HFI in the academic realm, which positions food scarcity in relation to financial resources within the household. However, it is commonly misinterpreted in public communication to describe the direct inverse of food security at the community level. “Food insecurity” appears in five documents, which is half the number of texts as those that contain its decontextualized counterpart, “hunger.” Among these documents, the majority of them ($n = 4$) appropriate or misuse the term.

One local news article, for instance, frames “food insecurity” as the absence of “food security” within the regional food system. This would be an acceptable interpretation had the

article concerned the food system alone; however, the article inaccurately incorporates concepts related to HFI without acknowledging its separate set of drivers. Its title alone, ““Hungry for food security,”” erroneously suggests that hunger in Richmond is directly linked to the regional food supply – an impression perhaps produced in part by the journalistic tendency towards figurative language (Wood 2015). The article continues to present food scarcity in terms of shortages in regional food supply rather than consumer income, for which there is no mention whatsoever. It only discusses financial constraints with reference to precarious producer livelihoods, which does not apply to the vast majority of the urban population. Furthermore, the author only addresses the affordability of food from the perspective of cost as determined by the food system, the rationale being that expanding local food production would decrease food prices. What he fails to acknowledge in his discussion of affordability is that consumer income exerts much more influence on purchasing power than the cost of food. Diverting attention from income to the cost of food in this manner is a decontextualizing tactic prevalent in several ($n = 5$) documents, including the article currently under consideration. The section entitled “food (in)security” exclusively concerns environmental aspects of local food production, which demonstrates the tendency for sustainability-centric discourses to overwrite underlying issues of poverty. It contains one interview subject’s statement that “we need to look at the whole system and that includes the processing and packaging of food and how we prepare food in our kitchens.” Although these topics are central to sustainability and health, the speaker creates a false sense of holism, with respect to the concept of “food insecurity,” that ignores its primary component of income.

Politics

Subsidiarity

The de-contextualization of food insecurity removes HFI from the unjust political economic structures that produce it, allowing culpable institutions to download responsibility onto communities and individuals. This discursive process is inherently political – neoliberal, alternative economy, or both – even as stakeholders attempt to depoliticize food insecurity. That the word “community” is the second most frequently occurring word in my analysis, appearing only behind “foods,” reveals the preferred scale of action among documents analyzed. Virtually all food-based discourses posit community-level initiatives, including food banks, community meals, community kitchens, and community gardens, as solutions to food insecurity (or its various terminological iterations). Notably absent from these documents is acknowledgement for the provincial and federal governments’ unfulfilled obligation to distribute and ensure sufficient financial resources necessary for procuring food. In this way, food-based discourses place the burden of HFI reduction on communities rather than on the structures and institutions responsible for producing HFI in the first place.

Some discourses, particularly within the nutritional framework, further downscale social responsibilities onto individuals by suggesting that they are to blame for poor dietary outcomes. Blame is often couched in positive terms such as “wellness,” the absence of which suggests personal, rather than societal, shortcomings; “nutrition education,” “food skills,” and “food literacy,” implying ignorance among target demographics; and “healthy food choices,” overlooking the fact that poverty is not a choice. Several food-based discourses refer to the downward pressure on responsibility using language of “empowerment,” creating a form of illusory agency that leaves vulnerable individuals powerless to buy food, since purchasing power

remains lacking, and influence income policies, due to the stigmatizing suggestion of personal blame for dietary circumstances.

On the other hand, documents containing mostly income-based discourses accurately ascribe blame to provincial and federal governments instead of individuals, but stop short of implicating neoliberalism. While they rightfully criticize the inadequacy of government income supports, they tend do so in isolation from its political economic milieu. Instead of addressing this wider context, many of these documents still focus on the local scale, incorporating elements of food-based frameworks in a discursive patois. To illustrate, the Richmond Food System Assessment report, produced by the Richmond Poverty Response Committee (2006), correctly utilizes the term “food insecurity” within the context of income and inadequate social welfare yet problematically presents food banks, community food programs, and local food production, as well as geographical access to these initiatives, as primary solutions to the issue. It even appears to legitimize the unacceptable permanence of food banks, quoting a community food security proponent who writes that “food banks need to reconsider their original premise that they are temporary structures” (Richmond Poverty Response Committee 2006, p. 2, see Koc 2005). Although the intention behind this quote is to improve food bank practices by integrating them with community food security initiatives, it still normalizes the need for food banks, which were historically scarce, instead of addressing the income-derived causes that have made them necessary in recent decades. The integration of anti-poverty, food charity, and community food security discourses reveals discursive alliances that consolidate power among these frameworks.

A more recent report regarding a public forum held by the Richmond Poverty Response Committee suggests producing a “food system map” and “[locating] food services in areas with greatest demand,” which invokes food environments, food charity, and community food security

discourses (Richmond Poverty Response Committee 2017a, p. 8). However, it goes on to acknowledge that “community gardens are for the rich” (Richmond Poverty Response Committee 2017a, p. 8). In this study’s view, the promotion of community-based initiatives is appropriate as long as their very real limitations are addressed in this manner. An accompanying report differentiates between short-term actions, including community-level services and programs, and long-term systemic changes such as an increased pension, guaranteed basic income, and affordable housing (Richmond Poverty Response Committee 2017b). This report accurately reflects jurisdictional discrepancies between provisional and systemic interventions, yet it fails to question the ways in which the former has become the status quo.

Concealing neoliberalism

From a political economic perspective, the long-term reliance on community initiatives is a calculated product of neoliberalism – something that is rarely acknowledged in other discourses. Instead of responding in kind, that is to say politically, the majority of discourses depoliticize HFI in order to maintain popular and institutional appeal. While pragmatic, this tactic may perpetuate neoliberalism by hiding it from public view, often in plain sight, under auspices of objectivity or even advocacy. Even when income-based discourses criticize government inaction, they tend to blame bureaucratic factors, with a “lack of coordination” among different levels of government cited in three documents, rather than the politics at play. One report regarding child poverty in Richmond suggests that “policies only change if politicians know they matter to people” (Richmond Children First 2013, p. 29). While this statement is partially true, it ignores the possibility that politicians may already recognize the importance of proposed policies but choose not to act anyway on account of political dispositions.

Some documents avoid advocacy for HFI reduction entirely: after linking the prevalence of HFI in BC to inadequate social assistance payments, Provincial Health Services Authority (2016b), writing from an SDH perspective, concludes by stating that “the purpose of this report is not to recommend specific policies or programs” (p. 3). When advocacy appears in other documents, it is frequently framed in politically neutral terms. Both the Richmond Food Bank and Richmond Food Security Society signal vague commitments to “advocacy” in both of their mission statements without mentioning income on their respective websites. While the nature of advocacy is left (likely intentionally) unspecified, one can infer that it occurs on behalf of food redistributors or producers rather than low-income populations. These silences about the very populations that experience food insecurity effectively render them invisible, thus contributing to their political marginalization.

Silencing victims

Populations vulnerable to HFI, predominantly comprising low-income individuals, are virtually absent from popular media. Even when they appear, they are often portrayed in ways that shame their circumstances. Five out of seven news articles analyzed concern food charity programs, but only one of these articles features a program participant. Although this article to some extent gives voice to the experience of poverty and food insecurity, it depicts this experience using condescending and stigmatizing language. For example, it describes a homeless individual as a “resident,” the quotation marks suggesting that he is lesser or other than individuals with homes (Campbell 2017). The author also juxtaposes the interviewee’s conception of his abode as a “plot of paradise” with the “reality” of his home as a “beat-up, solar-powered camper van, wrecked SUV, complemented by his self-landscaped garden, garnished with a tent and patio umbrella,” a comparison suggestive of ridicule.

Discrimination and invisibility can also surface in subtler formats such as pictures.

Despite emphasizing the inclusivity of their services, food charity websites tend to feature pictures of children, a social group commonly characterized as members of the “deserving poor.” Although these images were likely intended to help garner public attention, they unintentionally reinforce the neoliberal distinction between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, demarcated based on the ability to participate in the labour force. In addition to food charity discourses, local food movement media may also facilitate social exclusion by invoking class hierarchies. The Sharing Farm, which produces groceries for the Richmond Food Bank, does not include any pictures of grocery recipients on its website. Instead, all of its images follow, what is in my view, a bourgeois aesthetic consisting of idyllic gardens, produce at its farmers market stall, and middle-class volunteers/staff members. While these scenes may have simply been more readily available to the Sharing Farm than ones taking place at the food bank, they still speak to the social stratification that has excluded vulnerable populations from public participation and advocacy.

Amplifying voices

Only two documents, both produced by the Richmond Poverty Response Committee, confer political power to food insecure populations. They amplify the experiences of individuals experiencing poverty and food insecurity, developing “a space/community to share their stories” and “opportunities for like-minded folks to meet and create positive changes in Richmond” (Richmond Poverty Response Committee 2017a, p. 5). One of these documents explicitly politicizes poverty reduction activities by recommending “[getting] involved – volunteering in the community, advocacy, politically,” “[engaging] in protest,” “[creating] a petition,” and “[voting] for change” (Richmond Poverty Response Committee 2017b, p. 16). Compared with

the imprecise language about advocacy and empowerment in many food-based discourses, this document specifically refers to “self-advocacy” and “[the empowerment of] individuals who traditionally have been excluded or marginalized,” referring to members of the low-income community (Richmond Poverty Response Committee 2017b, p. 18). In the present study’s view, this is the type of politicized community empowerment, rather than the uncritical provision of aid alone, that truly underpins alternative economies. Unfortunately, such instances of proto-political economic discourse are vastly outnumbered by their depoliticized counterparts, just as marginalized voices are underrepresented in the conversation about food insecurity.

Policy discourses

The popularity of apolitical advocacy has already translated to its asymmetric influence in the policy realm, where discourses are even more likely to affect people’s everyday lives. As in aforementioned local media, web pages, and reports, food-based discourses are heavily prioritized over income-based discourses in policy-based documents. The City of Richmond’s Social Development Strategy policy document, for instance, links income to food only with respect to its goal of “[supporting] and [encouraging] community-based initiatives that promote independence and reduce the cost of living for low income households (e.g. community gardens, community kitchens, low income resource directory, social enterprises, and community-based life skills workshops)” (City of Richmond 2013). This statement deflects attention from income onto the cost of living, allowing it to present food-based initiatives as solutions. The “community-based initiatives,” “independence,” and “life skills” in this quote also place responsibility on communities and individuals rather than on senior governments which bear responsibility over the last several decades for leaving households without adequate financial resources. To its credit, the document acknowledges that the “downloading of responsibilities

from senior governments” is a “serious concern for municipalities across Canada,” citing the concomitant displacement of social obligations from federal to provincial governments, and from provincial governments to municipalities (City of Richmond 2013, p. 9). However, the remainder of the document continues to discursively download social responsibilities onto communities and individuals instead of exerting pressure on senior levels of government.

In 2016, the Richmond Food Security Society developed a Richmond Food Charter for the municipal government, identifying seven themes for food system action. While it is encouraging to see that “social justice” is the first mentioned of these themes, signalling a commitment to “[improving] access to food for all,” the document fails to follow up with any mention of income or poverty. Its related theme of “economic development” describes supporting farmers and farm workers only, which retains an unnecessary focus on the food system: since HFI is associated with precarious livelihoods in general, there is no reason for economic development to be limited to food producers. Other themes continue to invoke food-based discourses without addressing income. The theme of “education,” encompassing “food skills training,” “gardening,” and “healthy cooking,” inaccurately implies that food insecurity arises from the absence of these activities and intentions. This rationale is characteristic of nutritional and community food security discourses. The latter is explicitly mentioned as the document aims to “strengthen community food security” under the theme of “responsible government,” recommending collaboration with all levels of government without differentiating between their jurisdictional responsibilities.

Despite presenting food as a “basic human need and a right,” the document does not follow the rights-based framework in naming the federal government as the primary duty bearer of human rights. Such discursive inconsistencies, characteristic of the majority of documents

analyzed, highlight confusion and co-option among competing discourses. It is likely, then, that this document interprets the right to food as something to be achieved through food production at the community level rather than through income supports guaranteed by senior governments. Tellingly, its utilization of the term “community food security” instead of “household food insecurity” implicitly downloads responsibilities from senior governments onto communities.

Using these rhetorical mechanisms, food insecurity was perhaps decontextualized and depoliticized by design in order to consolidate the municipal government’s support for the Richmond Food Charter. Small wonder, then, that it was unanimously endorsed by all city councillors. Many of the Richmond Food Charter’s themes then carried over into the city’s Community Wellness Strategy (City of Richmond 2018). Considering the accumulative effect of discursive power, I consider the Richmond Food Charter to be a missed opportunity for introducing income-based discourses into the policy arena.

In the Community Wellness Strategy (City of Richmond 2018), as in its preceding documents, food-based discourses continue to take precedence over income-based discourses. Its titular reference to “community wellness” already indicates the presence of nutritional and community food security discourses. These discourses underpin its objective of “[increasing] the number of Richmond residents across all ages making healthy food choices” (City of Richmond 2018, p. 4). By framing dietary outcomes as a matter of choice, without acknowledging income limitations, this objective individualizes social liabilities. When the document speaks of increasing the range of choices available to individuals, it proposes community-level interventions that do not respond to the macro-scale structures that constrain choices for low-income populations.

To illustrate, one of its priority actions is to “expand community gardens in neighbourhoods across Richmond, to encourage...access to fresh affordable vegetables and fruits for residents,” creating the false impression that community gardens are the main answer to removing affordability barriers (City of Richmond 2018, p. 4). This recommendation was likely informed by a Vancouver Coastal Health study cited later in the document, indicating that “people living in neighbourhoods with fewer healthy food outlets and a higher density of less healthy food outlets report lower intakes of fruits and vegetables and higher intakes of sugary beverages and snacks” (City of Richmond 2018, p. 20). As mentioned previously, these results may have been more indicative of income environments than they were of food environments. Their enshrinement within a policy document lends credence to the misleading spatialization and characterization of food insecurity.

Even when the document acknowledges income, it fails to emphasize this crucial factor. Despite recognizing “economic factors such as the need for adequate income, food security and affordable housing” as a common theme identified from stakeholder engagement, the document places this topic last in a flow chart of priority areas. Topics positioned above, such as “social connectedness,” while important, have seemingly obscured structural causes of poor health outcomes. It is important to note that the City of Richmond’s stakeholder engagement process in preparation for this document may not have been truly inclusive. The majority of public consultations were targeted towards families through family day events, school district surveys, and student discussions. Not only do these activities cater to members of the “deserving” poor only, they also miss unattached individuals, who represent the most prevalent (43%) type of household experiencing food insecurity (Tarasuk et al. 2016). Although additional discussions

held at the library were theoretically open to the general public, they may not have been truly accessible to economically marginalized populations considering their invisibility in society.

Its alternative, an online survey, faced similar issues of nominally universal yet self-selective outreach. The survey was advertised in community centres, City Hall, social media, and community newspapers – spaces and media that are likely underutilized by socially isolated populations. Had the City of Richmond specifically attempted to engage vulnerable populations, which arguably require health-promoting policies and services the most, economic factors may have been ascribed much higher importance. As with the Richmond Food Charter, the Community Wellness Plan’s focus on food at the expense of income is expected to persist in future municipal policy documents. One of its objectives, which is to create a “Healthy Eating Strategy” that builds upon the Community Wellness Plan, the Richmond Food Charter, and the Regional Food System Action Plan, will likely continue to follow their discursive directions.

The Regional Food System Action Plan, produced by Metro Vancouver (2016), similarly relies on food-based discourses while overlooking income-based discourses. Despite associating food insecurity with financial constraints per Health Canada’s (2012a) definition, the document addresses poverty only as an afterthought, devoting one small paragraph to it on page 30 out of 36 pages in total, and mentioning income in passing only four times throughout the document. The link between poverty and food is categorized under the heading of “Emerging Issues in the Regional Food System,” which suggests an ideological disregard for income-related concerns (Metro Vancouver 2016, p. 30). From a political economic perspective, poverty is not an emerging issue but a persistent condition of Canadian society that has caused widespread HFI since the 1980s – a link that has been well-established (Riches 1986; Power 1999; Riches & Tarasuk 2014; Riches 2018). Its representation as an emergent consideration today, perhaps out

of feigned ignorance, shows the extent to which income-based discourses have been neglected or deliberately ignored by neoliberal institutions, often in favour of food-based discourses.

Throughout the thesis, I demonstrate this tendency to conceal the social consequences of neoliberalism behind seemingly politically benign, yet covertly neoliberal, frameworks.

Given the Regional Food System Action Plan's adherence to food-based discourses, all of its goals belong to community food security, nutrition, and food charity frameworks. Its hierarchy of goals reveals the relative priority ascribed to its discursive underpinnings. The only goal that is relevant to HFI reduction, which is ensuring that "Everyone has Access to Healthy, Culturally Diverse and Affordable Food," is numbered fourth out of five goals, taking place after increasing local food production, improving the financial viability of the food sector, and supporting healthy food choices (Metro Vancouver 2016, p. 22). Even within this goal, contextual information and proposed actions do not reflect the nature of the task at hand. Remarkably, income is never mentioned under this section other than a perfunctory reference to "economic inequities," which is portrayed to be on par with "future impacts of climate change" in terms of urgency (Metro Vancouver 2016, p. 22).

This false association shifts attention from income back to food, invoking an environmental sustainability narrative that ties food scarcity to food supply instead of financial resources. While environmental factors such as climate change indeed pose an impending threat to the food system, they occur on a time scale far different from the one in which HFI occurs. Given that the Canadian food supply is at immense surplus (Clapp 2012), food insecurity is predominantly a result of inadequate household income – and has been for the past several decades. Since the document fails to distinguish between these disparate scales and systems, it inaccurately proposes "[increasing] the availability of healthy and nutritious food" as the main

solution to HFI (Metro Vancouver 2016, p. 23), when financial accessibility is in fact the primary issue. In a pie chart illustrating the weight of planned actions, urban agriculture and the recovery of surplus food comprise disproportionately large sectors relative to “improving vulnerable population’s access to nutritious food,” considering the centrality of financial access (Metro Vancouver 2016, p. 24). It does not reflect the fact that neither food production nor redistribution significantly reduce HFI due to their inability to increase fundamentally inadequate incomes.

Even the most appropriate sub-objective of “improving vulnerable population’s access to nutritious food” can be subject to scrutiny. Its list of thirteen proposed actions primarily consists of support for community food programs, nutrition education, and food charity initiatives, with a plan to update a Community Poverty Reduction Strategy – the only action that reflects the root cause of income – appearing second to last. Since the document overstates the role of food-based initiatives, it also exaggerates the power of institutions responsible for their operations. For example, its claim that “local governments are taking a strong leadership role in ensuring equitable access to nutritious food,” unaccompanied by acknowledgement for jurisdictional limitations to income-based interventions, effectively downloads responsibility from provincial and federal governments onto municipalities and communities (Metro Vancouver 2016, p. 9).

Local Discursive Influences

Thus far, I have analyzed discourses from a broadly applicable political economic perspective. In this section, I will account for additional factors, which may not necessarily belong to my theoretical framework, that are specific to my study locale. While food-based frameworks are dominant in society at large, their centrality in local discourse is perhaps also a

legacy of Richmond's natural and cultural history, or at least the city's pastoral account of such. The City of Richmond's website depicts an island shaped by the confluence of the Fraser River, depositing fertile sediments, and the Pacific Ocean, bringing fish to its shores, geographically primed for productive food industries (City of Richmond 2017). It then chronicles the historical inhabitation of the island by the Coast Salish peoples, who would fish, hunt small game, and collect berries, followed by the settlement of European farmers in the 1860s, Japanese fishermen in the 1880s, and finally, immigrants from Hong Kong and then mainland China. While this narrative pays tribute to the First Peoples of the island and the diversity of cultures thereafter, it weaves an idealized tapestry of intercultural harmony threaded together by the common language of food. What it fails to address is the displacement of Coast Salish peoples at the hands of European settlers laying claim to the land by none other means than agriculture. Although racial politics are not the main focus of this study, they cast aspersions on food-based discourse's nostalgia for a romanticized agrarian past, one that does not otherwise hold the answers to HFI.

Today, agriculture remains a focal point of racial tension in Richmond, albeit with different actors and an altered balance of power. The agricultural sector is now under threat from rapid development fuelled by immigration and foreign investment from China, inciting backlash from some residents. Both the loss of farmland and perpetuation of inequality are valid concerns in their own right; however, these causes frequently carry undertones of racial resentment. On the one hand, farming functions as a symbol for Richmond's European heritage, and, on the other, development is often framed as representing "Chinese greed" (O'Connor 2017). Such associations, among many others tied to these sectors, are so complex that some advocates may be unsure about what exactly they are defending, and whom they are actually opposing. Others, I suspect, are very intentional about their coded battles. Occasionally, their true intentions emerge

less subtly in anti-immigration flyers (Britten 2016), emails to city hall (Quan 2018), letters to the local paper (Richmond News 2015), and public rants (Hennig 2019), although these are extreme examples. In any case, the conflict in Richmond is almost never as simple as that between agriculture and development. It is one between nature (or at least a highly altered version of it) and development, citizens and outsiders, the old and the new, the poor and the rich, and other narrative binaries.

