

**You Eat What You Are:
Constructions of Poverty and Responses to Hunger**

by

Eleanor Anne Carlson

B.A., University of Alberta, 2007

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Dr. Margo Matwychuk, Department of Anthropology
Supervisor

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Departmental Member

ABSTRACT

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Canadian social scientist researchers have frequently pointed out the necessity of understanding food banks and the conceptualization of food insecurity as political in relation to the institutionalization of food banks and their collective interaction with federal, provincial, and corporate bodies. However, a comprehensive understanding of this role must additionally engage with discursive practices at the community level. Food banks, as the source to which hundreds of thousands of Canadians turn each month to receive temporary relief from hunger, offer a wealth of information in this regard. Through a discourse analysis of documentation produced and collected by a prominent British Columbia food bank, this research investigates how discourses, images, and constructions of poverty and food insecurity influence and are influenced by the policies and practices of providing food relief. Overall, 1391 documents were analyzed, totaling 3285 pages covering the time period from 1989 up to 2008. This thesis concludes that although various understandings of food insecurity exist within the food bank documents, certain understandings are more commonly produced, specifically in the external documentation, as well as in food bank policies and procedures. Commonly produced understandings included an individualized conceptualization of food insecurity and of

those who are food insecure and discourses of differential deservedness among food bank users. Policies and procedures included a malleability of food distribution eligibility and a utilitarian guide to the framework of food bank operations. I argue that the reproduction of these discourses, along with the implementation of these particular policies and procedures within the food bank, are key processes through which the possibility of a conceptualization of food insecurity as political is diminished at the individual and community level.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Images	viii
List of Tables	ix
Acknowledgments	x

Chapter one: Introduction

1.1 Research topic	1
1.2 Research context	4
1.3 Research objectives	6
1.4 Research questions	11
1.5 Literature: Between food and poverty	11
1.5.1 Approaches of poverty and relief practices	13
1.5.2 Society and hunger relief organizations in Canada	14
1.5.3 The depoliticization of hunger and food insecurity	17
1.5.4 Shifting Canadian discourses of food insecurity	18
1.5.5. Canadian’s international and domestic rights-based understandings of food ..	21
1.5.6 Understandings of food bank donations and users	23
1.5.7 Community food insecurity	24
1.5.8 Neoliberalism: Individualism and community	26
1.6 Conceptual framework	28

1.7 Significance	30
1.8 Overview of the thesis	32

Chapter two: Methods

2.1 Research context	34
2.2 Recruitment	38
2.3 Primary material collection	39
2.4 Methods of data analysis	44
2.4.1 Discourse analysis	47
2.4.2 Image analysis	48
2.5 Ethical considerations	49
2.6 Positionality	51
2.7 Chapter summary	52

Chapter three: Understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure

3.1 The individual and the immediate	55
3.1.1 Reference to physical needs and lack of personal ability	55
3.1.2 The legitimacy of the immediate and continuation of food insecurity	58
3.2 The role of systemic inequalities within food bank discourses	64
3.3 The food insecure and community membership	71
3.4 Categories of the deserving poor	73
3.4.1 Families	75
3.4.2 Children	77

3.5 Conclusions	82
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Chapter four: Policies and procedures at the Olive Branch Food Bank

4.1 Malleable hamper eligibility	84
4.1.1 Expansion of hamper service eligibility	85
4.1.2 Food shortages and eligibility	86
4.2 Policies with utilitarian concerns	91
4.3 Community responsibility	97
4.3.1 Community absorption	100
4.4 Conclusions	104

Chapter five: Conclusions, discussion, recommendations, and further research

5.1 Conclusions and discussion	106
5.2 Recommendation.....	118
5.3 Further research	128

References	132
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Appendices

Appendix 1 Detailed breakdown of documents organized by year	144
Appendix 2 Staff and volunteer consent form	146
Appendix 3 Letter of understanding to food bank	150
Appendix 4 Food Banks Canada: Suggested election questions	153

LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1 Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser poster date unknown	54
Image 2 Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser document 1996	79
Image 3 Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser document 1996	80

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Percentage of documents for each year	42
Table 2 Broad categories of documents	42
Table 3 Detailed breakdown of documents organized by year	144

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Research Topic

Hunger in Canada is not a recent phenomenon. It is commonly claimed to have first appeared significantly in recent memory in the 1980s and has been steadily increasing since that time (McIntyre 2003). Coinciding with the increase in hunger is the rise of the number of Canadian cities with food banks. Since 1989 food banks have increased 100 percent (Fawcett & Scott 2007) and are currently found in every province and territory (Food Banks Canada 2010a). As the years pass from a time when Canadian cities did not have food banks, the first starting in Edmonton in 1981 (Tarasuk & Davis 1994), it is not surprising that food banks are increasingly viewed as legitimate responses to hunger (Riches 2002) and that poverty and food insecurity in Canada are often viewed as naturalized phenomena (Coulter 2009) and as a social policy issue, depoliticized (Riches 1997). As illuminated in a speech to the Canadian Association of Food Banks¹ in 2001, the Honorable Adrienne Clarkson, former Governor General of Canada, stated:

I welcomed you a moment ago, but nothing could have pleased me more than to not have you and to not have in existence the food banks where you work. The idea of food banks is now, unfortunately, so entrenched that it has become what I would call a necessary evil (Governor General of Canada 2001).