These prevailing sentiments are frequently broadcast in local media, including a news article previously analyzed in this study. The article contrasts unsightly “mansions” on farmland with financially struggling organic farmers leasing the land, and also features two interview subjects who recommend placing restrictions on foreign investment in farmland (Wood 2015). Its premise, that the real estate market has made agricultural enterprises financially untenable, is sound enough; its subtext, depicting the supposedly noble resistance of white, environmentally conscious “serfs” against enigmatic “foreign investors” in homes that “ruin the land for farming” and “block out views” (Wood 2015), invokes race and class stereotypes – if not caricatures. Unfortunately, discourses in Richmond often co-opt the local food movement in this manner. Aside from racialized language, the article creates a false causality (as discussed in the discourse analysis) between the local food supply, here depicted to be threatened by the real estate market, and food insecurity. Although the real estate market is indeed an antagonist, a much more relevant point of conflict would have been the trade-off between housing costs and food expenses, or the stigmatization of low-income populations in a city dominated by wealth. These issues may have been lost on the author in question, but I will address them in ensuing chapters.

From Discourse to Reality

In a discourse analysis of local news articles, websites, reports, and policy documents, I have demonstrated the overwhelming dominance of HFI discourses based on food over ones that emphasize income. These documents, mostly designed for a public readership, run contrary to a body of SDH research that has firmly established HFI's causes and solutions, which derive from income rather than food. Therefore, the disproportionate representation of food-based frameworks among documents analyzed reflects the prevalence of ideology, rather than the veracity of knowledge, in HFI reduction. In a Marxian sense, discourses frame HFI according to ideological notions about its context and politics. In my analysis, food-based discourses uproot HFI from its context of a disintegrating social safety net, whereas both food- and, to a lesser extent, income-based frameworks implicitly perpetuate or simply ignore its underlying neoliberal politics. The absence of discussion about neoliberalism, arguably the engine behind the production of HFI, represents a discursive gap to be filled using political economic theory. However, political economy does not completely explain location-specific, cultural phenomena I encountered in local discourses. These considerations will be examined further in ensuing chapters, which capture the complexity and diversity of human experiences to a greater degree. Shifting from the theoretical to the quotidian, the next chapter considers perceptions of responses to HFI among different key stakeholders.

5. DISCOVERING MY OWN BACKYARD: OBSERVATIONS, DINNER, AND CONVERSATION

Observations

Having theorized and criticized from afar until this point, I will now immerse myself within the grounded experiences of responses to HFI in Richmond, BC. This section recounts my passage across the study area, beginning with the landscape at large and then moving through settings in which HFI reduction activities occur. I depart on this journey from a specific geographic and social location (Richmond resident, Chinese-Canadian, researcher) that steers the conclusions at which I eventually arrive. My positionality will be a major topic of Chapter 7; for now, I acknowledge that the following observations do not consist of objective facts, but rather, subjective perceptions, impressions, and opinions of the world through my eyes.

Landscape

Discourses not only underpin written works, but also permeate our everyday environments. Richmond's slogan, "Island City, by Nature," greets every entry point into the city, with two bridges leading into an arterial road named "Garden City." These words are engrained in the geographic imaginations of visitors and residents, including those who air their grievances in the local paper. The city's slogan resurfaced, quoted sarcastically, in one of many complaints about "allowing megahomes to be built on our precious farmland" (see Richmond News 2017). This letter to the editor belongs to recurring commentary about Richmond's evolving physical and social landscape. As an island situated between the City of Vancouver and its rural suburbs, the city is a microcosm for regional patterns of urban development, with concentrated social hostilities to match. It has given rise to an abundance of "luxury"

condominiums in its expanding city centre, and sprawling homes encroaching on remaining farmland in its outskirts. At the same time, agriculture has found new life within and around the urban core, albeit on a smaller scale. Neighbourhood organizations have established community gardens in manicured parklands among residential areas, especially in desirable neighbourhoods. Considering their municipal endorsement, it is not a stretch to think that community gardens function not only to appease anxiety about the loss of farmland, but also to increase property values in surrounding developments.

We can then begin to see how the ongoing negotiation between nature and the built environment, while visibly contrasting, can represent different means to the same end. Farmland, gardens, mansions, and apartments alike hide an invisible side of society that exists in their shrubbery and shadows. In Richmond, agricultural land is not the only thing that has been relegated to the periphery; so, too, has a sizeable portion of society that is unable to afford basic needs such as food and shelter. From my perspective as a critical researcher, the misfortune of disappearing farmland obscures a far graver tragedy: that of the disappearing social safety net, as well as the waning recognition for its important role in society. Even in rare acknowledgements for social services and the existence of their users, the general public tends to stand on the antagonistic end of the debate. Compare, for instance, the public's adoration of community gardens with its sustained backlash against the development of a meagre 40 units of temporary modular housing for homeless individuals within the city centre. This housing project, another frequent subject of incendiary letters to the editor, has been a famously divisive issue in municipal politics since its proposal in 2018. The most vocal members of the public, angry letter writers included, have misdirected moral outrage either towards the victims themselves or towards the minimally related cause of local food production.

It is important to note that these members, in spite of their disproportionately loud voices, are not representative of society as a whole. To some extent, they are counterbalanced by networks of religious and non-profit organizations working to extend vital resources and services to vulnerable populations, often including food insecure individuals. Proponents of alternative economies, as described in the literature review, could argue that these programs provide pockets of compassion across an otherwise hostile urban setting. Even so, the environments in which they operate are still shaped by prevailing discourses that facilitate the invisibility and/or vilification of participants. In the present study, I witnessed some of these contradictions at three different types of food programs.

The Sharing Farm

The Sharing Farm is located on prime parkland adjacent to the Fraser River, the Pacific Ocean, a golf course, a million-dollar playground, and multi-million-dollar houses. Residents can be found strolling, cycling, and jogging through the multiple-award-winning park's knolls, groves, glades, waterfront, orchard, community garden plots, and vegetable fields. Bucolic vistas appear to cater to everyone – naturalists, agrarians, and housing developers alike – provided that they are fit to participate in a public life that privileges wealth. The farm is home to a storybook red barn, a wood-fired cob oven, a greenhouse, and several acres of land producing vegetables that are distributed to the Richmond Food Bank. As a fixture of the local community, the Sharing Farm regularly hosts a farmers' market stall, volunteers and events such as “farm yoga” – activities that enable its continued operations, yet occur a world away from intended beneficiaries. Although the organization speaks of “empowerment and inclusion,” it is not necessarily empowering and including the invisible recipients of its food. Rather, it retains a top-

down model, contingent on middle class goodwill and fancy, that continues to reinforce class hierarchies. This type of aid, however, is perhaps preferable to the corporate funding and donations on which the food bank would otherwise rely. Nevertheless, I have the impression that the Sharing Farm enjoys widespread support only so long as benefactors feel good and beneficiaries remain out of sight, considering the public's hostility towards low-income people. In order to glimpse these hidden members of society, who are absent from the Sharing Farm, I then conducted participant observations at spaces in which they are sequestered: the Richmond Food Bank and a church-run community meal.

Richmond Food Bank

The majority of Sharing Farm produce travels a short distance – an ideal of the local food movement – to the Richmond Food Bank's central depot, also located close to the city's waterfront. Less than a kilometre away from the food bank is the riverside Richmond Olympic Oval, a legacy of the watershed event in 2010 that fuelled the Metro region's unprecedented wave of development over the past decade. Membership to the Oval athletic centre is a status symbol among local residents, including my peers. Some types of membership to social groups are sources of pride; others are sources of shame. The food bank is an anomalous warehouse nestled among new apartments overlooking the Fraser River, cranes promising more developments, and malls set to be demolished and rebuilt as residential-commercial complexes. A rezoning application sign positioned in front of the food bank portends the inevitability of its relocation. On the main roads encircling this block, which includes a police station around the corner, architectural motifs from surrounding buildings repeat as a colourful triangular pattern painted onto bike lanes and sidewalks. Food bank clients traverse these roads in all types of

weather by foot, transit, rides with friends, and bikes with makeshift storage. They obtain a ticket from “the numbers guy,” and wait quietly in the parking lot, where benches and chairs have been set out. Under rainy conditions, the waiting area is supposed to be covered by a small canopy that is unable to accommodate everyone. Sometimes, it is missing entirely due to oversight. Seating is never enough, leaving the majority of clients standing between 20 minutes and an hour. They typically yield seats to the Chinese seniors who frequent Wednesday morning distributions. Mothers send their children to the daycare within the food bank so that they can be spared from the elements, boredom, and perhaps shame. “The numbers guy” periodically barks numbers drawn non-sequentially, at which point their corresponding individuals dutifully return their tickets. Only then are they allowed inside.

Once inside, clients are directed in a U-shaped queue around successive grocery stations: pre-packaged foods, dairy, bread, and finally fruits and vegetables. At the time of my observations in January and February of 2018, Sharing Farm produce was not yet available. The quality of food varies from junk food (e.g. cupcakes, brownies, and other supermarket pastries) to Greek yogurt, but appears reasonable overall as a weekly grocery supplement. Recipients are given an illusion of agency as they choose between different food options available by request, but only in predetermined quantities. Some stations are modelled after grocery store shelves, the difference being that they are not directly accessible to clients. They are separated by a counter over which smiling volunteers hand over requested items. Following the grocery stations, freshly made soup, served in Styrofoam cups, is available to clients on their way out. By the exit, many people reassemble their groceries and finish their soup, savouring its warmth before returning outside.

Once they exit the warehouse, they enter the community wellness centre area, which provides information about community resources, services, and institutions that may be of assistance to clients. The table displays brochures for the food bank itself, community meals, settlement agencies, addictions services, employment agencies, local health agencies, dental clinics, free income tax clinics, low- or no-cost recreation, and, most curiously, the region's Conservative MP. The featured politician is a former cabinet member for the Harper government, the same administration that ridiculed a UN report concerning widespread food insecurity in Canada. The barely concealed political advertisement, in the form of a calendar, is not so much ironic as it is indicative of the ideologies underpinning food bank *systems*. That is not to say that it reflects the political dispositions of the food bank *community*, not least the progressive volunteers helming the wellness centre. As a shadow for these facilitators, this is the place where I was posted and from which I interacted with clients and other volunteers. While there, a number of clients expressed to me their interest and appreciation for Richmond's various community-run services, with one individual remarking that he wouldn't be able to survive without them. Free or low-cost amenities include free or low-cost settlement, employment, addictions, income tax, daycare, dental, and health services, as well as church-run community meals, which are very popular among wellness centre visitors. These community responses, however, can only go so far. Another individual surmised that they would not improve his fundamentally deficient financial circumstances. It appears that the community, food bank volunteers included, is doing its part – but our senior governments are not.

From my viewpoint at the wellness centre, I regularly witnessed clients seeking refuge from the cold in the exit area as they wait for their numbers. Doing so draws the ire of food bank staff, who will usher them out immediately. In order to understand this overreaction, one must

look to the food bank model's neoliberal sensibilities. Against the backdrop of non-perishable goods stacked to the warehouse ceiling, the procession of clients resembles a conveyor belt manufacturing the "fight against hunger," a catchphrase, as canned as the foods distributed, triumphantly repeated on posters adorning the premises. Entering the wrong end, at the wrong time, then appears to violate the sacrosanct flow of a system designed to maximize efficiency, but not necessarily empathy. Other innocuous interruptions to this system, such as confusion among clients about ticket numbers, are similarly condemned. On one occasion, a couple accused of cheating the ticket system was publicly berated by staff members for several minutes, and gossiped about for hours to come. When staff members urged volunteers to enforce flow control rules, we (myself included) reluctantly obliged. It is not easy to resist the systems in place.

Systems notwithstanding, most staff members and volunteers genuinely have the best interests of their clients at heart. For the most part, they treat them with as much dignity as can be afforded in an inherently dehumanizing environment. Their smiles and conversations likely make all the difference to food bank users experiencing shame, particularly those who are socially isolated. The volunteers, consisting of ethnically diverse individuals who are typically middle-aged and middle-class, derive a sense of purpose and community in their shared activity. However, this sense of community does not necessarily extend to food bank clients, who are inevitably looked upon as "other." Communities, by definition, grant membership to those who share a particular characteristic, in this case the social location of volunteers, and deny it to those who do not. They are as much systems of exclusion as they are units of belonging. Although volunteers actively try to avoid discrimination, repeatedly emphasizing that the food bank is for *everyone*, they still periodically lapse into judgement. These sentiments can sometimes be heard

during teatime just prior to grocery distribution, when staff members and volunteers congregate over snacks and refreshments inside, just as clients begin to assemble in the parking lot. In relative privacy, personal opinions about clients tend to emerge during teatime gossip. Among many volunteers, the general impression of clients is that they are predominantly rich Chinese seniors taking advantage of free food. Chinese volunteers, most of whom are immigrants from Hong Kong, eagerly distinguish the supposed freeloaders as people from *mainland* China. All volunteers who conveyed opinions about this demographic cited “fancy cars” as evidence for their wealth. That the Chinese seniors continued to attend on heavy snow days, approaching by foot, grocery trolleys in tow, suggests otherwise.

Church on Five Community Meal

The same Chinese seniors, recognizable by their colourful jackets and hats, can be found at a church-run community meal I attended. The Church on Five sits by a highway on the outskirts of Richmond, away from “luxury apartments” and close to farmland, “megahomes,” a strip mall, and a golf club. Every Wednesday evening from September to June, people of various ages and ethnicities show up for a free dinner. Familiar faces from the food bank, including but not limited to the Chinese seniors, looked noticeably more relaxed than they were when they stood outside the food bank in silence. Here, they are welcomed into a spacious foyer where they take a seat, help themselves to coffee, and converse with one another as church volunteers finish setting up. Soon, doors open to a theatre containing dozens of white-clothed round tables. Its stage features a grand piano on which a church member plays soothing melodies as dinner guests file in. Once everyone is settled, a representative from the Richmond Public Library gives a short presentation, in both English and Chinese, about free library services available to them. Despite

the church's best efforts to create an inclusive environment, this is not the multicultural utopia Richmond imagines itself to be. Racial groups tend to cluster among themselves at dinner tables, understandably due to language barriers and cultural familiarity, but perhaps also because of reasons more disconcerting. I suspect that the divisive stereotype of "wealthy Chinese people taking advantage of free food," initially relayed to me at the food bank, persists here as well. This was later confirmed in an on-site interview.

The dinner commences with a brief prayer, undertaken, I believe, to express care rather than to impose faith. One by one, tables are invited to food stations, where volunteers greet every "sir" and "ma'am" in line before serving them. The line is orderly and efficient like the one at the food bank, but retains more of a human dimension. After obtaining food and refreshments, guests return to their tables to dine. Tonight's meal consisted of butter chicken, rice, and naan. The plate did not resemble the vegetable-covered one featured in the updated Canada Food Guide, but otherwise tasted like something one might enjoy at a restaurant. Dinner guests chat with neighbours as they eat, some taking the opportunity to practice their English skills. They comment on the tastiness of the food, discuss weekend plans, and exchange platitudes, with no mention of personal circumstances. Their socio-economic backgrounds are inscrutable based on their conversational topics and appearance, just as Richmond's discourses and landscapes conceal the existence of these people. Here, as in the city at large, poverty remains hidden from view. Yet for the entire hour, community meal participants are able to look other people in the eye, hold conversations, and feel like valued guests. However perfunctory, these interactions provide a modicum of normalcy that they may not be able to experience easily otherwise in everyday life. The dignity with which they are treated may not remove the stigma attached to their circumstances, but perhaps they simply wish to blend in. Following the main course,

volunteers bring cookies to each table for dessert. As guests dissipate, saying farewell to new acquaintances, they pick up loaves of donated bread on the way out – a parting gift as they return to a world in which they remain largely invisible.

Interviews

In my observations, I have depicted Richmond to be a city of appearances and hidden realities. To obtain the missing perspectives of people who inhabit or interact with its underbelly, I conducted 12 interviews with food program clients and community facilitators who engage with food insecure individuals. Since I consider conversation to be a medium between textual discourse and experienced reality, I categorized interview responses into discourses examined previously while allowing for perspectives and experiences that are independent from discourse. Participating respondents ($n = 12$) commonly invoked food charity ($n = 9$), SDH ($n = 8$), the local food movement ($n = 7$), nutrition ($n = 7$) discourses, and the anti-poverty movement ($n = 7$), with the absence of political economic discourse (Table 7). Although discourses were evenly distributed among participants, their number of mentions within interviews suggest the dominance of food charity frameworks (28 instances), followed by the local food movement (23), nutrition (17), anti-poverty (11), and SDH (10) (Table 7, Figure 2). Further aggregation reveals that the incidence of food-based discourses (12 participants, 68 instances), including food charity, the local food movement, and nutrition, outnumber that of income-based discourses (9 participants, 16 instances), referring to anti-poverty, SDH, and political economy. Based on the number of respondents alone, representation for SDH and the anti-poverty movement correspond to the high frequency of “income” in the frequency analysis, as illustrated in Table 8. In context, respondents typically identified “income” as the main cause of HFI. Despite such recognition,

respondents tended to suggest food-based responses to HFI, which contributed to the high number of appearances for food-based discourses. Another factor may have been the variable durations of semi-structured interviews, which may have resulted in the disproportionate representation of views of several respondents with longer interviews, who happened to be proponents of food-based discourses.

Table 7.

Prevalence of main HFI frameworks arising in interviews by number of respondents and references

Discourses		Respondents	Appearances
Food-based discourses	Food charity	9	28
	Local food movement	7	23
	Nutrition	7	17
Income-based discourses	Political economy	0	0
	SDH	8	10
	Anti-poverty	7	11

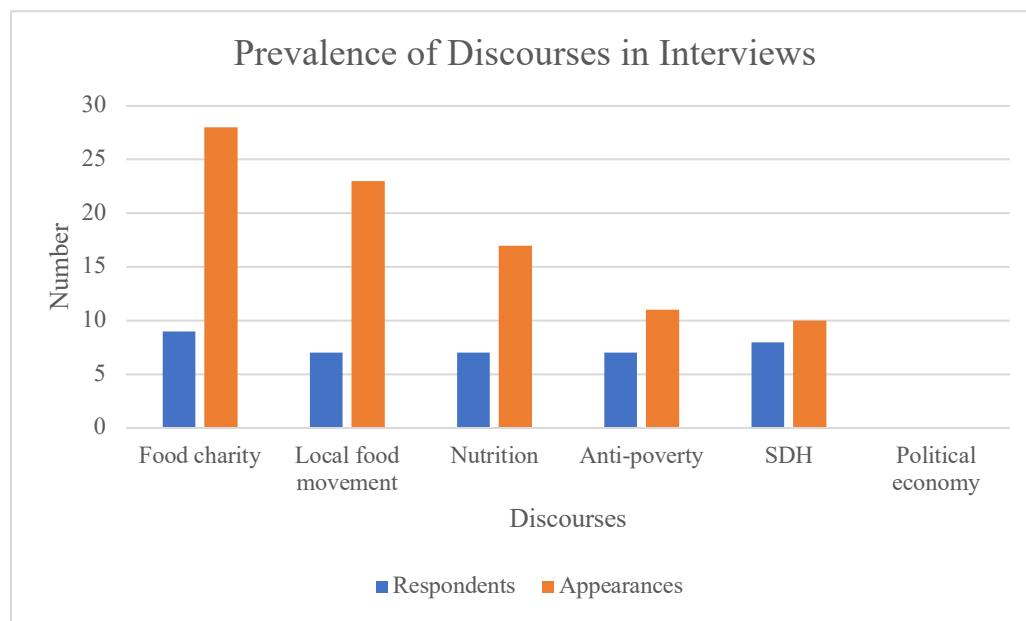


Figure 2. Bar graph showing the prevalence of main HFI discourses in interviews by number of respondents and references.

Despite the emphasis on food-based discourses, virtually all participants (11) recognize that food insecurity is rooted in income. One participant who is food insecure succinctly conveys that “the main thing is income is insufficient” – a sound bite that seems to accurately encapsulate this study. Its resonance among responses was reflected in the recurrence of “money,” “income,” and “poverty,” words that appeared 3rd, 5th, and 15th, respectively in a frequency query (Table 8). Respondents also mentioned insufficient welfare, disability payments, minimum wages, and employment opportunities as reasons for the inability to afford healthy foods. Three of four participants who identified as food insecure or formerly food insecure reported provincial disability assistance payments as their main source of income. In addition to income, the cost of living was a significant factor to nearly all participants (n = 11), with the cost of housing (n = 8) mentioned more frequently than the cost of food (5 participants). Still, the cost of living problem often returned to the issue of income:

It's a mismatch between income or what funds you have available to cover all of your needs and your cost of living so the money you have disposable and the money that you need to meet all of your needs doesn't match up I think. So poverty is I guess the short answer (Food Bank staff member).

Multiple respondents demonstrated the ways in which government assistance fails to add up to support real costs of living. They cited monthly disability payments of \$1220 (two respondents), welfare rates of around \$700 (two respondents), a shelter subsidy of \$375, and housing costs of \$500-1000 (two respondents) that leave little to no money for purchasing food. Several respondents also reported the inaccessibility of social housing due to long wait lists, costs that remain high relative to social assistance and disability payments, and a lack of disability-friendly infrastructure.

Table 8.

Frequencies of the top 30 words occurring in interviews

	Word	Count
1	food	406
2	time	89
3	money	80
4	housing	70
5	income	70
6	right	67
7	good	64
8	government	62
9	give	60
10	meal	58
11	vegetables	57
12	meals	55
13	low	54
14	program	54
15	poverty	48
16	programs	47
17	living	45
18	kitchen	42
19	place	42
20	help	40
21	cook	39
22	banks	38
23	group	38
24	able	37
25	barriers	37
26	kids	37
27	church	35
28	job	32
29	live	32
30	never	32

Note. The length of 30 was selected to match the length of frequency query in Table 6.

Facilitators who work with food insecure individuals are well aware of the financial basis of food insecurity, but their work does not typically respond to this root cause of income. Only one organization, the poverty advocacy group, does so:

Our bottom line is that we shouldn't have to depend on charity to feed ourselves. That food security should be a right, it's a justice issue, it's not a charity issue. And we're trying to move charity to justice. And that means increased incomes for people and subsidized housing so they don't have to pay everything, fees on rent and all of that stuff.

With the exception of this group, the majority of organizations frame food insecurity reduction as a matter of food charity, food production, or nutrition.

Food Charity

Respondents generally considered food charity to be a necessary, if imperfect, form of relief. Respondents who have utilized food charity initiatives spoke of the necessity of these services while acknowledging that they are far from ideal. "They allow me to subsist," said one community meal participant. "So if I had run out of money and there weren't options available to me, then it helps me avoid the fundamental crisis." In addition to receiving food, respondents also attend community meals to attain social connections. "The opportunity to go out and to sit down and have a meal with other people is very uplifting," said another individual who reported attending community meals, "it makes a whole lot of difference to [us], as a person in poverty we're pretty well isolated." However, respondents reported "not enough" community meals throughout the week, with gaps on the weekends, and "never enough" food at community meals. Although respondents acknowledged that churches "try to make it a balanced meal" that is "delicious," one diabetic participant still remarked that "it's impossible to get a balanced nutritious diet." In addition, reliance on community meals can be very time- and energy-intensive. "To get a dinner you've gotta travel all over the city. They're all over the place and they're all pretty well spread out. So if you need to go to a community meal every night you're on the bus for probably an hour, you wait in line, then you wait in line for half an hour, the

meal's 20 minutes long and then you spend another hour and a half or so getting home," said one poverty advocacy facilitator.

Five facilitators distinguished between the short-term utility of community responses such as food charity and government policies that deal with income and housing in the long term. They did not mention the persistent nature of food banks and community meals, which have been expanding fixtures of the Richmond community for the past several decades. Two respondents, however, alluded to this phenomenon. After identifying the need to scale up food charity operations in order to meet demand, one community kitchen facilitator acknowledged that "this issue [food insecurity] shouldn't fall on charities and religious organizations and the food bank. That's what happens in Richmond." A community meal facilitator similarly expressed discomfort about the balance of responsibility in further detail:

Well honestly, I feel like the government's not doing it [supporting food insecure people] cause they know that we are going to do it, honestly that's what I feel. If we had zero churches doing what we're doing, they would have a heavy problem cause people would be dying, people would be going through malnutrition...So I feel sometimes we're bringing it on ourselves.

He then described the precarious nature of community meals, which face major limitations in donation funding, coordination with other agencies, time, and volunteer labour. These factors explain gaps in community meal services. "We stop in June because we need a break plus we don't have money we can't run it throughout the year and then there's also a volunteer burnout factor so we stop in June and we start back up in September," he said. This unfilled hiatus, which is certainly problematic for those dependent on the service, illustrates the unpredictability of community-based initiatives. Limited resources also threaten the long-term viability of charitable models. "What about the next generation and the next generation after that? Who's all doing that?" the meal coordinator wondered. "I have a full-time job so I don't have the opportunity to

make this my full-time job. I'd love to but I won't have that opportunity...At some point if I lose interest it dies with me. And so if you have an interest in it then maybe I support you but maybe you get burnt out and then there's no one to come along and kind of bring it all together." These sentiments were recognized by a respondent who has attended community meals in the past.

"The problem with [food charity] is that the churches can do so much but then they get burnt out. Cause in the organization it's always some people doing all the work cause others don't step up to the plate and then eventually those people get burnt out. They don't wanna do it anymore, they've been doing it for 15 or 20 years," she said.

The burden of maintaining charitable food services on limited resources also prevents facilitators from being involved in social, let alone political, advocacy. Although food bank and meal facilitators recognized the imperative for poverty reduction initiatives, they do not have the capacity to regularly engage in activities beyond food provisioning. "We are so focused on getting the day to day tasks completed that we don't have the time to think about doing things differently...nobody wants to think about anything other than food distribution," explained the executive director of the Richmond Food Bank. She signalled intentions to become more involved in advocacy, stating "I'm putting my views out there but, unfortunately, I should be doing more personally through the food bank...but I'm still learning and just trying to strengthen whatever I am confident in...once that is taken care of then I think I should move into more advocacy and do that piece as well." In particular, she is interested in developing partnerships with other food banks to create a platform for advocacy. "The collective voice is stronger than individual voices," she said. However, a "lack of time, staff, and volunteers" remain limiting factors to this ambition. As she noted, "Everybody has volunteers but you cannot rely on volunteers to create those partnerships for you." Another limiting factor, unspoken yet heavily

implied, is perhaps the need for public approval. Given the continuous challenge of maintaining funding streams based on donations and grants, facilitators likely avoid political messages in order to maintain financial support. “We try to stay away from anything political,” said the community meal coordinator, warily.

Local Food Movement

The Richmond Food Bank is minimally involved with anti-poverty advocacy, but highly entwined within local food production initiatives. In addition to receiving food from a local farm and surplus fruit from residential trees, the Richmond Food Bank also runs its own community garden. According to the executive director of the food bank, clients “love” the local farm produce. Regarding community gardens, a food bank staff member believed that “it’d be great if I guess people had more access to spaces that they can use for growing their own food if that’s something that they’re inclined to do and want to do...there’s a lot of people who would probably enjoy growing their own food but the community gardens would not always be available, there can be long wait lists, the fee might be a barrier for a lot of people as well.” One respondent who was formerly food insecure expressed interest in participating, but was unaware of how to sign up for one. Another food insecure respondent revealed that community gardens would never apply to him because of his physical injuries. Nevertheless, he recognized potential benefits of gardening activity in terms of mental health rather than food procurement. “Well I think they’re a positive thing in general. Like I mean if they’re good to someone as a hobby it might be a good peace of mind thing. I think they’d probably be a good thing overall but not for me,” he said.

The local farm supplying the food bank is guided by a combination of food charity and community food security discourse. According to the executive director:

Our primary function is to grow food to donate to the food bank and we also have an important secondary function as kind of an agricultural community hub and teaching people about local agriculture and food security and doing lots of programs. We have 700 volunteers a year coming through so we're kind of exposing a lot of people to farming in a sustainable way so that's it in a nutshell.

She continues to express that “the whole idea behind the farm is that having fresh, organic, healthy produce shouldn’t just be for like rich people but it should be for everybody and I think when it was set up that was kind of the idea behind it was like being able to have the best quality food donated to the food bank.” Although this quote alludes to correcting inequality through charity, the interview did not contain any mention of income or poverty. Rather, the executive director saw community-based food production as a “nice and empowering” response to food insecurity “where community members can kind of contribute to their community via growing healthy food for people.” Nevertheless, the executive director admitted that they “don’t deal with [food insecurity] frontline very much” other than a food skills program that provided food baskets to low-income families in the past. This farm does not regularly come into contact with food insecure populations because their volunteers generally have middle class backgrounds.

It also faces various limitations that constrain its capacity to produce food. Similar to the food bank and community meals, it experiences sustained uncertainty in financial and labour resources. “Despite all our best efforts, the financial security of the farm is not as good as I would want it,” said the executive director, “[w]e are kind of getting about a third of our funding from grants and that is very innately unstable and so if we had a bad funding year, then we would have to lay off staff and that would be mean basically we wouldn’t be able to grow for as long so it would directly impact how much we could grow and how much we could donate.” Since

maintaining operations is already stretching available resources, it would be difficult to expand beyond the farm's 4 acres of farmland. In addition, food production is physically limited by seasonality and land availability, the latter of which would have to be negotiated with the city. As a result, the executive director acknowledged that "there's not gonna be big leaps forward in [their food] donations. Maybe little tiny increments but not huge."

Nutrition

Several respondents invoked the nutritional framework during interviews. As mentioned previously, the local farm facilitator described food skill workshops that the organization used to run. The food bank facilitator also cited nutrition demos hosted at the food bank as one of the extra services that make "[their] food bank pretty special." Another food bank staff member, however, recognized that food insecurity is not associated with a lack of food skills. While nutrition is secondary to the local farm and the food bank, it represents the main focus of a community kitchen run by a family service agency. Nutritional discourse was most prevalent in interviews with the community kitchen facilitator and two of its participants. At the community kitchen, participants learn food skills, cook healthy meals, and dine together at bi-monthly sessions, which are free or by donation. According to the facilitator, participants include a mixture of middle class and low-income individuals since the program is open to everyone. The two participants interviewed identified as low-income, food insecure individuals with disabilities. The facilitator distinguished between the community kitchen and food programs, revealing that its objective was food skills education rather than food provisioning. "It's not just because they're hungry, I don't have people who are hungry coming to my program, to be quite clear community kitchen there are many different community kitchens, some community

kitchens may be downtown in Vancouver, is for people who really are hungry but usually community kitchens is food skills, a lot of other components into it,” she said. One of these components is community development. Community building is “another piece in our program that’s very important. It helps the participants to build a good social network for people who are living by themselves or they are new in the country or for some reason or another reason they don’t have friends this is the best place.”

The facilitator saw hunger and nutrition as “two different issues,” remarking that “people don’t have money to buy healthy food but people might have a little bit of money but because they are not food literate, they can’t eat well either. So they are separate.” Although she accurately identified income as the main determinant of food insecurity, she still associated lack of food skills with food insecure populations. “I’ve seen many occasions that people get a lot of vegetables, I can tell you they can easily on those time they can rely 50% of their produce on food banks but many of them either they don’t know how to cook those vegetables or because they have never cooked vegetables, they’re cooking it in a way that is not tasty so they don’t like vegetables. So food skills, food literacy helps,” she said.

Food skills were similarly emphasized by community kitchen participants. Both participants framed food insecurity as a matter of knowledge and physical barriers, due in part to disability, rather than financial resources. “Education to me, lack of knowledge, transportation, fresh vegetables have to be eaten in a certain amount of time,” said one participant who reported having poor food skills. This sentiment was echoed by another participant with self-described proficient food skills, who believed that food insecurity generally results from “a lack of knowledge as well as [physical] accessibility.” Their statements about food skills contradicted some of their other responses, which suggest that income is the underlying issue. When

questioned about income, both participants acknowledged that their disability payments are inadequate for purchasing fruits and vegetables – even with a high level of resourcefulness. “I’ve always had food in the house. I’ve never had a problem with that but I also shop very much on all sales, I shop bulk, I store my food, I do a lot of things like that but you can’t do that with fresh fruit and vegetables,” said one participant. “With myself, I don’t feel myself [it’s about] the knowledge, I do research things and that, but I find it more the transportation, then more finances, with my personal self, I’ve got a disability so that affects things sometimes like to find things in supermarkets and stuff like that cause I’m legally blind so that can affect it,” she later revealed. Because she resides in social housing, she may have more expendable income for food than individuals living in regular accommodations. Although this respondent revealed that food skills are not an issue for herself, she still insisted on a lack of food skills, rather than income, as the primary cause of food insecurity for others. As I will illustrate in the following section, the concept of food skills is entangled with rhetoric that blames low-income individuals for their circumstances. According to SDH research, victim-blaming in health education and wellness approaches is antithetical to upstream action against public health issues such as HFI (Raphael 2003; Watt 2007).

Supplementary Discourses

Deserving and Undeserving Poor

In addition to primary discourses, many respondents invoked supplementary discourses of the deserving and undeserving poor (6 respondents), food environments (7 respondents), and the right to food (5 respondents). The neoliberal idea of the deserving and undeserving poor, as described in the literature review, is closely related to the nutritional framework. One low-

income, community kitchen client repeatedly implied that many low-income individuals are to blame for their poor dietary outcomes, and are thus undeserving of aid. She attributed their circumstances to the inability to cook or financial irresponsibility:

There are other people who actually have much more income than you because maybe they get child support or they work as well as having a disability. But they don't know how to use it properly. I knew one girl that she had 3 kids and it was her and her husband, the three kids. She didn't know how to cook. So for dinner time she'd open up a whole bunch of cans of chili to do chili for them or something like that. Do you know how expensive that ends up being? Rather than making your own and she had no idea. And the money she'd go through and she was at the time there on low income...she didn't even know how to even do the foods, it ended up being really costly to her...by the time she's finished it's a heck of a lot more than what I paid for.

The impression that people cannot afford food because they do not know how to cook was challenged by a community meal participant to whom I had recommended the community kitchen program. "I'm not short on information. On cooking. I'm short on having a kitchen, I'm short on stamina to cook [because of pain]. But the knowledge and what I need to cook isn't the issue," he replied, visibly offended. I inquired about whether food skills have any bearing on food insecurity. "No," he interrupted. "It's just a financial reflection."

One pervasive idea among participants is that undeserving members of the community are exploiting systems of relief. A community kitchen client, for instance, suggested that some low-income people are taking advantage:

With some people they get a cheque, gets help from her mother, gets help from this and you can give this person a cheque and give her another 500 dollars and it'll be all gone 'cause she has no clue how to spend it. And some people again, they think they're entitled to living in low income housing, gets some food, gets some cat food for nothing, gets her cat clippers, nails done for nothing, gives a sad story.

And what I've experienced from being low income, is some of them, some actually take it for granted and that's what bothers me too. They're just out there to get whatever they can...they just take it for granted, they feel that they have that right...I think there are some people that are just takers and that doesn't always work even at the food bank or things like that, and it does affect things.

Furthermore, the respondent believed that these individuals are the source of judgement against the low-income community:

The problem with that, when you get people like that because it's low income housing, everybody thinks that we're all like that. You get a couple of people like that who are too lazy and you got other people like that who are quite the opposite. There are people who are working full time, there are people who can't work but they're volunteering. But because you're in low income housing, oh everybody's lazy, everybody's just clipping dough from the government.

As shown in the quote above, judgement was passed even as it was criticized – a contradiction that she acknowledged. “People just get that image of you, we’re all homeless people, all drug addicts, and I’m probably guilty of it myself sometimes cause it’s the human nature,” she said.

Two other respondents also simultaneously criticized and reinforced the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor. One respondent who was formerly food insecure explained the stigmatizing effect of placing responsibility onto vulnerable individuals:

I encountered an awful lot of discrimination. An awful lot. Trying to find a place to live, trying to find work, people just don't get it. That it's not always people's fault that they're living in poverty. I think that's what the stigma is. Is that people believe that we should be able to pull up our socks and rise above it. And if we have to go to the food bank or if we have to go to a community meal, most people feel that we have control over how much money we make, how much money we earn, or what income is, or that we are lazy, or don't wanna work, and none of that is true. We are living in poverty because it's just the way society works.

The last line of this quote hints at the structural, rather than behavioural, nature of the problem. He also described encountering victim-blaming and discrimination at the food bank:

We don't wanna have to go to food banks. Even at the food bank, we're treated in a way that it's our fault. It's all our fault that we have to beg for food.

Wrongful discrimination...makes it really difficult to go there sometimes. You don't want to experience that when you're hungry. Your emotions are high or low I should say and you're very vulnerable. So when you go into that environment and have someone "tsk tsk" you, to go shame on you and be in shame because you have to go there for food, it's emotionally damaging.

Ironically, he proceeded to direct discriminatory comments about food bank and community meal clients, specifically Asian ones:

Well, not to be discriminatory but when we see Asian people drive up in their SUVs, brand new SUVs, and line up at the food bank, it makes me wonder just exactly what's going on here...they don't communicate to anyone. To the regular people, to the Caucasian non-Asian people. They just communicate with themselves or they don't communicate with anybody. And they come in, get their food, and they're out of there. After a while, seeing that you go: are they just being greedy? It just seems like there's a certain, they're just taking advantage. Even with the community meals, they would make a pot of coffee and a pot of sugar, creamer, and they'd go up, they'd get a coffee and they'd grab a handful of sugar and they empty out the creamer into another container and there's this certain selfishness or greed that I see.

These were not isolated views. Racialized anecdotes portraying the undeserving poor, fancy vehicles included, recurred in an interview with the community meal facilitator:

There's so much stigma but especially with what I find with Asian families sometimes it's like underhandedness or just a little bit sneaky in how it's been done but I don't know if these people even know what's on the news because you see it on the news all the time when people are taking advantage of social whatever, housing, food, you know those kinds of things. Some people don't care because they're making it work for their family yet they own a home or they got a nice car in the parking lot.

As a Chinese-Canadian individual, he expressed some frustration with the community's intolerance of cultural circumstances and differences:

I think there's a little bit of both. Like I think if they can take advantage of it I think they will, but I think, you know, they put their money into other things so to them there's still a need and yes they will take home groceries because they're paying a mortgage, because they're paying for their vehicle, because they're doing other things, because the money is going back to China or Taiwan. So the people that are here, absolutely they're cheating the system in their minds. And I think so much of this culture, I've grown up in Western Canada but because I'm Chinese I feel sometimes embarrassed by immigrants that are coming through and they kind of push their way through because that's culture right?

Lots of racial things were thrown back and forth because a lot of people will not line up in an orderly fashion, they wanna crowd around the table and they wanna see what's put out and then they will grab it. And meanwhile the other people who are thinking they're being orderly are waiting in line and they can see the hubbub at the front where people are grabbing food and then they start getting irritated and angry because it's about fairness right?

In addition to food skills, race, or perceived wealth, age may be another factor used to distinguish between the deserving and undeserving poor. Young children, along with their families, are commonly considered members of the “deserving poor.” In Richmond, the majority of population-specific food programs target families with young children, including three meal programs run by the Richmond Family Place. One respondent expressed dismay about food services available to families with kids aged 0-6 only, which exclude her circumstances. “You honestly think my daughter is 16 you think she eats any less? No, she probably eats more at 16. But there’s not the help there at 16... it’s no cheaper for me to feed my 16-year-old than for you to feed your three-year-old,” she said.

Right to Food

The right to food framework recognizes food as a basic entitlement to all, rather than something to be provided only to those who are “deserving.” Of respondents who identified food as such, two directly and three indirectly, two associated this concept with income. The

Richmond Poverty Response Committee chair explained that “food security should be a right, it’s a justice issue, it’s not a charity issue. And we’re trying to move charity to justice. And that means increased incomes for people and subsidized housing so they don’t have to pay everything, fees on rent and all of that stuff.” Even at the food bank, a staff member similarly recognized the necessity of an income-based approach to food entitlements: “All of those strategies [utilizing food charity] are not perfect because what you really need is, in most cases, more income to be able to buy healthy food. More entitlement to healthy food I should say, the ability to get it.” Although the executive director of the Sharing Farm implicitly invoked the right to food in terms of wealth, remarking that “I do really believe like healthy food shouldn’t just be the privilege for the rich,” she envisioned its realization through community food production, continuing to say that “having something like this where community members can kind of contribute to their community via growing healthy food for people, I think that’s really nice and empowering model.” She did not acknowledge the role of income and subsidized housing, which are issues that are related to neither the food system nor the community scale.

Food Environments

Multiple respondents cited a lack of amenities and transportation as factors contributing to food insecurity. Two respondents explained that grocery outlets cluster around the city centre, missing the outskirts of Richmond. “There are a lot of food deserts in Richmond like everything is in Richmond centre in this area, you know, supermarkets, grocery stores, produce stores, but then you go to East Richmond there’s nothing,” said the community kitchen facilitator. According to four respondents, limited transportation options, especially combined with disabilities, make long distances to food outlets difficult:

Food justice and transit...those two things are so closely linked. Especially for low income people who don't drive. All of our folks are on transit, two are in wheelchairs, one's on a cane, nobody drives. And so we studied how closely linked food access and transit is. And we did some food asset mapping, where they lived and where they shopped, where the nearest markets are, and it was clear to me from what we came up with.

Respondents expressed frustration with inconvenient bus routes, transit affordability, public shaming for fare evasion, and discriminatory looks from other passengers. Bicycles may not be viable alternatives due to bike maintenance expenses. "The thing is that the bicycles people are using are death traps...it's so expensive to even get your bike tuned out and so they're riding those bikes that have no brakes. And they're just putting themselves in so much danger of getting killed, getting injured, seriously injured," revealed one respondent who informally performed bike repairs within his social network. "So we're living a life of danger, we're living a life of risk. In poverty. We're risking our lives when it comes to transportation, trying to sneak on sky trains and possibly risking a chance to go to jail, riding bicycles or whatever that are dangerous, or not road-worthy, we're risking our lives, we're risking our lives when it comes down to food." The precarity of everyday life, as exemplified here by transportation, embodies the uncertainty that underlies the condition of food insecurity.

In addition to food outlets and transportation, household facilities are another feature of the built environment that constrains access to food. Four respondents reported lack of storage, refrigeration, and cooking facilities in accommodations such as social housing, rentals, and a vehicle in which one homeless respondent lived. Two respondents in social housing reported adding their own storage and refrigeration to their units, which did not come with these facilities. They acknowledged that these strategies are ultimately limited by finances. "If you don't have the finances you have to find a way. With me, I had two of them and mine just conked out and I

lost a whole freezer. When you're on low income...that just conked out and that's a hell of a lot of money for us too. Then you gotta start all over."