¹ In 2008 the Canadian Association of Food Banks changed its name to Food Banks Canada.

In March of 2009, 794,738 Canadians received food from food banks; 72,231 were first time users. This number represents a 17.6 percent increase from March of 2008 (Food Banks Canada 2010a). Despite the fact that hundreds of Canadian food banks provide food resources to hundreds of thousands of hungry Canadians each year, food banks consistently struggle to meet the need for food assistance. In 2009, 28 percent of food banks lacked adequate funding and 31 percent lacked sufficient food to meet the need. Further, as the majority of food banks provide limited resources, distributing only one hamper a month containing five or fewer days' worth of food, food banks regularly fall short of adequately providing the nutritional and desired food needs of food bank users (ibid); in the end leaving many Canadians still food insecure.

As food insecurity within Canada has relentlessly grown over the past 30 years, food bank operations have changed and altered, continually endeavoring to adapt to the growing and changing needs of food insecure individuals and communities as well as to the changing availability and acceptability of food redistribution processes. Over the years, Canadian food banks have expanded their operations, increased their efforts to promote donations, launched provincial and federal agencies, and established partnerships with food production and transportation companies. It is through these actions that food insecurity within Canada has become understood as a depoliticized issue (Riches 1997). From the creation of a national food bank association to the corporate and media relations fundamental to today's food resource collection, movement, and redistribution across Canada, food banks have become established and acceptable institutions through which countless Canadians seek short-term solutions to their hunger.

This thesis explores processes through which food bank actions divert the conceptualization of food insecurity as a political issue at the individual and community level. Through an investigation of the understandings of food insecurity at a particular Canadian food bank together with the policies and procedures of food redistribution implemented at it, this research demonstrates a critical location for the depoliticalization of food insecurity within Canada. The research was accomplished through a discourse analysis of documents provided by a major food bank in British Columbia, focusing on the processes through which understandings of “poverty” pertaining to food insecurity are produced and reproduced.

It should be noted that this research is localized and situated, with a focus on the particular understandings of food insecurity and processes of food redistribution over a specific time and at a specific place. However, as the food bank discussed in this research represents a typical Canadian food bank, defined by Valerie Tarasuk and Joan Eakin as an “extra-governmental community organizations that collect donated foodstuffs and redistribute them to the ‘needy’, working largely with volunteer labour and donated equipment facilities” (Tarasuk & Eakin 2003:1506), some findings may have a more generalized application. It is my desire that my analysis be understood as a start of conversations regarding how and why food banks portray food insecure individuals and understand food insecurity based on a selection of materials collected in a particular community.

1.2 Research Context

The specific location for this research is the Olive Branch Food Bank², a well-established food bank in Pembrey³, a city in the province of British Columbia with a metropolitan population of approximately 350,000. In regards to poverty, British Columbia is a unique Canadian province. It currently has the highest average wealth and highest poverty rate in Canada (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives 2010). On the bottom side of this distribution are the one in five British Columbia workers who earn less than 12 dollars an hour. This number is significant, notes Steve Kerstetter, as “it’s a very conservative estimate of what the OECD⁴ defines as a low-wage job” (2010:1). In fact, Sébastien LaRoche-Côté and Claude Dionne point out that compared to corresponding industrialized countries, Canada has one of the largest proportions of low-paid workers (2009). Food Bank Canada’s annual *HungerCount* findings cite low income, whether short or long-term, as the major cause of food insecurity in Canada (Food Banks Canada 2009). In March of 2009, 89,996 individuals were assisted by 93 different food banks within the province, an increase of 15.1 percent from March of 2008 (Food Banks Canada 2010a).

The cost of living in Pembrey is also high compared to much of Canada. Housing is particularly costly and continues to decrease in affordability. For instance, in 1991 British Columbia had the highest proportion of renters spending more than 30 percent of their income on shelter in Canada (BC Stats 1991). This statistic has persisted and in

² This is a pseudonym used to protect the identities of the individuals who work at, use the food bank and have contributed to the material provided by the food bank for this research.

³ This is a pseudonym used to protect the identities of the individuals who work at, use the food bank and have contributed to the material provided by the food bank for this research.

⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

2006, 43.7 percent of renters in British Columbia spent more than a third of their income on housing (BC Stats 2006). In 2006, Pembrey had the third highest median household costs in Canada (ibid). In addition, as the population of Pembrey steadily increases, the rental properties decrease in number and increase in price (The Indicator 2008).