It appears that many constraints imposed by the built environment can be bypassed or mitigated with money, which returns to the centrality of income. As demonstrated above, household facilities can be added or customized with finances – provided that they are available. With regards to transportation, increased financial resources would make transit fares, bicycles, or vehicles more accessible. One disabled respondent also reported utilizing a grocery delivery service for a small charge. Although food environments may influence dietary outcomes to some extent, these environments are ultimately navigated with money. In fact, all food insecurity discourses logically lead back to income whether they emphasize or more often, hide, this connection. As I will discuss in the following section, meaningful HFI reduction will depend upon the transparency of the condition's relationship to income.

Dispatches from the Field

Similar to the document analysis findings, fieldwork results indicate the interviewees' strong preference for food-based, over income-based, approaches to HFI reduction. From my observations, the pre-eminence of food in Richmond's general landscape and food program settings obscures the existence of the people experiencing food scarcity, specifically low-income individuals. They are either excluded or hidden from public life, even in spaces designed to alleviate food insecurity. The food program spaces observed include the Sharing Farm, which involves middle-class, rather than low-income, community members in farm operations; the Richmond Food Bank, which contains an uninviting, periodically hostile, atmosphere; and a

church-run community meal, which rightly shelters, but inadvertently secludes, participants from an apathetic public. Food insecure individuals are invisible in society, just as their voices are missing from discourse.

Therefore, my next task was to see and hear some of these overlooked members of society, as well as the people who provide services to them, on a conversational basis. Whereas observations were undertaken from my personally-held perspectives, interviews were designed to reveal those of community program facilitators and clients. Likely owing to discursive influence and organizational direction, food-based frameworks continued to dominate interview perspectives. Unlike the documents analyzed, however, these perspectives were accompanied by a near-unanimous acknowledgement for income as the root cause of food insecurity. Food program facilitators generally recognized manifold limitations to food-based initiatives, including their failure to address poverty. Several facilitators followed up with a desire for incorporating income-based advocacy into their programs; however, they expressed a lack of capacity for doing so considering the precarious nature of the non-profit sector. Precarity was also identified by food program clients, who conveyed the anxiety of surviving on unreliable charity despite their appreciation for these services. Such feelings of insecurity, which underlie the condition of HFI, are to be eliminated through stable and adequate incomes rather than the uncertain and insufficient provisioning of food. This is the argument that I develop further in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, which will synthesize, reflect upon, and conclude my findings.

6. STRETCHING THE MEAL: TRIANGULATING AND EXTENDING FINDINGS

Using textual, observational, and interview data, I will now respond to the present study's research objective and questions about the discursive formulations of Household Food Insecurity (HFI) and their real-world effects on responses to the issue. Consistent with my hypothesis, the three different types of data were dominated by food-based discourses, including food charity, the local food movement, and nutrition, as opposed to income-based discourses, including the anti-poverty movement, social determinants of health (SDH), and political economy. The aforementioned primary discourses were supported by supplementary discourses of food environments, linked to community food security and the nutritional framework, the deserving and undeserving poor, associated with nutrition and food charity, and the right to food, which relates to either income- or food-based discourses depending on interpretation. The disproportionate influence of food-based discourses does not reflect the income-driven reality of food insecurity, as portrayed by interview respondents and corroborated by SDH literature (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael 2019; McIntyre, Patterson, Anderson, & Mah 2016; Collins et al. 2014). Rather, it results from the de-contextualization and de-politicization of food insecurity, often in service of neoliberalism.

As I have shown in the document analysis, food-based discourses tend to perform the following: separate HFI from its context of a disintegrating social safety net; conceal the neoliberal politics underlying the issue; download social responsibilities from senior governments onto communities and individuals; and underrepresent the voices of low-income populations. Whether these effects are intentional or more often unwitting, they are

counterproductive to the cause of HFI reduction. According to food-based discourses, HFI reduction requires increased food production, (re)distribution, or education on the part of communities and individuals – strategies demonstrated to be ineffective in SDH and political economic literature. By contrast, income-based discourses emphasize the necessity of fundamentally adequate income safeguarded by provincial and federal governments – a policy intervention proven to be highly effective for HFI reduction (Emery, Fleisch, & McIntyre 2013b; Loopstra et al. 2015; Loopstra 2018; Tarasuk 2017). Such discursive ideas (and their lack thereof) are first established in organizational texts and the media, which then play a role in shaping stakeholder perspectives and food program settings. In this chapter, I will discuss the interrelations between discourse, perspective, and reality, as well as their implications for HFI reduction.

Discourse, Perspective, and Reality

Indoctrination

Interview responses followed prevailing frameworks identified in the document analysis (Chapter 4), albeit with some noteworthy divergences. Many respondents recited discursive jargon, buzz words, and catch phrases verbatim, some with more conviction than others. The most avid acolytes were two community kitchen participants, who extolled the Pollan-esque virtues of cooking from scratch, food literacy, and knowing where our food comes from, even suggesting that they are key solutions to food insecurity. This verdict was inconsistent with their acknowledgements that income was one of their main barriers to accessing food. Evidently, these respondents internalized nutritional discourse to the extent that they were unable to recognize structural limitations that produce food insecurity for themselves and others, whom they also

blamed for poor dietary and financial circumstances. They espoused the nutritional framework's notion that food insecure people don't know how to cook – a failure on the part of the individual, rather than society. The unproven and condescending nature of this idea (McLaughlin et al. 2003) became apparent when it caused offense to another interview respondent who was deficient in finances, not food skills. In fact, all food insecure respondents, including the community kitchen participants, demonstrated a high level of resourcefulness within budgetary, geographic, and mobility constraints, consistent with the findings of Tarasuk (2001), Douglas et al. (2015), Desjardins (2013), Dachner et al. (2010), and Engler-Stringer (2011).

However, these coping strategies could only go so far because the limiting factor was always money. The community kitchen participants also suggested that people with behavioural shortcomings, such as laziness, excessive spending habits, and lack of cooking skills, are “taking advantage” of aid, including food bank, social housing, and government assistance. In doing so, they appear to partition the food insecure population into the deserving and undeserving poor. The alienating effect of these views, perhaps adopted to position oneself above others within class boundaries, displays yet another complication with the nutritional framework: in order to facilitate solidarity among food insecure individuals, the aim of HFI frameworks should be to unite rather than to divide. Given that solidarity in its “uncritical” forms, as described by Riches (2018), has already been ineffective, there is especially no place in HFI reduction activities for antagonism against the victims.

Opposing perspectives among participants may also reflect differences in their circumstances, reminding us that the food insecure population is not homogeneous. The nutritional framework's proponents resided in social housing with kitchen and storage facilities, whereas its opponent was a homeless individual living in his car. Social housing residents likely

enjoy a higher degree of stability than those in non-subsidized accommodations – or no accommodations whatsoever – which may explain their ability to participate in a community food program, as well as their inability to see the severity of barriers, such as finances and housing arrangements, faced by other individuals. This is consistent with Sriram and Tarasuk's (2016) correlation between housing characteristics and food insecurity, as well as Loopstra's (2018) and Dietitians of Canada's (2005) suggestion that stable financial and housing circumstances are a precondition for participation in food programs. Even if food programs were to be scaled up, they would still require policy interventions pertaining to income and housing in order to reach populations that are most vulnerable.

It is important to note, however, that the majority of respondents are under no illusions that food programs are enough to reduce food insecurity. Virtually all facilitators, including proponents of food-based discourses, recognized severe limitations in scale, funding, labour, time, space, participant accessibility, and the ability to address the fundamental problem of income. These shortcomings are well-documented in the existing body of research on charitable food assistance and community food programs (Dietitians of Canada 2005; Hamelin et al. 2010; Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk 2009; Loopstra & Tarasuk 2013; Power 1999; Raine et al. 2003; Seed et al. 2014; Tarasuk & Reynolds 1999; Tarasuk 2001a; Wong & Hallsworth 2016). Yet they were hardly acknowledged in the texts analyzed, including those produced by the facilitators' corresponding organizations. While food-based discourses dominated texts and interviews alike, income-based discourses were more prevalent in interviews than in text, as visualized in Figure 3. Referring back to word frequencies in Tables 4 and 6, the words "money," "income," and "poverty" ranked 3rd, 5th, and 15th, respectively in interviews, whereas "poverty" ranked 19th in texts analyzed, with "money" and "income" failing to appear in the 30 most frequent words. The

discrepancy between textual and interview data reflects the conceptually intuitive yet discursively obscured relationship between income and food insecurity. In spite of personal reservations about efficacy, facilitators ultimately shaped their respective programs according to prevailing discourses, rather than personal intuition, likely due to organizational or public expectations. I even observed this phenomenon in volunteers, including myself, when asked to carry out the uncomfortable order of reprimanding clients – my price of admission into their community, perhaps. Such is the banality if not of evil, considering the good intentions of volunteers, then of “uncritical solidarity;” violence has been normalized in spite of supposed compassion. Food-based discourses appear to obstruct critical thought, and thus “critical solidarity,” even when stakeholders are instinctively critically inclined. Social conditioning via discourse causes stakeholders to act in unwitting or reluctant service to neoliberalism regardless of personal politics, which I have frequently observed to be progressive among facilitators and volunteers. It seems that the indoctrinating entities are not churches, which seem to share their faith respectfully at community meals, but food-based discourses. Due to the generally asymmetric power of discourse, with discourses inflecting thought processes but never vice versa in my study, stakeholders frequently build responses to HFI along misplaced paradigmatic foundations.

Food Program Settings

Food charity

From my observations, food charity and local food movement discourses construct spaces that maintain or disguise neoliberalism even as they mitigate its ill effects. The concept of charity originates from the Latin word *caritas*, which describes expressing love for God through love for

one's neighbour and oneself (Fisher 2017). Eventually, the term came to signify "almsgiving," referring to the provision of food and objects to people in need (Fisher 2017). Soup kitchens and food pantries, often operated by churches, have long supported citizens whom the social safety net has failed (Riches 2018). In the 1980s, which marked the beginning of the neoliberal period, these pantry-style initiatives evolved into the warehouse-model food banks we are familiar with today. The Richmond Food Bank, for instance, was founded by two churches in 1983. Although it has since turned secular, it retains biblical imagery in its logo, which consists of fish and loaves of bread. With the food bank in charge of grocery distribution, six churches and one Sikh temple in Richmond continue the charitable tradition through free weekly meals pragmatically staggered on different days. None of them are referred to as "soup kitchens," a term that may have lost favour due to its patronizing connotations (Poppendieck 1999). Instead, they are called "community meals," ostensibly to enhance their community development aspect while downplaying their charitable function. In political economy and SDH literature, the term "feeding program" is sometimes used to describe charitable meals (both religious and secular), the rationale being to remove the "wonderfulness" of these initiatives (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael 2019). The present study will continue to use the term "community meal" in recognition of its utility for community development, whether or not this objective is related or conducive to HFI reduction. Nevertheless, I will look beyond their "wonderfulness" to critically examine the mechanisms by which food charity, community meals included, potentially perpetuate HFI.

The present study's textual, observational, and interview data indicate that the food bank behaves like an institution in myriad ways. Its objectives of maximum publicity (as long as recipients remain hidden), efficiency, and quantity are consistent with Fisher's (2017) notion of the "hunger-industrial complex" (p. #). The food bank system appears to be more concerned with

commanding nameless and numbered clients – “over 2200 people on average every week” – than addressing the circumstances that brought them there (Richmond Food Bank 2019). My observation was shared by an interview respondent who remarked that “unfortunately there are certain [food bank] staff members who are just militaristic, they want us to behave in a certain manner.” The military analogy is especially appropriate considering the “fight against hunger” invoked on food bank premises and in websites, complete with uniformed volunteers. These unexpected connections between experience and discourse demonstrate the extent to which reality is underpinned by language. According to Fisher (2017), militaristic rhetoric is commonly utilized in food charity discourse in order to create the impression of organized social action. With the politically neutral concept of “hunger” serving as the enemy, corporate donors are ironically elevated to heroes, as exemplified by a laudatory blog post dedicated to Walmart in this study’s discourse analysis. Fisher (2017) also uses Walmart as a case study for corporate charity, in which its strategic donations to food banks across North America have helped to deflect criticism from its notoriously exploitative labour practices. In another level of irony, one of many in food charity discourse, Walmart recently eliminated the greeter positions that used to be a source of employment for individuals with disabilities (Rubinkam 2019). This action runs contrary to the need for increased disability employment, an HFI reduction measure proposed by several food insecure interview respondents.

Community meals run by churches comprise a different, albeit interconnected, stream of food charity in Richmond, sourcing some of their ingredients from the food bank. Compared with the food bank, they operate by gentler, far less militaristic means. Rather than portraying a fight against hunger in its communication materials, churches use amiable language to invite anyone who is interested in attending. This rhetorical difference manifests itself in contrasting

program configurations. The food bank treats clients as numbers to be served, whereas community meals embrace their humanity. Several interview respondents reported enjoying the opportunity to socialize and to be treated with dignity at community meals. These experiences occur under the direction of the community meal facilitator, who “really [tries] to impress upon volunteers that when they come through here, treat the people here like they are gold.” His attitude towards vulnerable members of society aligns with the Judeo-Christian tradition of providing for the less fortunate, often in the form of food (Fisher 2017). Sometimes, religion leads believers to social-justice oriented movements such as the anti-poverty framework (Fisher 2017). Although the church I visited does not engage in anti-poverty advocacy directly, the community meal facilitator proudly spoke of a former volunteer who organized a petition and social protest at city hall in favour of modular housing for homeless people. He further expressed hope for steering volunteers, many of whom are high school students, towards social justice initiatives. “That’s why I love having young people come through here because I feel like I want to impact heavily on what they’re gonna learn in the next couple years because now’s the time that’s gonna start shaping their minds,” he said.

Despite some connections to social justice, religious responses to hunger are nonetheless rooted in charity. Consistent with the de-politicization of hunger in the publicly attractive charitable sector (Riches 2018, Fisher 2017), the community meal facilitator avoided politicizing the community meal, likely due to fear of losing public support and funding. In ameliorating food insecurity without redress to its root causes, the community meal inadvertently masks poverty in society. Although participants became temporarily visible to themselves and volunteers, amongst whom poverty is still a taboo topic, they remained hidden from the

community at large. The community meal thus provides respite from, but not resistance to, systems of oppression.

The idea of the deserving and undeserving poor, which pervades food charity discourse, was perceptible at both the food bank and the community meal I attended. Take, for instance, the ubiquitous impression of “wealthy Chinese seniors taking advantage of free food” shared by two interview respondents and multiple food bank volunteers with whom I had informal conversations. All of them cited fancy cars – BMWs, SUVs, even BMW SUVs – as evidence for their lack of eligibility for aid. The vehicles were also sensationalized in a news article about the community meal, which I later encountered in the discourse analysis. In it, the community meal facilitator was quoted as saying that “we have people showing up in BMWs, we don’t judge that, because some of those people are struggling from a lonely standpoint.” “They are not struggling from a monetary standpoint,” he assumes. These words were enlarged, highlighted, and featured in the centre of the article. During my own interview with the community meal facilitator, he was dismayed that his one quote about BMWs, given with good intentions, was literally blown out of proportion. Although he and other food charity stakeholders know to avoid judgement, they still could not help but comment on “nice cars in the parking lot.” In the three months that I spent at the food bank, and one evening at the community meal, the mythical BMWs never materialized. The discursive preoccupation with wealth, synonymous in the media with being Chinese, only serves to hide poverty and fuel racial divisions. This phenomenon may explain the lack of engagement between Chinese seniors and participants from other social groups at the community meal, or the facilitator’s recollection of racialized insults directed at Chinese seniors due to perceived overzealousness for free food.

Local food movement

While local food production initiatives are commonly considered to be more ethical counterparts to charity, they are still enmeshed within the charitable food assistance network in Richmond. The main food program that serves food insecure populations is the Sharing Farm, which produces food for the food bank and church-run community meals (either directly or through the food bank). Other programs include the Richmond Food Security Society's fruit gleaning program, which delivers surplus fruit from residential gardens to the food bank and the Sharing Farm's 14-week sponsored grocery baskets for families in need. Partnerships between these organizations are perhaps forged from discursive blending among food-based discourses, the conflation of which compounds public appeal and consolidates power for food-based responses. The Richmond Food System Assessment report, for instance, recommended joining the food bank up with food production initiatives, which has since been realized. Furthermore, both the Sharing Farm and the Richmond Food Security Society's websites follow a hybrid of food charity, local food movement, and nutritional discourses, boasting of quantities donated to the food bank, advocating for local food production, and promoting food skills education.

Although the Sharing Farm website frequently invokes "community empowerment," a guiding principle in community food security discourse, its empowered subjects appear to be middle class volunteers and corporate donors, to whom glowing blog posts, pages, and pictures are devoted, rather than the recipients of its produce, who are never featured. This phenomenon is consistent with Power's (1999) assessment that "the rhetoric of community...fails to address issues of power – who gets to join, to speak, to act, to be heard," thus empowering the privileged and disempowering the marginalized. Among the privileged are corporations, who can even make a donation to obtain a volunteering experience for its employees as part of the Sharing

Farm's corporate volunteering program. This transaction enables funding and labour for the Sharing Farm, as well as public relations and team-building opportunities – in a sense, the most neoliberal form of community development – for corporations. As in food charity discourse, noblesse oblige and corporate largesse are thus presented as part of the solution to HFI, notwithstanding the benefactors' role in perpetuating it. Meanwhile, the discursive absence of food insecure individuals, those whom the Sharing Farm is purporting to serve, has led to their exclusion from program activities. Its exclusionary setting may derive from the community food security framework's association with privileged social identities (Guthman 2008), which also aligns with the city's prioritization of wealth and development. Situated in one of the most expensive neighbourhoods in Richmond, the Sharing Farm may be contributing to the phenomenon of "eco-gentrification," whereby urban sustainability initiatives increase property values and displace low-income residents (Quastel 2009).

While the availability of fresh, local produce may indeed dignify the experience of food charity, recipients nonetheless have no control over its procurement. Even their involvement in food production, however, would not improve the financial constraints that underpin the condition of HFI. The omission of income from media produced by the Sharing Farm and Richmond Food Security Society was reproduced in an interview with the executive director of the Sharing Farm, who declined to comment on income. She admitted her lack of knowledge on the matter, because it lay outside of her field of expertise, as well as the organization's lack of engagement with low-income individuals. The only program that was designed for low-income participants was a food skills workshop for families – coincidentally members of the "undeserving" poor – likely operated from the nutritional framework's false association between food skills and low-income status (Huisken et al. 2016). According to the executive director, the

program has since been cancelled due to the discontinuation of its funding. Such is the unstable nature of community food programs (Loopstra & Tarasuk 2013; Tarasuk 2001a), which makes them ill-suited for responding to the uncertainty that characterizes HFI, and more broadly, the precariousness of life in poverty (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk 2009; Loopstra 2018; Loopstra & Tarasuk 2013).

Under- and Over-stating Reality

Charitable food assistance and community food programs may provide nutritious food to a small sector of food insecure individuals in small quantities, which is a worthy achievement in itself; but my impression is that they do not necessarily reduce food insecurity among participants, much less for the population as a whole. This conclusion is supported by SDH literature that reports limited or short-term reductions in HFI among food bank and community food program participants, who altogether represent a very small subset of the food insecure population, and do not include its most vulnerable individuals (Loopstra 2018; Dietitians of Canada; Loopstra & Tarasuk 2013). Although many facilitators verbally suspected as much, these concerns rarely surfaced in text, which is the medium that holds performative power over responses to HFI. The reality of food insecurity, at least as I interpret it, does not comport with its representation in food-based discourses. While reality is largely subjective, as demonstrated by myriad terminological variations on food insecurity, the condition of food scarcity is to some extent, corporeal. We cannot reduce food insecurity simply by discursively diminishing its prevalence. Nor, for that matter, can we do so by overstating the contribution of food-based initiatives. It is difficult to deny that in the face of public policy neglect, rates of HFI have only

worsened over nearly 40 years of food banking and a couple decades of emerging community-based food initiatives (Riches & Tarasuk 2014).

Consider the vast disparity in numbers between food bank users and the food insecure community at large: two seemingly objective, quantifiable truths, deriving from food charity and SDH discourses, respectively. The 2,200 weekly clients boasted by the Richmond food bank website is far surpassed by the 8% (as of 2011-2012) of the population (Provincial Health Services Authority 2016c) who are food insecure, including one interview respondent with disabilities who reported being unable to stand in line at the food bank. Food bank staff members were well aware that food bank figures are an underestimation of food insecurity, with one facilitator accurately citing Loopstra and Tarasuk's (2015) average multiplier of 4-5 times. Taking the number of food bank clients as a function of Richmond's food insecurity rate and population, the food insecure population likely exceeds food bank users by approximately 8 times in my study area.

The underutilization of food banks in Richmond is perhaps a result of the stigmatization of low-income individuals in a city that discursively privileges wealth. Regardless of the quantity of underestimation, the website's quotation of number of clients, absent acknowledgement for its relationship to HFI rates, understates the prevalence of food insecurity and overstates the food bank's role in responding to it. From a political economic perspective, this is a calculated discursive decision. As Mendly-Zambo and Raphael (2019) explain, the utilization of food bank figures as a proximal measure of food insecurity in food charity discourse functions to underplay the magnitude of HFI in high-income countries. In the case of the Richmond food bank, the figure of 2,200 is low enough to elude concern for a failing social safety net, yet high enough to convince the public of its efficacy. As shown in this example, food-based discourses tend to

sugarcoat the problem of HFI so that it is politically palatable to corporations, governments, and the masses. The sustained publicity for food-based initiatives as front-line solutions, in spite of mounting evidence and knowledge to the contrary, has been counterproductive for the purposes of real reductions in HFI. The following section will analyze this effect within different political economic frameworks.

Political Economies

So far, I have demonstrated the predominantly detrimental impacts of food-based discourse on the perception and reality of HFI reduction. These findings contradict a more optimistic post-structuralist stream of political economic literature. The premise of Gibson-Graham's (1996, 2008) "performative practices for 'other worlds'" is that discourses critical of neoliberalism often paradoxically reinforce its authority, whereas discursive recognition for alternative economies, which are often community-based, empowers systems operating outside of neoliberalism. Instead, my findings show that discursive silences (e.g. inattention to poverty) about neoliberalism help to preserve its power, while the promotion of community food initiatives for addressing HFI has in fact enabled neoliberal "roll-backs" to the social safety net. In creating the illusion of fulfilling deficiencies left by the "roll-back" of the safety net, food-based discourses may even be features of "roll-out" neoliberalism, which refers to interventions that preserve oppressive economic structures, often creatively (Peck & Tickell 2007). More specifically, food-based discourses conceal the consequences of diminished income supports, silence or blame the victims of growing inequality, and superficially substitute food for income as the deficient resource to rectify.

These phenomena have previously been documented in a nascent stream of political economic literature about HFI. Fisher (2017) criticizes the “hunger industrial complex” that has led to the institutionalization of food charity amid increasingly exploitative labour practices within donor organizations, cutbacks to US government programs, and the marginalization of voices consistently “missing from the table.” Similarly, Riches (2018) has written extensively about the construction of domestic hunger in neoliberal “food bank nations” including Canada, characterized by the de-politicization of food scarcity, the shift from income security to charitable food assistance, a disintegrating social safety net, the state’s abandonment of social obligations, corporate philanthropy’s role in perpetuating food insecurity, and the stigma attached to what is essentially begging for food. Mendlly-Zambo and Raphael (2019) build upon Riches’ perspective to draw attention to competing HFI discourses, of which political economy is the most suitable yet least utilized framework. The present study follows in these authors’ structuralist appraisals of discursive approaches to HFI.

While well-intentioned and well-suited for other purposes such as sustainability and social connectedness, food-based responses create the misleading impression of effective HFI reduction undertaken by the non-governmental sector (Wakefield et al. 2013; Riches 2018). The preeminence of community responses diverts attention from the political economic structures producing food insecurity, as well as the structural interventions necessary for reducing it (Mendlly-Zambo & Raphael 2019). In such manner, food-based community initiatives paradoxically detract from income-based policy action – a phenomenon observed in the present study. Food-based discourses consistently took precedence over income-based discourses within texts analyzed, including municipal policy documents, generating the misleading perception that community-based responses effectively reduce HFI. This may explain why virtually all

responses to food insecurity in my study area, with the exception of one deriving from an anti-poverty framework, failed to engage with income advocacy at all. HFI discourses are even (in)visible within food program settings and in the landscape at large, where agrarian and charity initiatives camouflage the presence of low-income individuals. In Richmond, food programs either exclude food insecure individuals from public life, as exemplified by the middle-class sensibilities of community gardens and even the Sharing Farm, or hide them from public view, as seen at the Food Bank and to a lesser extent, a community meal.

Food-based discourses include not only food charity, which has been the main focus of political economic literature thus far, but also seemingly preferable discourses organized around food production or community development, categorized in this study under local food movement frameworks. In recent years, these discourses have been subject to criticism in SDH literature, which is closely associated with political economy. Riches and Tarasuk (2014), representing both political economic and SDH perspectives, explain that serious efforts to address food insecurity have been hindered by the vast non-governmental industry, encompassing food banks, soup kitchens, and “feeding programs,” as well as more recent developments of community kitchens, community gardens, subsidized grocery boxes, and other local means of producing food for individuals experiencing HFI. All of these initiatives, along with their underlying discourses, were prevalent within my study, whereas income-based approaches were not. Regarding community food programs, Collins et al. (2014, 138), writing from an SDH perspective, “suspect that widespread support for the local-level food-based approach to HFI has impeded critical judgement of the true potential of these activities to reduce HFI.” This phrase recalls Riches’ notion of “uncritical solidarity,” here applied to local food movement initiatives in addition to its original usage within the context of food charity.

Community development, a cornerstone of the local food movement, is largely responsible for amassing this newer version of “uncritical solidarity.” Not only is community development unrelated to HFI according to Mendly-Zambo and Raphael’s (2019) political economic analysis, SDH proponent Power (1999) goes further to suggest that it perpetuates oppression against community members who “don’t belong,” such as, in this case, low-income individuals or Chinese seniors. Moreover, both political economic and SDH proponents argue that community-based rhetoric offloads responsibilities of the deregulating and downsizing welfare state, explicitly referred to as neoliberalism in political economic literature, onto communities (Power 1999, Mendly-Zambo & Raphael 2019, Riches & Tarasuk 2014). In drawing critical skepticism to community-based food initiatives, which are paradoxically seen as the critical antithesis of food charity in food systems literature, the present study thus continues to bridge SDH and political economic perspectives. In addition to SDH and political economy, however, a subset of food systems scholars similarly directs criticism toward community food initiatives. In a study of students volunteering for food insecurity organizations, Guthman (2008) found that her subjects’ actions diverted attention from broader structural inequalities, such as poverty, instead of improving marginalized people’s diets. Poisoned apples, so to speak, assume many forms, including the organic and locally grown variety.

Alternative Neoliberalism

Although community food initiatives are commonly designated as “alternative food networks” (AFNs), which define local food systems operating outside of industrial food economies, they often remain entangled within neoliberal networks. They include market initiatives such as farmers markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) boxes, as well as

non-market streams such as donations, “good food boxes” that sell local food at reduced prices, and community food programs including community gardens, kitchens, and meals. While market mechanisms have commonly been criticized for their economic exclusivity (Guthman 2008), an emerging body of literature, discussed previously, has begun to highlight the neoliberal mechanisms underpinning non-market avenues – even ones that are designed for low-income populations. The two types of AFNs, both neoliberal rather than anti-hegemonic, were exemplified within my study. In the market-based stream, the Sharing Farm partakes in overtly capitalist networks, such as farmers markets and CSA boxes, at prices that are unaffordable to low-income individuals – the intended beneficiaries of its main operations. Such exclusion is reinforced by its online and physical spaces that privilege, in Edwards’ (2016) characterization of AFN participants, “white, middle-class, ‘do-gooders’,” which once again exemplifies the notion of “uncritical solidarity.” This demographic applies not only to patrons of market products, but also to volunteers, some of whom pay for a commodified “volunteer experience.”

Whether or not food and volunteer experiences are commodified, it is hard to envision local food production initiatives as alternative economies if they are predicated on class stratification – oftentimes much more so than conventional food outlets such as supermarkets. Even in its purely non-market operations, the Sharing Farm indirectly strengthens capitalist actors. Although local food production may reduce the food bank’s reliance on corporate donations and increase its availability of healthy food, the Sharing Farm is nonetheless financially dependent on corporate donors of its own. According to its website, which discursively elevates these entities, they include wealth management companies and banks, which exacerbate economic inequality, and the River Rock Casino, a paragon of disposable wealth in Richmond. Moreover, in donating produce to the food bank, albeit with more ethical

intentions than corporations, the Sharing Farm is still supporting an institution that maintains corporate interests and cutbacks to government programs (Riches 2018, Fisher 2017).

As shown in Figure 4, the Richmond food bank is a central node in the network of non-governmental organizations that serve food insecure individuals, including the Sharing Farm and church-run community meals. The food bank is a part of wider food bank networks of Food Banks BC and Food Banks Canada, which distribute food and monetary donations among member organizations. Although the Richmond Food Bank denies receiving government funding on its website and in interviews with staff members, it received a refrigeration expansion grant from Food Banks BC, which likely originated from the BC government's \$7 million donation earmarked for food bank refrigeration in 2017 (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael 2019). Its government-aided expansion of refrigeration capacity demonstrates Fisher's (2017) observation that food banks and their supporters are "feeding the need," that is to scale up the profitable business of hunger, instead of "shortening the line," which is to develop income-based solutions that reduce the necessity of food banks.

Food Banks BC is in turn a member of Food Banks Canada, to which Walmart, among many other corporations with exploitative labour practices, is a major donor (Food Banks Canada 2019). The centrality of the food bank within Richmond's non-profit network, combined with its connections to neoliberal actors, illustrates the institutional entrenchment of food banks described by Riches (2018) and Fisher (2017). While Holmes et al. (2018) similarly criticize the permanence of food banks in society, their recommendation of incorporating food banks into the community food security framework, which has begun to occur at the Richmond Food Bank, would likely consolidate power for food banks and fail to liberate them from neoliberal networks. Once resource and funding streams have been traced back to their sources, one can see

that local food production and food charity initiatives examined in the present study are still entwined within dominant economic networks. Such are the contradictions inherent to the non-governmental sector, which do not necessarily discount its contributions, but cast doubt on its categorization as alternative economies.

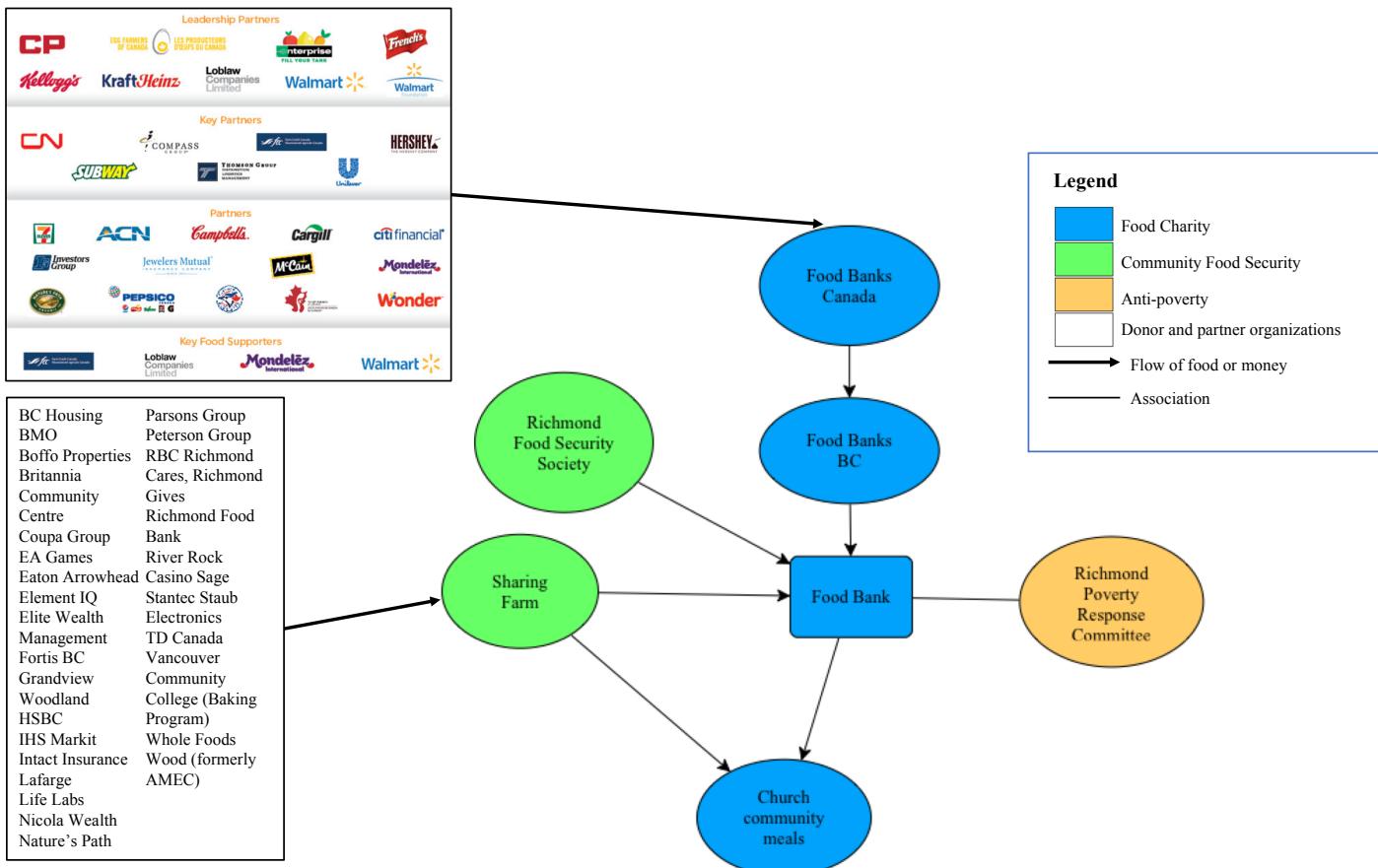


Figure 4. Conceptual map of organizations related to HFI reduction in Richmond, BC. Organizations (primarily corporate) donate food and/or money to Food Banks Canada and the Sharing Farm. The food bank receives food and/or money from Food Banks Canada (via Food Banks BC), the Sharing Farm (local food production), and the Richmond Food Security Society (fruit recovered from residential backyards). The food bank then distributes food either directly to its clients or to community meals run by churches. The Food Bank and Richmond Food Security Society are affiliated with the Richmond Poverty Response Committee. Note. Data for Food Banks Canada donors are from Food Banks Canada (2016), and data for Sharing Farm donors are from Sharing Farm (2017).

Uncritical Solidarity

It is important to acknowledge that local food production and food charity initiatives still represent important sources of voluntary care and support, especially in a city that lacks compassion according to multiple interview respondents. But even where compassion exists, at the Sharing Farm, community meals, and to varying degrees, the food bank, it tends to assume uncritical forms. Complacent compassion, my variation on the concept of “uncritical solidarity,” simply allows volunteers and donors to feel good without confronting the uncomfortable politics surrounding HFI. As Riches (2018) argues, the de-politicization of hunger ignores, and even maintains, the neoliberal processes that have left people dependent on charitable food assistance, and local organizations struggling (and failing) to compensate for retracting welfare state functions. Oppressive institutions may even prey on compassion to advance their own neoliberal agendas. This tactic is frequently deployed by Walmart, which gains positive exposure for its food bank donation campaigns, as demonstrated in the present study’s discourse analysis and in Fisher’s (2017) case study on Walmart.

I do not intend to discredit the significance of mutual aid, but only to explain that aid alone is not enough to reduce food insecurity – and many other structural problems, for that matter. Despite the “heart and soul” of community meal volunteers, as expressed by one respondent, there is “never enough” food. Gaps in service also exist during weekends and summer months for community meals and winter months for the Sharing Farm, with no guarantees for continued services in the long term. It is clear that the gossamer network of community food programs is no substitute for a disintegrating social safety net. This perspective is consistent with Riches’ (2018) assertion that communities have already been doing their part – which will never be sufficient – but governments are not. From what I have seen at food

programs, there is too much on the plates of facilitators, as it were, and not enough on those of clients. For the past several decades, communities have unjustly borne the burden of HFI reduction, which should primarily have been the state's responsibility to uphold. It is perhaps unfair to demand more from community initiatives, which have already been stretched to their limits, but in a different respect, that is what I am requesting. In my view, the solution is not to scale up community responses, as prescribed in virtually all local policy documents, but to foster "critical solidarity" in order to exert political pressure on senior governments.

I see the biggest contribution of community action not in alleviating material deprivation, which is a woefully inadequate stopgap measure, but in political advocacy for safety net solutions, which responds to the structural nature of the problem. Some potential for developing critical solidarity, however limited, already exists within food programs analyzed in this study. Both the community meal facilitator and the executive director of the food bank expressed some interest in anti-poverty advocacy, with the latter wishing to leverage the food bank network's "collective voice." However, both respondents admitted that time and resource constraints have prevented them from engaging in advocacy. Many facilitators and volunteers have bitten off more than they could chew to the point of "burnout," which is a perfectly valid reason to eschew political advocacy. Moreover, food programs' foundations in neoliberal networks and discourses complicates efforts to resist these structures. While the power and reach of the food bank network could theoretically provide a large platform for advocacy, as envisioned by the executive director of the Richmond Food Bank, its entrenchment within corporate interest groups would likely hinder meaningful political action. For that reason, community meals, which are linked to the food bank network yet one step removed from its corporate influence, may be more suitable arenas for political advocacy. Alongside community kitchens and The Sharing Farm,

they are also more conducive to human connection than, in an interview respondent's words, the "militaristic" food bank model. Producing and sharing meals together are ideal activities for forging relationships that enable collective action; but instead of the prevailing objective of building community, a social unit in which "others," including low-income individuals, may not truly belong (Power 1999), the goal should be to develop "critical solidarity" towards income-based political action.

Currently, the connective power of food continues to be harnessed towards community development, rather than "critical solidarity," and food-based, rather than income-based causes. Take, for example, the community kitchen facilitator's thoughts on food, community, and the nutritional framework:

I believe that the first communities were set around the kitchen table. For anybody. The first communities were set around the kitchen tables with our families. So, I think this is the concept of community kitchens, it's a family, it's a group of people that don't know each other but they become like a community. With food, you just start a conversation and divert it to newcomers or divert it to healthy eating, food literacy, nutrition, it comes all together. The food is the principle object that we are talking about but everybody so we can share that together very easily.

I generally agree that food can be a valuable springboard, or appetizer rather, to wider conversations. The topics she identified, however, are not the ones that reduce food insecurity. In my view, the main course of discussion surrounding HFI should be income, which has too often been a mere afterthought to discourses organized around the food system and/or nutrition. Furthermore, her language of universality ("anybody," "everybody"), while nominally inclusive, does not give voice to populations, namely low-income individuals, with specific and heightened vulnerabilities to food insecurity. Universal rhetoric is also utilized by community meal websites and the community meal facilitator:

The community dinner is for anyone who wants to come regardless of religion or age, socio-economic background because people are either homeless, they're wanting to practice their English, they are making ends meet, they're lonely so that's how I describe our dinner. The dinner is food but it's more of having them there where we don't wanna rush them out, we want them to sit and meet people in the community of Richmond because there's a lot of diverse backgrounds, there's a lot of divisiveness between Richmond residents and immigrants because of the language issues, because of culture issues, we have a lot of that going on so what we're trying to do is really create a little bit more of a getting to know each other relationship when they sit down at dinner time.

Similar to the community kitchen, the objective of community development, which is being accomplished to a large extent, takes priority over that of food provisioning. It is encouraging to see food programs looking beyond food provisioning to more ambitious aims, but they still stop short of social justice goals. Community development has succeeded only in conferring dignity, which is prerequisite to, but not equivalent with, solidarity. It is easy to confuse the two concepts and be (compassionately) complacent with attaining the first of these. Like many other contributions from community food initiatives, dignity is a worthy accomplishment in itself, but not enough to reduce food insecurity. From what I observed at the community meal, dignified treatment removed neither the stigma attached to poverty, nor the prejudice against Chinese seniors. The community meal facilitator later conceded that he “[tries] to encourage togetherness” but “[doesn’t] always succeed” in transcending race and class barriers. Likewise, the community kitchen facilitator reported skepticism with the community kitchen’s capacity for facilitating compassion, a quality that she recognized to be in short supply in Richmond. Despite – or more likely because of – their universality and political impartiality, food programs have largely failed to deliver their visions of community collectivity. They do not respond to the needs of the most vulnerable members of society, who require dedicated spaces to voice these needs. While we must respect the anonymity afforded by universality, which may be a source of dignity

for those who prefer it, several low-income respondents within this study expressed the desire to emerge from stigma and advocate for themselves.

An Alternative Economy

The only organization that has provided low-income individuals with a platform for self-advocacy is the poverty reduction group, which represents the lone instance of what I consider to be an alternative economy within my study area. Unlike initiatives analyzed thus far, this organization specifically amplifies the voices of low-income individuals, and thus follows predominantly income-based approaches to food insecurity.

One of its reports, outlining findings obtained from “conversation circles” within the low-income community, emphasizes that “‘universal’ or ‘one size fits all’ approaches are failing to address the root causes of poverty” as I have mentioned previously (Richmond Poverty Response Committee 2018a, p. 18). The report highlights the need for safe spaces, such as the aforementioned “conversation circles,” in order to increase participation in public issues including food insecurity. These types of spaces illuminate, rather than conceal, individuals oppressed and silenced under neoliberalism. I infer that the universal approaches in question, while unnamed, consist of community development initiatives such as community meals, kitchens, and especially gardens. This conclusion is supported by a conversation circle participant’s belief that “community gardens are for the rich” (Richmond Poverty Response Committee 2018a), as well as one interview respondent’s assertion that “we all know that community gardens are for the rich and idle,” giving extra meaning to the “idyllic” landscapes I portrayed in my observations.

Still, the organization occasionally draws upon food-based frameworks including food deserts and the local food movement. It engages in partnerships with the community kitchen, which runs workshops with the group, and a local farm, which donates a biweekly good food box with “lots of kale” to the group. I retain the opinion that hobby farms for the rich, and farming in general for that matter, do not reduce the financial problem of HFI – even if they are letting the less fortunate eat kale. Nevertheless, these activities appear to provide solidarity-building functions that form an enjoyable backdrop to, rather than a dangerous distraction from, the organization’s main goal of poverty reduction.

In addition to forums and reports, the poverty advocacy group regularly uses art as a powerful discursive tool. In what is perhaps a literal example of Gibson-Graham’s (1996) “performative ontological project,” one participant wrote and *performed*, alongside other group members, a play (*Hope Beyond Homelessness*) based on his experiences of poverty. These play participants discursively frame their overlooked realities using the proscenium of theatre; this time, the low-income community, rather than the corporate or privileged parties that typically enjoy the spotlight in society, are elevated to its stage. Their discursive influence is striking given that discourses, including income-based ones, are usually created and perpetuated by the powerful. Shown several times at a local auditorium, *Hope Beyond Homelessness* was able to reach thousands of audience members – including the mayor and his family. The group facilitator shared a poignant anecdote about an encounter with them:

This play, it gets you not just intellectually in the head but it hits you in the heart. So that people leave with lasting impressions of what they’ve learned. So, we’ve got this play and the mayor’s wife crying in the last scene, and they’ve come to me and say wow we really didn’t know this and we really needed to hear this. And I said yeah, now you need to do something about it right? So, you’ve got a major decision maker who’s really been moved by what we’ve done.

The playwright, whom I also interviewed, later revealed to me that the mayor's wife even gave him a hug. These interactions are especially astonishing considering the mayor's perennially conservative politics. In this respect, the play may have contributed more to HFI reduction in one night than have several decades of food banking. In addition to the mayor and his family, the play also left an impression on a decision-maker within the school system, a network that could reach many more people:

Afterwards, this person from the school board, a trustee or something like that, he was on the school board and he came to see and said you know what, I've had my students have come to me and told me that they don't see a problem with poverty in Richmond. The students came to him and said why is there such a big deal about poverty in Richmond? There's no poverty in Richmond. And they challenged him to prove it. So, he came to me and said you know if you could put your play on in schools to educate these people that don't believe that there's a problem, that would be awesome. And that would be awesome. I don't know if anything's gonna happen with that but maybe. It would be awesome. But yeah, so people don't see the poverty, they don't see the homelessness, they don't see the struggles that we're going through. So why bother doing anything about it?

This quote demonstrates the artistic medium's capacity for illuminating the invisible, foregrounding people who have been erased from Richmond's collective consciousness. Even without explicitly incriminating neoliberalism, which Gibson-Graham (1996) considers to be performatively counterproductive, play participants succeeded in generating the beginnings of "critical solidarity" through art. The emotionally resonant nature of the play may also have facilitated conversations in ways that more expressly political approaches might not have. Yet in drawing attention to the problem of poverty, this application of performativity still differs from that of Gibson-Graham (1996), whose recommended discursive reticence regarding neoliberalism may hide issues such as poverty.

Not only has art actualized the marginalized within the public imagination, it has also empowered its creative agents, sometimes politically:

We've written a play, shown things, done [an] art installation and one of these members was so charged up about civic elections she ran for city council. And on a zero budget with the help of this group, of this project group. And the stuff that's happened in this group is just amazing. So again, we can give people to feel safe, comfortable, non-judgmental, they support each other, they're telling their stories in the way that they find most effective. And it really is having an effect.

Their creativity and initiative contrasts with the rote delivery of food-based rhetoric, which has overwritten intuition, in food program facilitators and volunteers. The ability to act and speak for oneself and allies is the type of agency, a principle often misapplied in food-based discourses, that underscores meaningful HFI reduction. From a political economy perspective, true empowerment stems from purchasing power and resistance to the neoliberal structures that have diminished it, rather than food literacy and food production. The politicization of hunger in this manner, as evidenced by a member who ran for city council, represents a foil to the frequent de-politicization of hunger in community food initiatives. That the Richmond Poverty Response Committee's art projects were able to run on a "zero budget," and still generate much more social change than programs dependent on corporate funding (e.g. the food bank, the Sharing Farm, and community meals), provides further justification for their status as alternative economies. After reflecting on research limitations and positionality in the next chapter, I will formulate recommendations for more effective community action in this vein.

7. A TASTE OF MY OWN MEDICINE

Logistics

Now that I have critically appraised the world around me, I will redirect analysis to the frames of reference through which I perceived it. In this chapter, I divulge the logistical circumstances, theoretical frameworks, and social positions that influenced my findings, then examine the limitations and opportunities, blind spots and vantage points, distortion and discernment, that lie herein. From a logistical standpoint, this project is only as comprehensive as its scope allows. The discourse analysis mostly contained texts directly relevant to my study area of Richmond, including community, municipal, and regional documents while excluding documents with a provincial or federal scale. This selection likely skewed data towards food-based and community-oriented discourses, which lie within local scales of action, rather than income-based policy responses that largely lie beyond their jurisdiction. While the emphasis on initiatives over which communities have direct control is understandable, it still does not excuse the near-complete absence of income, and unwillingness to apply pressure over the matter to senior governments, in the analyzed texts. Income-based discourses may exist in provincial and national media and policy documents to a larger extent than portrayed in the present study, but they are nonetheless vastly overshadowed by food-based discourses as demonstrated by Mendl-Zambo and Raphael (2019).

The present study's observations depict only a small cross-section of food programs in Richmond. At the food bank, I attended one of two weekly grocery distribution times at one of four food bank locations for a period of two months. Several respondents and volunteers revealed to me that the demographics of the clientele differ by time and location, with each location containing a different social atmosphere. The high proportion of Chinese seniors I

witnessed may be attributed to the food bank depot's location within the centre of Richmond, where the Chinese population is concentrated, and weekday morning distribution time, when working individuals are unable to attend. As the central food bank depot, this location's large scale of operations contributed to my impression of the "hunger-industrial complex" on premises. While other food bank locations may operate on a smaller scale, they likely share the same "militaristic" tendencies by nature of organizational structure.

According to multiple respondents, community meals also differ by location. Out of weekly community meals run by seven different churches across the city, I observed one community meal session at the Church on Five. Witnessed in geographic and temporal isolation, my observations may not be representative of all community meals. One respondent who frequents multiple community meals considered this particular community meal to be the "best one" in terms of quality of food and atmosphere, but reported enjoying community meals overall. Since appreciation for community meals in general was shared by several respondents, the pleasurable experience of the community meal was unlikely to be an anomaly. Unlike data obtained at the food bank and community meal, Sharing Farm observations were limited to a visual landscape survey because I did not attend the Sharing Farm premises when programs were taking place. Although I did not personally observe participants here, I was able to triangulate information about their demographics from interview data, online media, and the physical environment. This is one instance in which I opted for scope of data over depth of observation.

In the interview component of my project, however, depth took precedence over scope. Respondent perspectives, while rich in detail, may not comprehensively reflect those of stakeholders at large due to a small sample size of 12. Among facilitators, many respondents were introduced to me through the food bank network in which their organizations were directly

or indirectly involved. Outside of this network, I was unsuccessful in reaching representatives from community service organizations unaffiliated to food programs, likely due to my lack of connections to them. This may have led to the overrepresentation of food-based frameworks in interview responses, but it also highlights the food bank network's range of influence. Even more conspicuously absent than community service facilitators are food insecure individuals, of which only four were interviewed in the present study. They were the only participants to whom community kitchen, community meal, and the Richmond Poverty Response Committee facilitators granted me access; I was unable to approach clients for interviews at the food bank due to its policy of asking no questions, which is appropriate to its services. Although the size of this selection was determined by circumstance rather than by design, its consequence of discursive underrepresentation remains the same. Just as I criticize the absence of marginalized voices in HFI discourses, so must I reckon with its own lack of representation for such voices in the present study. To compensate for scope with depth, I attempted to capture their responses in detail, devote sufficient space to their perspectives, and direct attention to their causes within the present study. I also tried to avoid overpowering their voices with those of facilitators and most importantly, my own – much like how I restrained myself from “talking over” participants during interviews. Whether or not I was successful in performing these tasks will be up to the reader.

But even if the voices of marginalized respondents were adequately amplified, they may not speak for the food insecure population in all its diversity. The present study's sample of food insecure individuals likely excludes its most vulnerable members, who may be unable to attend the programs from which respondents were selected. Not surprisingly, the majority of respondents exhibited a higher degree of stability compared to other members of the low-income

community, with three out of the four individuals living in social housing. The remaining respondent reported living out of his car, ownership of which was considered a sign of privilege from the perspective of other respondents. He explained the necessity of driving due to his health condition of living in pain – an invisible disability that might not be perceived even by other food insecure individuals who are disabled. He also refuted the community kitchen's respondent's belief about the causal link between food skills and food insecurity, attributing the issue instead to his lack of finances and accommodations, deficiencies of which are much less severe for the community kitchen participant respondent who resided in social housing. These social differences, which challenge presumptions harboured even among low-income respondents, begin to illustrate the heterogeneity of the food insecure population. Indeed, their multiple dimensions would not be adequately captured in a sample size of four individuals. While the four individuals interviewed spanned different social groups, including gender, types of disability, senior status, homelessness, and single motherhood, they all identified as Caucasian individuals, leaving my curiosity about the Chinese seniors unsatiated. That is a recurring motif, repeating in interviews, observations, discourse, and my mind, to which I will return later.

My selection of respondents may also account for the presence of discourses in participant responses, which I had previously attributed to social conditioning at food programs. In addition to this indoctrinating effect, it is likely that support for theoretical frameworks begets participation in programs based on those frameworks. For instance, the community kitchen participants may have sought out the community kitchen based on preexisting inclination toward the nutritional framework, which was then reinforced by the program. These biased samples derived from food programs may have resulted in the overrepresentation of food-based discourses among food insecure participants, and created the impression of indoctrination at food

programs. Whether or not this occurs at food programs, discursive exposure still conditions personal beliefs, knowledge, values, and opinions according to prevailing theoretical frameworks.

Theoretical Positions

Discursive Conditioning

As I have shown in my research, one's perceptions, interactions, and thought processes are largely influenced by the social, cultural, and political milieus in which he/she is situated. Such social conditioning operates in all forms of discourse, including not only the food-based discourses examined previously, but also the income-based ones utilized in the present study. I, myself, have been previously conditioned by local food movement discourses, re-conditioned by SDH and political economy discourses as I began this project, and once again subject to conditioning from food-based discourses – which I actively resisted – as I reviewed discourses and conducted fieldwork. As a former advocate for local food movement initiatives, I had previously worked, volunteered, and interacted with multiple organizations mentioned in the present study. Based on these past experiences, I am able to understand the thought processes of facilitators interviewed and observed, but I may also be projecting my personal thoughts onto them.

When I volunteered at the Sharing Farm, I felt good about being in nature, mingling with middle class community members, partaking in the trendy activity of gardening, and contributing to noble causes of charity and sustainability. The Sharing Farm continued to be a regular part of my life when I worked at its partner organization, the Richmond Food Security Society, with which it shared offices and premises at the time. Colleagues complained about Chinese people

stealing from the farm and community gardens, then driving away in BMWs – an anecdote that is suspiciously familiar to me now, but one that I believed wholeheartedly at the time. My job duties here included assisting with community kitchens (separate from the community kitchen in the present study) and gleaning fruit from residential backyards for food bank donations. Even from the food-based perspectives I held at the time, the community kitchen succeeded in neither educating nor improving the circumstances of its “low-asset” participants. This experience planted the first seeds of doubt regarding the efficacy of community food programs, which I later recognized in facilitators interviewed. And much like facilitators interviewed, I nevertheless continued to embrace, against my better judgement, the food-based frameworks in which I was immersed – at work, at university as part of my environmental sciences degree, and in popular media. At fruit gleaning sessions, we frequented middle-class homes, and were sometimes assisted by middle-class volunteers. In my mind and theirs, it was a win-win for the environment, community, people in need, and less altruistically, ourselves. We would magnanimously deliver the fruit to the food bank, take a portion of the fruit for our own, and feel accomplished about doing our part. Now I realize that we were only picking the low-hanging fruits of uncritical solidarity.

Years later, I once again experienced uncritical solidarity as I performed the present study’s research tasks. I felt the allure of charity as I volunteered at the food bank, became seduced by the sentimentality of community meals, and conferred cheap compassion, quantified in donations and honoraria, to interview respondents. While these feelings are inherently patronizing to food program clients, such characterization of these feelings may be equally condescending to volunteers and facilitators. Essentially, I have inflicted two levels of condescension that diminish virtually all study participants – a power dynamic I will explore

further later in this chapter. Even for myself, I was only able to see my own uncritical solidarity after being exposed to academic income-based frameworks, which are less accessible than their popular food-based counterparts. These income-based frameworks, however critical, may have obstructed my critical judgement in other ways.

Theoretical Shortcomings

To begin, we must consider criticism levelled against income-based frameworks. From the perspective of the local food movement, income-based frameworks' fixation on the social safety net fails to account for the injustices within the food system, and also allows exploitative economic systems to remain (Suschnigg 2013). In this vein, the present study challenges only one facet of neoliberalism, which is the "roll-back" of the social safety net, while disregarding neoliberal food systems and trade networks in general. In fact, the social safety net may even function to uphold capitalism by mitigating its social consequences, including HFI, just as community food programs enable the disintegration of the social safety net by ameliorating its liabilities, including hunger. However, this may be a misleading analogy since income redistribution policies are much more structural, and therefore effective, compared with food redistribution initiatives.

From my perspective, the present study's parochial resistance to neoliberalism is acceptable, if not necessary, for the purposes of HFI reduction. It is not opposing neoliberalism at large, which would be impossible within the scope of my study, but neoliberalism as it affects HFI in wealthy countries such as Canada, particularly in cities. A healthy private sector, which is inevitably neoliberal, is a crucial source of funding for social support systems – as long as they assume the form of tax and transfers, or their own labour practices, rather than donations to

charity or community food programs. It is also important to note that the neoliberal food system, while exploitative to food producers and the environment, is responsible for the relatively low cost of food in North America (Black 2015), and improved dietary outcomes worldwide (Pingali 2012). A major contradiction within the present study, then, is that it indirectly justifies other systems that are unjust, and problematically maintains neoliberalism that way. There may also be a colonial dynamic in prioritizing the welfare of citizens in industrialized countries, by nature of my study scope, over those in agrarian countries. While I recognize the imperative for sustainable and ethical food systems, these matters are largely unrelated to my study based on the income-based frameworks I have selected. Rather, they lie within the purview of food-based frameworks, just as HFI belongs within the domain of income-based frameworks. Although I agree with the local food movement's cause of improving the livelihoods of food producers, I argue that this objective should extend to all livelihoods, the majority of which are non-agrarian in Canadian cities. Conflating food systems with wider issues of poverty, as food-based frameworks often do, overcomplicates HFI and prevents necessary responses in industrialized nations such as Canada. I acknowledge that SDH and political economic frameworks may be reductive in their emphasis on income. But, contrary to the interdisciplinary trend in food systems literature, HFI in wealthy countries is not necessarily a complex issue. Its causes and solutions, which are primarily related to income, have already been well-established; what has been truly lacking is political direction, which will be a topic of the following chapter.

Although I consider income-based frameworks to be the most appropriate for HFI reduction, I may have adhered to these frameworks too rigidly. To some extent, I still want to believe that food programs can help reduce HFI, but my selected frameworks have steered me away from this possibility. From Gibson-Graham's (1996) perspective, such discursive

conditioning may have conferred power to neoliberalism, and extinguished my ability to imagine alternative worlds. Critical analysis, as undertaken in this study, may very well have reinforced neoliberalism, but so has the failure to confront it. That is why I tried to counteract, and maybe even overcompensate for, the understatement of HFI's structural nature and the overstatement of post-structural solutions.

Yet my harsh appraisal of food-based discourses may derive not only from SDH and political economic literature, but also from personal disillusionment with, and alienation from, food-based discourses. Perhaps I felt the dogmatic urge to renounce previously held positions in order to affirm my support for new ones. Nevertheless, I believe I delivered a lukewarm reception, rather than searing indictment, of food-based discourses. Where possible, I tried to acknowledge their merits – even if most of them are unrelated to HFI reduction. I continue to support community food initiatives for purposes of sustainability, social connectedness, and maybe even hunger relief, with the knowledge that they do not reduce food insecurity. Without the academically-acquired privilege of such knowledge, however, it is hard to separate these functions from HFI reduction. And even for myself, as with the community at large, I was unable to isolate food-based discourses from local race and class tensions that are relevant to my identity. The present study has left me in the crossfire of these overlapping conflicts.

Positionality

Researcher Role

I may have adopted a reductive approach to HFI, but we all contain multitudes that influence the frameworks that we choose. As a researcher, food bank volunteer, Richmond resident, and second-generation Chinese-Canadian, I was simultaneously an insider and outsider,

in various respects, among interview respondents, observation subjects, and discourse producers. My role as a researcher reflects modes of privilege that respondents may not share. On a direct level, it allowed me to obtain critical academic perspectives that are largely inaccessible to society at large, including myself prior to this study. Perhaps it was unfair of me to then use these perspectives to criticize those of participants, which are no less valid – if not more so, due to their direct experiences with HFI. For example, I am skeptical about food charity and community food programs, whereas respondents experiencing HFI understandably welcome every source of relief. Their very existence sometimes hinges on these initiatives, and mine does not. As an individual who is not directly affected by food programs, who became affiliated with them entirely by choice, it is not my place to dictate what these programs should and should not look like – especially when lives hang in the balance. Although my intention was to amplify the voices of food program stakeholders, especially individuals experiencing HFI, I may have instead overwritten or twisted them to suit narratives pre-determined by my selected theoretical frameworks and political inclinations. Just as the de-politicization of HFI is problematic, so is its political co-option – by both neoliberal and anti-hegemonic agendas such as my own. The present study's overtly political stance risks overpowering the lived experiences of stakeholders, some of whom may not wish to politicize the issue. These phenomena demonstrate the amount of power that I wield over study participants, particularly ones that are food insecure.

Class differences

My status as a graduate student evinces not only my academic position, but also my economic background. I must acknowledge that the educational opportunities accumulated throughout my life were enabled, directly and indirectly, by none other than my middle-class

upbringing. All of these privileges, including graduate studies, have advanced my educational, social, and economic capital in a socially stratified society. And as a part of my graduate studies, research is inherently exploitative in its voyeuristic academic curiosity and its social elevation of the researcher. To mitigate these effects, I have tried to elevate marginalized voices along with my own following the completion of this thesis, and to hold myself accountable for my own perpetuation of social injustice in this section. Perhaps the biggest paradox within the present study is that in spite – or because – of my solidarity with food insecure people, I am exacerbating inequality even as I write about it. This widening social difference was unlikely to be lost on food insecure respondents, especially at the community meal in which I immersed myself as a participant. I was also keenly aware of the optics of me, a Chinese person, consuming free food that I did not require. One of the participants with whom I dined revealed that he never visited Stanley Park despite living here for years, to which I responded that I, too, rarely visited because “we take the tourist attractions for granted when we live here.” He smiled uncomfortably. Later, he revealed that he had never visited due to his inability to afford parking and walk without pain. In what is now a clichéd rumination of the privileged millennial, I realized I had taken so much more for granted.

Despite being a Richmond resident of several years, and frequent visitor throughout my life, I was hardly aware of the city’s sizeable food insecure population prior to conducting this study. Even my prior involvement with community food programs had never alerted me to their presence in a seemingly wealthy suburb. That is the extent to which poverty is concealed in Richmond. As an insider and outsider to my study area and residential community, I was able to glimpse the city with familiar, if myopic, proximity and more open-minded, if less informed, distance. While I have described my outsider status so far, I will now examine my entrenched

position within the community, as well as its potential influence on research findings. Whether or not this position is appropriate for research, I am personally invested in how my community is portrayed, in discourse, in interviews, and in my own observations, because it has been such a significant part of my life. Richmond is where I attended Chinese language courses as a child, connected with other members of the diaspora from Hong Kong, frequented Chinese restaurants with family, and currently live. This is where race, a topic seemingly unrelated to the present study, enters into my reflections upon it. It is an extricable part of my study area and myself.

Richmond resident

As a lifelong member of the Richmond community, I, along with study participants and discourse producers, witnessed vast social and physical changes to the urban environment – gradual at first, and then accelerated in recent years. Businesses from mainland China replaced Hong Kong establishments, which had succeeded local businesses decades earlier. Mandarin superseded Cantonese as the city's primary language, even within remaining Hong Kong restaurants and grocers, and English further declined in relevance. The near-obsolescence of the English language was reflected in commercial signage written only in Chinese, which infuriated non-Chinese residents. Local residents and immigrants from Hong Kong alike disparaged the Chinese newcomers' inability to follow Western social conventions, such as waiting in line, as well as their adherence to their own social norms, which includes the tendency to flaunt wealth. Increasingly crowded parking lots abounded with BMWs and the odd Ferrari. Agricultural plots and single-family homes disappeared before our eyes, as “megahomes” and apartments respectively took their place. Reactions to such urban transformation, even under auspices of justice, has inevitably become stewed in prejudice. In recent years, Caucasian residents would

oppose foreign investment, immigration, real estate speculation, and development (supposedly) on behalf of agricultural land and affordable housing, whereas predominantly Chinese residents would protest homeless settlements, social service centres, social housing projects, and the prospect of an empty homes tax. Economic injustice begets racial injustice, and vice versa.

Race

Against this backdrop of urban transformation and social division, I position myself in relation to respondents and the city's manifold conflicts. My social location as a second-generation Chinese-Canadian granted me insider status among participants from different cultural groups. It allowed me to code-switch between English, which I used with Caucasian food insecure respondents as well as facilitators and volunteers of various ethnicities, including Chinese-Canadians like myself; Cantonese, in which I conversed with several food bank volunteers; and much less fluently, despite the Chinese lessons, Mandarin, in which I was only able to engage in small talk with Chinese seniors. I can claim knowledge about all of these groups to varying degrees, including the ways in which they process urban change, and the social tensions between them. I am familiar, for instance, with the tensions between residents from Hong Kong and those from Mainland China, as well as those between first- and second-generation Chinese-Canadians, or residents and newcomers in general.

For longtime residents, I know that it is natural to feel resentment, envy, and dismay about neighbourhood change, and easy to racialize these feelings according to geopolitical narratives. Conversely, I understand the somewhat idiosyncratic convergence of historical insularity, traditional collectivity, and recent aggressive economic development in Chinese society, which has contributed to its intolerance of outliers such as low-income individuals. That

is not to justify racial or economic prejudice, but to acknowledge the wider circumstances in which they are entwined. I can only speculate (in the non-financial sense) about the mega-homes on farmland, but I suspect that their residents are trying to move beyond the lives they left behind in China, whether in cramped apartments or China's un-romanticized agrarian past – which bears no similarity to what is portrayed in the local food movement. Paradoxically, neoliberalism is responsible not only for perpetuating HFI within my study area, but for bringing hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and famine in China, albeit unequally. Neoliberal proclivities are enshrined within Chinese values, which I simultaneously hold and question.

At the same time, I am empathetic to the region's housing affordability crisis, indeed exacerbated by immigration and foreign investment, which has affected many people around me. Among them is my mother, who has struggled with housing costs as a single mother and immigrant, albeit not to the same degree as food insecure interview respondents in my study. I know that the generalization of wealth does not apply to the entire Chinese community because I see vast inequality within my own family. In addition to class differentials, my positionality has placed me in the midst of the development/agriculture debate, one in which I am conflicted. I recognize that my vibrant ethnic community was largely born of economic development, which has also marginalized the low-income community (sometimes very intentionally). The agricultural movement is similarly entwined among just objectives, such as environmental sustainability, and unjust motives, such as racial oppression against my community. Owing to my own inability to separate these issues, the racial prejudice I observed within food-based initiatives and discourses may have negatively affected my opinion of them in the present study. Although racial prejudice also exists within the anti-poverty movement, income-based discourses are nevertheless much more relevant to HFI reduction than food-based discourses.

It would be hypocritical, however, for me to vilify study participants for their racialized sentiments. I would be remiss not to acknowledge my role in bringing out their worst instincts – because I, too, have harboured and grown with them. My receptiveness to anecdotes about Chinese seniors likely affirmed the respondents' prejudice, and to my regret, that might not have been accidental. However enabling, this response is engrained into me and my second-generation, Chinese-Canadian peers. All of these hyphens divide more than they unify our identity, as with our community. We react to the seemingly uncouth behaviour of our preceding generations with mirth to dissociate ourselves from them, to prove that we are Westernized. The ridicule is a bonding experience among us, as it was between me and the Chinese-Canadian community meal facilitator: part shared embarrassment, part jest, all in good fun – or so I thought.

Now I must reckon with the discrimination I had enabled not only during interviews, but also throughout my life. Directly and indirectly, I had consumed and fed the very stereotypes that eventually came to bother me. Only when we reclaim our heritage later in life, a pattern common to second-generation Chinese-Canadians, do we realize the damage we had caused and continue to inflict, sometimes subconsciously. These conflicting tendencies characterize my relationship to the Chinese community, which resembles family to me. As with family, I am fiercely defensive and harshly critical of its values, sometimes unpredictably, like I have been in this chapter. As with family, I feel affinity and aversion to its members, and self-consciousness and endearment for their behaviour. That is why the Chinese seniors in the present study, who look like my late grandmother, carry such significance to me.

Witness to HFI reduction

Despite resembling the seniors observed in the present study, with their colourful garments and grocery trolleys, my grandmother never needed to use the food bank. This difference, which has been an enduring mystery to me, may be cultural and circumstantial. My grandmother, who migrated from Hong Kong at a young age, may not have experienced food scarcity in the past to the same extent as her contemporaries from mainland China. While fortunes have since changed dramatically for many people in mainland China, older generations may retain deprivation-induced behaviour such as procuring free food whenever it is available. Even if the Chinese seniors are indeed wealthy, as claimed by multiple respondents, they may still feel psychological anxiety about money – a legacy of historical poverty – or lack direct access to family wealth.

Not only did my grandmother diverge from the present study's Chinese seniors in place, culture, and history, she also arrived in Canada at a different time: the early 1990s, a time before federal cutbacks to public housing funds and the subsequent transferal of public housing authority onto provinces and municipalities. Although she did not possess wealth, she was able to live independently in subsidized seniors housing while receiving Old Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) payments, which were more than sufficient to cover her living expenses. She would regularly walk or bus to Vancouver's Chinatown, which lay adjacent to her residence, to purchase groceries and dine with friends. To me, this is what it means to be food secure, in all its connotations of empowerment.

I realize that I may have resorted to the emotional manipulation I recognized in food charity discourse; fixated on the Chinese seniors as respondents and the media have done; and, similar to food-based discourses, introduced extraneous issues that divert attention from HFI.

And so, much of the criticism I directed towards HFI discourses can be reciprocated towards the present study. Problems inevitably exist when we look for them, but they are problems nonetheless. Regardless of the present study's criticisms, my grandmother was always grateful, as am I, for a country that welcomed her in spite of language barriers and provided her with a dignified life in her final decades. My wish is for this privilege – right, rather – to be extended and restored to all other sectors of society for the entirety of their lives. In the following chapter, I will argue that this vision is entirely feasible, being the status quo of the past, but that its realization requires a concerted political effort from multiple sectors of society.

8. A DIGEST OF FINDINGS

After having identified flaws and merits within Household Food Insecurity (HFI) discourses, including the present study itself, I will now discuss the implications and solutions arising from my findings and previous literature. To clarify the geographic and time scale of my recommendations, I will once again differentiate between food security and HFI. These are very different issues that have become conflated in food-based discourses pertaining to HFI, causing confusion about its causes and solutions. Food security primarily concerns predicted threats to aggregate food supply, which is currently at a surplus, in the ensuing decades and centuries; meanwhile, HFI addresses the persistence of food scarcity within the household, juxtaposed against an abundance of wealth and food, over the past several decades and in the present time. To me, the problem of HFI is just as urgent as that of food security, if not more so considering its immediate time frame. And from the perspective of income-based frameworks, its solutions reside in the past rather than in the future. Therefore, the responses I am proposing are neither interdisciplinary, novel, feel-good, nor prospective, but problem-specific, perennial, political, and historically proven. The intention behind this study is not to reject trends towards the former in HFI reduction activities, but to present a neglected counterpoint to prevailing discourses.

Amid growing publicity for food-based initiatives, I worry that we have left behind casualties of “roll-back” neoliberalism, and forgotten about the systems that used to support them. In lieu of a functional social safety net, wealthy countries have merely been redistributing “leftover food” to “left-behind people” through the charitable sector (Riches 2018). Although I recognize the need for short-term HFI management strategies at the present time, “short-term” measures such as food banks have become the status quo for the past several decades due to vested corporate and governmental interest groups. The institutionalization of food banks, which

were originally conceived as a short-term emergency resource, belies a prolonged state of emergency to which Canadian society has become desensitized. To a certain degree, I see community food programs as an extended façade, rather than structural repair, to this hidden state of emergency. Although community food programs tend to provide food with more nutrition and dignity, their recipients remain unable to purchase food on their own terms.

Due in part to the disproportionate influence of food-based discourses, which are at best unproven for reducing food insecurity, we lack the political direction to (re)implement “tried and true” safety net solutions that have consistently been proven to reduce food insecurity since the Great Depression. Rather than a hypothetical society in which we redistribute and/or grow sufficient food for food insecure populations, I envision communities that do not need to rely on food aid – a reality of the not-too-distant past. While warehouse-style food banks appear to be an indelible feature of Canadian cities today, a testament to the power of food charity discourse, they did not even exist prior to the 1980s (Riches 2018; Power 1999). From the Great Depression until that time, a robust welfare state, characterized by progressive taxation and social spending, ensured sufficient financial resources for living necessities such as food. I am proposing a return to this model, which has since been dismantled by “roll-back” neoliberal policies favouring limited government, and overridden by the “roll-out” of neoliberal institutions and modes of governance (Peck & Tickell 2007).

Therefore, I argue that the restoration of the welfare state entails confronting and reversing these neoliberal processes, which are seldom acknowledged in popular HFI discourses. Although community food initiatives arguably represent symptoms of “roll-back neoliberalism” and features of “roll-out” neoliberalism, they could potentially provide important platforms for advocacy and critical solidarity so long as they are prepared to engage with poverty. The present

study supports income-based discourses established in social determinants of health (SDH) and political economic literature, with the innovation of bridging these approaches with community action. In this chapter, I will situate my research within existing food- and income-based responses to HFI, recommend strategies for HFI reduction, and then suggest areas of further research considering the gaps and shortcomings within my own project.

Comparing Apples to Oranges: Food- and Income-based Responses

Food-based Community Responses

The present study is in accordance with a body of SDH literature that questions the utility of food-based initiatives, which comprise the overwhelming majority of responses to HFI. There is no evidence, neither within the present study nor within prior research, to suggest that community food initiatives reduce HFI (Tarasuk 2017; Loopstra 2018). Studies thus far, while limited, have only indicated the contrary: that they confer marginal relief to a small subset of the population without improving dietary outcomes at the community level (Loopstra 2018).

Tellingly, HFI has persisted and increased over nearly 40 years of intensifying food bank operations in Canada (Riches & Tarasuk 2014). Less than one-quarter of food insecure Canadians utilize food banks (Loopstra & Tarasuk 2015), and, of these individuals, 70% of participants in Tarasuk & Beaton's (1999) study reported severe food insecurity despite regular food bank usage.

Lack of efficacy applies not only to food banks, but also to community food programs – perhaps even more so due to their smaller scale. Although studies of community kitchens (characterized by educational cooking activities) have demonstrated increases to healthy food access and intake among participants (Iacovou et al. 2013), these benefits tend to be tenuous due

to precarious funding, staff availability, and program schedules – factors cited by all food program facilitators in the present study (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum 2007; Loopstra 2018). In a study of good food box programs, food insecurity among participants remained unchanged after an 8-month period (Miewald et al. 2012). Increases to food insecurity for program dropouts may have been more indicative of declining household circumstances than they were of program efficacy (Loopstra 2018). Even if community food initiatives were effective, and they certainly are for other objectives such as social connectivity, participation would still depend on the household circumstances of target populations, which requires structural interventions beyond the domain of the community. In the present study, several food program participants experienced a higher degree of household stability, and presumably food security, due to their residence in social housing, which is inaccessible to many other members of the low-income community. Once again, this returns to the centrality of safety net solutions.

Although the impetus towards increasing capacity, empathy, food quality, and inclusivity may improve program services, these measures still fail to address the structural source of HFI, which is a malfunctioning social safety net – not an insufficient food system. Ultimately, people are food insecure not because they lack access to food programs, affordable food retail, or food skills, but because they do not have enough money to purchase healthy food (Tarasuk 2017). If HFI is defined as the “[inadequate] access to the variety or quantity of food that they need due to *lack of money*” (Statistics Canada 2015) or “the inadequate or insecure access to sufficient food because of *financial constraints*” (Dachner & Tarasuk 2018), then food programs do nothing to improve the financial circumstances underpinning this condition. Even with the provision of healthy food in some initiatives, these programs still restrict choice and autonomy due to their clientele’s lack of purchasing power. In this regard, community-based initiatives – even those

with best practices – only represent superficial, “top-soil” responses that bury deep-rooted structural causes of inequality. The present study challenges the dominance of community food programs and food charity, which have been inaccurately framed as solutions to HFI in various discourses, and have thus become engrained into the public consciousness as such.

Food policy responses

Food-based approaches have gained influence in the policy arena, reflecting their public popularity, just as income-based approaches have declined. In cities, food strategies that function as roadmaps for local food policies and initiatives have become popular with municipal authorities worldwide (Sonnino 2016). As evidenced in the present study, these documents carry limited utility for HFI reduction because they focus on the production/distribution of food rather than the financial means to purchase it. This is partly by nature of jurisdiction since income policies, unlike local food policies, lie largely beyond municipal control (Mah & Thang 2013; Collins et al. 2014). At the federal level, the newly-unveiled Food Policy for Canada similarly sidesteps issues of poverty. Despite emphasizing the need to improve access to food, particularly for “the poor and people in vulnerable situations,” the national food policy received criticism for its lack of acknowledgement for income interventions (Government of Canada 2019b). Instead, it focuses on community food initiatives for which the federal government pledged \$50 million to local food infrastructure “primarily for the less privileged” (Government of Canada 2019b). Even according to an executive of FoodShare Toronto, which runs community food programs, “this is not how we respond to a crisis like food insecurity,” which is an issue that is “largely around income” (Hui 2019). In McIntyre and Anderson’s (2016, p. 33) words, “the only way to

eliminate household food insecurity in Canada is to ensure that every individual has access to an adequate income.”

Whether the cost of food rises or falls, a variable potentially affected by food policy, the overriding determinant of HFI is income. In Canada, the cost of food is already low relative to other countries (Black 2015), whereas rates of poverty and income inequality are higher than in developed countries with stronger systems of social support (Raphael et al. 2018). According to the USDA (2019), Canadian consumers spend, on average, 9.1% of household income on food – the fifth lowest rate among 104 countries surveyed. Yet out of 36 OECD countries with available data in 2016, Canada ranked 24th in social expenditures as a percentage of national GDP (OECD 2019b). This may explain why Canada’s relative income poverty measure (0.12 in 2016), which describes the share of the population with an income of less than 50% of the national median income, has been consistently higher than that of countries with higher levels of social spending, such as Finland (0.06), Sweden (0.09), Denmark (0.06), Norway (0.08), Belgium (0.1), France (0.08), Germany (0.1), and the Netherlands (0.08) (OECD 2019a). Similarly, Canada’s GINI coefficient (0.307), which measures income inequality, is larger than that of all of the aforementioned countries. Given Canada’s relatively low cost of food, and high rates of poverty, policies pertaining to income hold more relevance to HFI reduction than those organized around the food system.

Income-based Policy Responses

Income-based responses, the domain of provincial and federal governments, have consistently proven to be much more effective than food-based initiatives, which tend to occur at the community level (Loopstra 2018). Income supports afforded to Canadian seniors, which essentially provide them with a guaranteed basic income, represent an exemplar for HFI

reduction in SDH literature (Emery et al. 2013a; McIntyre, Dutton, Kwok, & Emery 2016; Dachner & Tarasuk 2018; Tarasuk 2017). To illustrate, the risk of HFI among individuals on income assistance drops by nearly 50% when Canadians reach pension age, at which point they are eligible for Guaranteed Income Supplement and Old Age Security payments; combined, they provide more than double the income of individuals on provincial welfare in most cases (McIntyre, Dutton, Kwok, & Emery 2016; Dachner & Tarasuk 2018). This protective effect was confirmed by a formerly insecure respondent in the present study, who attributed his newfound food security and personal stability to reaching pension age, which had doubled his income, as well as his recent attainment of social housing. As a current advocate for the low-income community, he demonstrates the empowering effect of adequate social services.

A notable example of policy solutions at the provincial level is Newfoundland and Labrador's implementation of a poverty reduction strategy in 2006, which nearly halved the incidence of HFI among social assistance (Income Support) recipients between 2007 and 2012 (Loopstra et al. 2015). This plan included the following measures: improvements to Income Support rates, which were increased and indexed to the cost of living; the facilitation of employment among Income Support recipients through cash transfers and the retention of benefits for the first month of employment; and the reduction of costs of living through affordable housing policies, extended prescription coverage, enhanced childcare support, and decreased low-income taxation (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador 2006; 2014). In addition to social services, the poverty reduction plan also addressed inadequate employment income by raising the minimum wage from \$6 in 2006 to \$10 in 2010 (Economic and Statistics Branch 2014).

The present study takes place amid incipient policy action against poverty and HFI, with several recent developments pertaining to these matters. In 2018, the federal government released Canada's first Poverty Reduction Strategy, which set poverty reduction targets of 20% by 2020 and 50% of 2030 relative to 2015 levels. If these goals were to be met, they would certainly have a large impact on HFI reduction. Although the results of this strategy remain to be seen, the establishment of food insecurity as an indicator for poverty reduction progress signifies recognition for the problem (Government of Canada 2018). BC then unveiled its own poverty reduction strategy in 2019, the first of its kind in the province, with a reduction target of 25% by 2024. While the federal and provincial strategies represent important initial steps towards poverty reduction, unprecedented in recent decades, they are far from comprehensive.

Critics of BC's Poverty Reduction Strategy argue that it introduces few new interventions beyond ones that have been insufficient thus far. The upcoming minimum wage increase to \$15.20/hour, for instance, still falls below the living wage required to live in the Vancouver region, which was estimated to be \$20.91/hour (Ivanova et al. 2018). Moreover, meagre increases of \$100/month in 2017 and \$50/month in 2019 to both Income Assistance and Disability Assistance rates fail to compensate for a decade-long freeze in rates between 2007 and 2017 (Robinson 2019). These increased rates leave income and disability payments at 50% (\$760/month) and 65% (\$1235/month) of the Market Basket Measure, which is the province's poverty line, respectively (Ivanova & Hemingway 2019). All food insecure respondents in the present study, along with several food program facilitators, concurred that these rates are ridiculously inadequate for covering their basic needs, including food and shelter, let alone for living a dignified life. Other than the 2019 hike in income and disability assistance, the BC Poverty Reduction Strategy has not pledged additional increases to these rates.

As mentioned in the literature review, federal and provincial poverty reduction strategies prioritize members of the “deserving poor,” such as children and families, over their “undeserving” counterparts, including individuals who are unable to participate in the labour force due to physical and mental challenges. This selective approach was ineffective in Ontario, where the prevalence of HFI remained stable over the past decade despite the rollout of its own poverty reduction strategy. Tarasuk (2017) attributes its lack of success to the focus on households with children, which excludes a large proportion of households experiencing food insecurity. One limitation of existing interventions, such as increases to the minimum wage, social assistance rates, affordable housing, is their piecemeal approach, which targets specific population groups individually and inequitably (Tarasuk 2017). Since the common denominator among a diverse food insecure population is inadequate income, a Basic Income Guarantee (BIG), according to SDH proponents, would theoretically reach the entire food insecure population at once (Tarasuk 2017). In an encouraging development for HFI reduction, a basic income approach is currently being studied by the BC government.

From policy to politics

From a political economy perspective, BIG advocates still fail to account for broader structures of power, along with the ways in which a BIG could be embedded within these structures (Raphael et al. 2018). While a basic income would certainly reduce poverty and attendant adverse health outcomes such as HFI, this effect can only go as far as Canada’s deficient welfare state allows. Given that Canadian governments will only consider a BIG if it is revenue-neutral or even cost-effective (Government of Ontario 2017), it is unlikely to elevate low-income people to comfortable levels above the poverty line – especially in the absence of

additional social supports such as subsidized housing, prescription drugs, and employment training (Raphael et al. 2018). In fact, governmental authorities may even use a BIG to justify rollbacks to these social supports, as well as continued economic and political inequities produced by neoliberalism. These sustained inequities are characteristics of the liberal welfare state, which describes regimes that prioritize market, rather than state, solutions to welfare problems (Myles 1998). Compared with other OECD nations, (neo)liberal welfare states including Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, UK, and USA contain greater income inequality, higher poverty rates, and diminished social supports because business interests take precedence over the basic needs of citizens (Raphael et al. 2018). Un-coincidentally, these countries comprise Riches' (2018) core group of "food bank nations," which has expanded to encompass high- and middle-income countries across the globe.

As a part of the liberal welfare state, Canadian governmental responses to HFI have primarily consisted of inaction and indifference, if not outright denial. In 2012, the former Immigration Minister of the Conservative government, Jason Kenney famously denounced concerns raised by DeSchutter's UN hunger envoy as "completely ridiculous" and a "waste of resources to come to Canada to give political lectures" (Canadian Press 2012). For all his willful ignorance, Kenney's response ironically illuminates the politics behind both HFI action and its lack thereof. More recently, the Ontario Progressive Conservative government's abrupt termination of a basic income pilot research program launched under the former Liberal government is one example of political influence and shortsightedness in HFI reduction policies (Rushowy 2018). In spite of the growing body of literature critiquing the policy environment surrounding HFI (Tarasuk 2017; Emery et al. 2013b; Dachner & Tarasuk 2018), governments have paid little heed, with some recent exceptions, to recurring recommendations for

strengthening social supports. Mendl-Zambo and Raphael (2019) argue that policy analysis has hitherto been ineffective due to its failure to reckon with political motivations for governmental indifference. Therefore, this thesis develops an argument for politicizing existing HFI-related policy advocacy in ways that explicitly respond to neoliberalism (Mendl-Zambo & Raphael 2019). Another issue with HFI policy advocacy is that it frequently occurs in academic isolation from the public realm, a segment of society that holds significant political power. By reinforcing the link between poverty and HFI, this study aims to steer academic, policymaking, and public attention from food-based social action to income-based political advocacy.

A Recipe for Change

From what I have demonstrated in the present study and in previous literature, HFI is an issue rooted in income, rather than food, largely requiring centralized, rather than community-based, solutions. However, that is not to say that HFI reduction activities cannot occur within civil society. Quite the contrary: communities may offer crucial political resistance where researchers and policymakers have been unable to. In this section, I will propose actions for different stakeholder groups in order to leverage their respective spheres of influence.

Private Sector

Given that over 60% of the food insecure population in Canada is dependent on employment income (Tarasuk & Dachner 2014), the private sector represents both a large part of the problem of HFI and a far-reaching component of its solution. The solution lies not in corporate charity, which has arguably perpetuated HFI, but in vast reforms to a labour market that has, in recent decades, failed to provide its workers with enough money to buy food.

Restoring adequate wages, benefits, job security, and employment opportunities, which were standard conditions of employment in the past, would reduce HFI far more effectively and extensively than through charitable initiatives. Thus, I believe true “corporate social responsibility” comes from organizations improving their own labour and tax practices rather than from conspicuous donations to other causes, food banks being a popular choice. In my view, food is a basic entitlement procured with adequate monetary compensation – not a gift for which exploitative institutions deserve public (and tax) credit. Although many corporations are economically capable of providing fair compensation, they fail to do so by virtue of exploitative class politics that prioritize profit over the welfare of workers.

At the other end of the private sector, small-scale businesses may operate on more compassionate terms yet lack the financial means to sustain themselves and support the tax and transfer system. Whether or not they are financially viable, social enterprises still present promising opportunities for HFI reduction at the community scale. In Vancouver, an urban farm (Sole Foods) and a catering company (Potluck) that employ low-income people represent alternative economies that reduce HFI through income rather than through food itself. By contrast to non-market food programs, they try to provide living wages, job opportunities, and employable skills – things that reduce HFI in the long term. In my study area, the Sharing Farm could thus consider transitioning from merely donating food to building livelihoods through food. It is also important to note that livelihoods do not need to be limited to food businesses, and that the opportunities for social enterprise are diverse.

In this sense, I am not opposed to capitalism itself, but neoliberal capitalism: I support capitalist frameworks that prioritize social well-being, including social enterprise, and more importantly, Keynesian economics. I favour the latter because it would be precipitous to bank

HFI reduction on either the limited conscience of corporations, or the tenuous financial resources of communities. Contrary to the premise of the liberal welfare state, market mechanisms rarely resolve welfare problems; and even when they do, they depend on government interventions to safeguard that effect. The private sector as a whole thus requires government regulation to distribute its excesses more evenly among society. From this perspective, the following subsection will elaborate upon the government's central role in securing the basic needs of its citizens, which include food.

Governments

The onus for ensuring universal access to healthy and adequate food, which I consider to be a human right, ultimately falls on the state in a rights-based framework. From this perspective, the federal government's overarching task is to guarantee financial access to food through policies and services, including progressive taxation, labour protections, and social programs, that collectively comprise the social safety net. This will involve reversing decades of roll-back neoliberalism that has progressively – regressively, rather – diminished safety net functions and downscaled them onto provinces, municipalities, communities, and even individuals (Ayo 2010; Riches 2018; Riches & Tarasuk 2014; Teghtsoonian 2009; Whiteside 2009). Going forward, federal authorities will need to increase coordination with, and financial support to, provinces for their ailing social services. Together, they will need to develop robust income policies that are indexed to the cost of living, including increases to social programs (e.g. Employment Insurance, disability assistance, income assistance) and labour entitlements (e.g. the minimum wage). Given the uneven provision of social benefits and services, serious consideration should be given to the prospect of a BIG, provided that it supplements, rather than erodes, existing social supports.

In addition to frontline solutions related to income, affordable housing policies may also contribute to HFI reduction considering the tradeoff between housing and food expenses (Sriram & Tarasuk 2016). Based on the present study, my impression is that the prohibitive cost of housing in Canadian Metropolitan Areas such as Greater Vancouver has a larger impact on HFI than the cost of food itself. Notably, affordable housing is one of the only poverty reduction measures over which municipal governments have some control. Even then, the primary authority for subsidized social housing lies with the provincial government currently, and the federal government formerly, prior to drastic cutbacks to funding for social housing and co-operatives in 1993 (City of Richmond 2017). Since higher levels of government have more resources at their disposal, the federal government should re-commit to funding and administering affordable housing – a responsibility they have deflected for the past several decades. Simply lobbying for the aforementioned poverty reduction measures, however, may not be sufficient to produce truly equitable health outcomes. The achievement of such requires not only policy advocacy, but resistance to corporate influence within the policy arena. This is where civil society enters into play.

Civil Society

While senior governments are solely responsible for implementing necessary structural interventions, the role of communities is to apply political pressure for these interventions. As congregational sites for food insecure individuals and people who care about them, community food programs intuitively lend themselves to this function. They are theoretically well-positioned to give voice to their clients; draw attention to the overlooked severity of HFI in Canada; condemn the unacceptable necessity of their services in a wealthy nation; and resist the

neoliberal policy environment that has created these conditions. Instead, the majority of community food programs have done precisely the opposite: conceal clients from public view; underplay the magnitude of the problem while overstating their utility for resolving it; “feed the need” for food assistance by enabling government inaction; and foster “uncritical solidarity.” While I understand the need to maintain public support for their services, critical solidarity, a much less marketable form of compassion, is a prerequisite for political action against HFI. Therefore, I propose shifting from popular food-based objectives of charity, education, and community development, which are politically neutral, if not oppressive, to income-based community organizing on behalf of the politically and economically marginalized.

A more complicated food program objective is that of environmental sustainability, which bears little relevance, but equal importance, to HFI reduction. In addition to obscuring the problem of HFI within food programs, sustainability initiatives may even perpetuate it. Many discourses invoke the food waste argument, which is anathema to structural solutions to both food insecurity and food waste. Food programs have been constructing synergies to HFI where they do not necessarily exist, such as its connection to the food system, and ignoring them where they do, namely in its potential for political action. Due to the imperative of achieving sustainable food systems, however, I believe that sustainability and HFI reduction activities can coexist within community food programs as long as the two objectives are clearly demarcated from one another. Food programs should thus incorporate income-based discourses if not as a replacement, then as a necessary counterpart to food-based discourses. Access to local food can nevertheless be socially, mentally, and physically beneficial to food insecure individuals, even if it does not reduce the condition of HFI itself.

Unlike typical community food initiatives, several organizations have done so very successfully, and represent exemplary models for civil engagement in that sense. In Ontario, a “union” of church food pantry volunteers have pragmatically confronted the paradox of food charity, providing charitable food assistance while advocating for poverty reduction policies that would eliminate the need for their services in the first place (Fisher 2017). Their name, “Freedom 90,” derives from the desire of members, many of whom are seniors, to “retire” from volunteering by 90. They express frustration with the perpetual state of emergency for the past several decades, and recognize the charitable sector’s role in masking its cause: an inadequate social safety net. By contrast to food charity discourse, which entrenches itself within society, Freedom 90’s ultimate goal is to make the very sector in which it operates – food banks – obsolete.

In Toronto, a community food centre entitled The Stop similarly frames its charitable functions as a secondary objective to social change. After shifting its focus from service delivery to social change, The Stop has since incorporated various food programs and, most importantly, advocacy for expanded government assistance. Notably, they sponsored two campaigns to create public awareness for the inadequacy of income supports. This community food centre model integrates multiple programs, both food-based and income-based, in ways that are more meaningful than strategic alliances and convenient synergies. All of its activities, including food-based programs, foster social understanding among different classes and ethnicities, particularly with respect to marginalized individuals. These qualities are much needed in Richmond, a city deeply divided by class and race. Fortunately, I see great potential for emulating the aforementioned examples of critical solidarity in existing services such as church community

meals, the food bank, and the Sharing Farm. The reconstruction of such spaces, however, will require discursive tools that have not been featured in popular media.

Media

While academically established, income-based discourses are vastly underrepresented in a media environment saturated with food-based discourses. This is unsurprising due to the disproportionate power of the corporate sector, as well as the universal appeal of seemingly apolitical movements. For instance, laudatory texts about corporate social responsibility, often about donations to food banks or community food programs, disguise exploitative labour practices of donor entities, consolidate unquestioning public support for recipient initiatives, and placate political backlash against neoliberalism. Although the private sector may indeed play a significant role in HFI reduction, its contributions should assume the form of mandated tax and transfers, as well as sufficient wages and benefits to employees rather than corporate charity. Ironically, it quietly undermines the former interventions while embracing the latter to public fanfare. As demonstrated in the present study, Riches (2018), and Fisher (2017), the media has assisted in constructing a pedestal of corporate munificence that elevates food bank stakeholders to a level at which they can evade criticism for perpetuating HFI. Instead of continuing to present food banks as a positive feature of society, the media should frame them as a negative indicator for a failing social safety net. Uncritical positivity is characteristic not only to discourse about food banks, but also to food production or education initiatives. Although these programs are ultimately good things, their popular portrayal as solutions to food insecurity, without any redress to poverty, has been counterproductive to HFI reduction.

Another problematic media narrative has been that of foreign wealth, reportedly in the form of real estate, money laundering, or bad drivers in fancy vehicles. These stories not only fuel racial resentment, but also obscure neighbourhood poverty while silencing those who experience it. Even when coverage of poverty occurs, it tends to gawk at the phenomenon within the Downtown Eastside (Wong 2016). We must keep in mind that poverty is rarely as concentrated and conspicuous as it is depicted in the media; oftentimes, it is discreetly scattered throughout the urban periphery, even in the wealthiest of suburbs. Therefore, I would like to see the media give voice to the politically and economically invisible, including suburban food insecure individuals, rather than benevolent corporations and racial fearmongers.

Academia

The imbalance of representation between food-based and income-based discourses in popular media reflects their differential permeability to wide audiences. Local food movement and nutritional discourses prevalent in academia have amassed public favour largely due to the universal appeal of food, a trendy yet timeless topic of interest. These discourses reach society at large through a wealth of documentaries, books, news articles, and social media featuring enlightened eateries, rustic family farms, and philosophical food producers. While food is attractive, poverty is much less so. Even though community food security and food sovereignty frameworks often respond to those living in poverty, they tend to retain a focus on food rather than income. This has been an unintentional source of confusion and distraction with regards to the income-based causes and solutions to HFI, which are well-established in the Social Determinants of Health field. Since HFI is inherently a matter of food justice, just as it is one of

health equity, food-based frameworks should incorporate income-based discourses to a larger extent in the future, and potentially use food as a segue into discussions about income.

By contrast to food-based discourses, income-based are much less publicly appealing, yet much more effective for reducing HFI. Although income-based proponents will never be as contemporary, synergistic, or pleasurable as food-based discourses, its predominantly academic proponents must play a bigger role in public engagement. So far, income-based discourses have been largely confined to academia, where they have limited potential for collective action. SDH proponents, for instance, have lobbied policymakers to limited success, while failing to engage civil society. In my view, the framework of political economy is better-suited to civil society precisely because it does not operate within the policymaking realm. By contrast to SDH's academic façade of political objectivity, political economy explicitly responds to the de-politicized, even covertly neoliberal, nature of many food-based discourses. Although this approach inevitably repels popular appeal, it would attract critical solidarity among potential supporters, including food program stakeholders. It appeared to me that the present study's food program facilitators were already critically inclined; however, they simply lacked the discursive guidelines, which has been limited to food-based jargon thus far, to act upon these latent inclinations. As a developing HFI discourse, political economy has yet to be made widely accessible. Thus, the responsibility of the academic is to disseminate and co-create this knowledge with civil society.

One of the first steps toward reifying critical concepts is to alter misleading terminology within academia. I consider “food insecurity” and “Household Food Insecurity” to be misnomers because of their false association with the umbrella term of “food security,” which typically refers to national or community food supply. As I have emphasized in the present study, HFI is

not a matter of food supply or (re)distribution, but one of poverty. To make this connection explicit, I suggest employing the alternative term of “food poverty,” which is more widely used in the UK. Another advantage of this term is that it strikes a balance between sentiment and context. If the evocative descriptor of “hunger” removes the condition from its socio-economic circumstances, and the academic phrase “Household Food Insecurity” detaches the concept from those who experience it, then “food poverty” combines the accessibility of the former, with the accuracy of the latter. Alternatively, Riches’ (2018) phrase of “domestic hunger in the rich world” or “rich world hunger” similarly invokes social inequality while maintaining the embodied resonance of “hunger.”

I also recommend utilizing the right to food framework as an organizing principle that is intuitive to the public. While the “primary duty bearer” of rights is the state alone (Riches 2018), the public, alongside researchers and international institutions, must hold senior governments accountable to this role. It is important to emphasize that food is as much a human right as it is a commodity, one that requires sufficient income to procure. This concept is inadequately acknowledged in food-based discourses’ interpretation of the right to food, which typically presents food as something to be grown or distributed, rather than purchased.

Inviting missing voices to the table

Since the causes and solutions to HFI are already well-established, but lacking in public recognition and support, further research should focus on strategies for communicating, rather than confirming, existing knowledge. In addition to the translation of knowledge, researchers will need to create more opportunities for collaboration with facilitators, volunteers, and food insecure individuals, whose voices are paradoxically missing from the conversation surrounding

HFI, in order to develop much-needed critical solidarity. Participatory research offers a potentially effective method for bridging academic and civil society. For example, the Nova Scotia Food Costing Project involved food insecure individuals in collecting data about the affordability of food for over a decade. In a discourse analysis of data collected, Knezevic et al. (2014) found that the participatory process was itself empowering for participants as they reckoned with the disempowering social structures shaping their circumstances. Although they exhibited the internalization of dominant discourses generating powerlessness and self-blame, unpacking that discourse together allowed them to create their own, alternative discourse responding to systemic marginalization. For many participants, this stimulated a desire to create change within the community and broader policy landscape. Once alternative discourses have been developed within safe spaces, they require public platforms to reach society at large. Since critical information is unlikely to travel through neoliberal media networks, which is largely responsible for generating uncritical solidarity, researchers should explore and forge alternative channels for reaching wider audiences. One such outlet may be Megaphone magazine, which not only generates profit for its homeless and low-income vendors in Vancouver and Victoria, but also tells stories about and by these vendors. It is doubly empowering as an alternative economy *and* media network. In Richmond itself, creative initiatives such as the play staged by the poverty advocacy organization could also represent case studies in future research. I consider alternative discourse networks to be more meaningful, yet less studied, than alternative food networks in terms of HFI reduction, although these systems may be intertwined.

Alternative discourses may help to break down animosity between different social groups, which represents a significant barrier to critical solidarity requiring further acknowledgement and understanding. As I have noted in the present study, the white

population's resentment towards the Chinese community, including "wealthy Chinese seniors" utilizing food charity, as well as the Chinese community's hostility towards the predominantly white low-income population have restricted compassionate understanding and empathy, let alone critical solidarity, for food insecure individuals. Lateral violence between marginalized groups, such as Chinese, low-income, and agrarian communities in Richmond, may therefore be a research topic that is highly relevant to building critical solidarity. Critical researchers could explore strategies for translating social justice issues across racial, cultural, and economic barriers without inciting more reactionary prejudice. In these cases, I urge understanding to address – but not justify – the roots of racism and classism in social malaise, whether it be related to geographic, economic, or cultural, exclusion. Empathy may not be the most instinctive response to violence, but it is perhaps the most necessary.

The complexity and multiplicity of social justice also complicates food-based discourse's "win-win" rhetoric regarding economic, environmental, and racial justice. To some extent, Richmond's politics subvert the expectation that they are always convergent, although potential synergies between them certainly exist. Therefore, achieving justice in one respect, without diminishing that in others, requires a degree of sensitivity that has perhaps been lacking in HFI stakeholders and researchers, including myself. How do we react when the gentrifying agents are people of colour; when racial prejudice is inflicted by environmentalists, the low-income community, and anti-hunger advocates; or when increased racial representation in public office has also produced perennially conservative local politics? These are awkward questions to be reckoned with as we adapt to a changing world order, particularly as it plays out in gateway cities to the Asia-Pacific.

Although HFI is nearly exclusively tied to income, its actors bisect multiple layers of identity including but not limited to class. Political economy, which primarily concerns class, did not account for these other social categories. This inadequacy highlights not only limits to, but opportunities for, theory. Feminist political economy (FPE) theory, for instance, could offer more insight into interrelationships between class, gender (a category that was not addressed in the present study), and race (a topic requiring deeper analysis than was undertaken in the present study). For example, further research under this framework may attempt to resolve the mystery of the Chinese seniors, which endures to the conclusion of this thesis. Although I have refuted the myth of their wealth in my observations, I was unable to obtain their neglected perspectives due to language barriers. In future studies, researchers could consider accessing these perspectives through Chinese-language interviews, and telling their stories in ways that humanize a misunderstood population. Such research could elucidate the circumstances that attracted Chinese seniors to charitable food services, as well as inequality within immigrant communities that are commonly portrayed to be wealthy. It would convey that we cannot malign (perceived) wealth, just as we cannot ostracize poverty, and that critical solidarity is necessarily intersectional.

The Takeaway

The main takeaway of the present study is that HFI is not necessarily convoluted, although the difficulty of grappling with HFI lies in building political support for the issue, and resistance to neoliberalism. In Canadian cities, HFI is primarily associated with income, much more so than it is correlated to the availability, price, and distribution of food. Its income-based causes and solutions have been well-known all along, at least until they were obscured by food-

based discourses. Given the disproportionate popularity of food-based discourses, the main contribution of the present study is to draw public attention to frameworks that emphasize income. Out of existing income-based discourses, political economy is the only one that identifies HFI's lacuna in politics rather than in knowledge. Politically speaking, HFI reduction activities lack recognition for food as a human right, willpower among policymakers, critical solidarity, and discursive clarity. The roles and responsibilities for achieving these elements are as follows.

As a human right, food is to be guaranteed by the state for its citizens (Riches 2018). In "food bank nations" such as Canada, this federal responsibility has been unfairly downloaded onto provincial governments, municipalities, communities, and individuals who are struggling to bear this burden. Moreover, it has been unsuitably offloaded onto a corporate sector that stands to profit from the charitable perpetuation, rather than structural reduction, of hunger. These neoliberal processes have contributed to the disintegration of the social safety net beginning in the 1990s, which has led to widespread food insecurity since that time (Riches 2018; Riches & Tarasuk 2014). Therefore, the task of senior policymakers is to restore critically diminished safety net functions including income assistance, disability assistance, employment insurance, and affordable housing, while holding the corporate sector responsible to social wellbeing through labour and tax regulations. These poverty-reducing services and policies are much more effective for HFI reduction than community-based food initiatives, which have paradoxically disguised, or even enabled, retractions to the social safety net (Collins et al. 2014; Loopstra 2018; Mendly-Zambo & Raphael 2019; Tarasuk 2017). But if communities endorse food as a human right, one that requires fundamentally adequate incomes to realize, they can begin to make other, more impactful contributions to HFI reduction.

The role of civil society is not necessarily to assume the state's responsibility for HFI reduction, but to hold it accountable to that responsibility. Communities should continue to produce or provide food to those in need; however, they must also leverage their position to draw awareness to, rather than conceal, the (neo)liberal welfare state's perpetuation of this need in society. Food insecure people and their allies represent a potentially sizeable source of political pressure that has been de-fused by "uncritical solidarity" in the nonprofit sector, disempowered by a lack of representation in discourse, and dismissed by the world at large. In order to foment political action, communities will require more critical HFI frameworks that incorporate the perspectives of their overlooked members. Since critical discourses such as political economy are often limited to academia, the role of researchers is to make them more accessible to civil society. This may involve the reification of terminology, the co-creation of knowledge through participatory methods, and the dissemination of such knowledge through alternative media networks.

As I have demonstrated, HFI reduction will require a concerted effort from all sectors of society, which hold unequal levels of culpability for, and authority over, HFI. Within their scopes of action, we must acknowledge limitations in jurisdiction, recognize opportunities for further action, re-structure hierarchies of power, and re-imagine operational models, particularly in a complicated non-profit sector. The village it takes to reduce HFI may not resemble the agrarian or charitable ones we have been discursively accustomed to. Nor may its actors assume the archetypal roles we see in local news and in the uncritical "fight against hunger." Rather, there are no heroes and villains in critical HFI reduction – only humans who carry inalienable rights, including that to food.

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APPENDIX

Lists of Interview Questions

For Food Program Clients

- What are barriers to accessing food in Richmond?
- How do you overcome these barriers? What are limitations to these strategies?
- Do aspects of your identity (e.g. race, ethnicity, age) affect your ability to access food?
- How do meal programs affect your quality of life?
- Why do you participate in food programs?
- In your opinion, what are effective policy responses to hunger?
- In your opinion, what are effective community responses to hunger?
- In what ways do food programs enable or prevent dignified food access?
- What types of food are offered at food programs?

For Community Facilitators

- Can you describe your program(s)?
- Could you describe the general demographics of program participants (e.g. race, gender, age)?
- Is your program underutilized by specific demographic groups? Why might that be the case?
- What are the main barriers to household food security [definition] in Richmond?
- How do these barriers vary by race, gender, and/or age?
- How do food insecure individuals navigate these barriers? What are limitations to these strategies?

- What are theoretical, ideological, political, or religious ideas that inform your organization's work?
- What types of food are offered?
- In your opinion, what are effective policy responses to hunger?
- In your opinion, what are effective community responses to hunger?
- I've read several articles about hidden homelessness or poverty in Metro Vancouver suburbs. Do you see this phenomenon in Richmond?
- Is food insecurity or poverty in general stigmatized in Richmond? By which communities?