Although in 2009, the apartment vacancy rate rose slightly from 0.5 percent to 1.4 percent, the rate still sits at 1.4 percent below the Canadian average (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2009). Housing inaffordability, coupled with low income, continue to be salient factors in the production of poverty.

The correlation between welfare in general and welfare cuts and food insecurity in British Columbia is also clear. Although the number of individuals receiving welfare⁵, officially known as income assistance, had dropped steadily since 1995, in 2002 the provincial government implemented major changes to its welfare program, including reduced eligibility, cuts to benefits, in particular to single parents and seniors, and cuts to shelter allowances, and implemented a more complex system, which has been repeatedly blamed for discouraging applicants (Klein & Pulkingham 2008). Bruce Wallace, Seth Klein, and Marge Reitsma-Street note that quickly following the welfare changes, individuals receiving welfare plummeted by 42 percent, dropping the population receiving welfare from 6 percent in 2002 to 3.5 percent in 2005. Further, their findings indicate that the concurrent government narrative stating that individuals finding employment caused the decrease could only explain half of the 100,000 fewer individuals

⁵ Welfare is an income assistance program offered by the provincial government to eligible individuals. Seth Klein and Jane Pulkingham describe it as a “program of last resort...available only to individuals and families who have no employment, have used up their savings, and have exhausted all other options” (2008:8). For information about British Columbia’s 2010 welfare eligibility and available benefits, see: Kienzel, O. (2010). *Your Welfare Rights: A Guide to BC Employment and Assistance*. Vancouver, BC: Legal Services Society, BC. Available at www.lss.bc.ca/assets/pubs/yourWelfareRights.pdf

receiving assistance (2006). Research conducted by Seth Klein and Jane Pulkingham from 2004 to 2006 found that 77 percent of long-term welfare recipients reported receiving food from an emergency food service, 43 percent attending food banks over 10 times (2008).

In light of statistics such as these, it is not surprising that the Olive Branch Food Bank has repeatedly reported a steady increase in the use of their food distribution services over the past 30 years. Currently, the food bank provides food hampers for 7000 people per month and food bank administrators expect that in the coming years this number will grow. Over the years the food bank has upgraded facilities, increased the number of paid staff and volunteer positions, as well as produced countless fundraising and promotional materials, all in the hopes of becoming better situated to provide hunger relief in the city of Pembrey.

1.3 Research Objective

The aim of my research was to investigate how discourses, images, and constructions of poverty, specifically those pertaining to food insecurity, related to the policies and practices of providing food relief at a prominent food bank in the British Columbian city of Pembrey. Additionally, this research sought to better understand the processes through which political understandings of food insecurity become diverted at the community level through the discursive practices of the food bank.

I understand *discourse* as an expression of thought on a particular subject. My use of discourse, as the writer of this thesis, is based on Stuart Hall's understanding of the term. Hall explains that a discourse is "a group of statements which provide a language

for talking about—i.e. a way of representing—a particular kind of knowledge about a topic” (1992:291). Importantly, Hall notes that “when statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way” and consequently “also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed” (1992:291). It is with this understanding that I comprehend particular discourses of food insecurity and the food insecure produced by the food bank as sources of particular knowledge production through language.

By *constructions and/or understandings* of poverty, I mean descriptions, either directly, or indirectly as through exclusion, or visually, of either what it means to be or how it is to experience poverty or to be considered a “poor person”. As such, I understand constructions or understandings to be part of the process through which knowledge is produced and reproduced.

Within this thesis I use the word *political* in application to the formal institutions of government. Within much of the Canadian food insecurity scholarship, the word *political* is used in this fashion, relating to issues such as distributive justice, policy and legislation, social welfare, human rights, and state responsibility (Riches 1999). I follow this use within this thesis⁶. As such the term *depoliticization* refers to the erosion of the political character of or the ability to think politically about a discourse (Hickey 2008). Within poverty scholarship, the term *depoliticize* is employed to indicate a process through which poverty is disembedded from a political framework. For instance, this

⁶ Although I apply this limited use of the word *political* within this thesis, as an anthropologist I also understand the political to be present beyond that of government, existing everywhere power is acquired and transmitted within a society (Gledhill 2000). For instance, politics, understood as the application of social power, plays an important role in many of the relations occurring at the Olive Branch Food Bank. For instance the relations among food bank administrators, food bank users and food bank donors all contain within them a political aspect.

would include the framing of poverty within a medicalized, individualized (Lyon-Callo 2000), or technocratic perspective (Hickey 2008) or additionally through quantitative or statistical research or discourses that exclude individuals from formal and informal institutions (Green & Hulme 2005). In each of these examples, the focus on an alternative discourse limits other discourses, for instance a political understanding.

I use the terms *policies* and *procedures* to denote the actions taken or the means to accomplish objectives, such as those set out by the Olive Branch Food Bank administrators in regards to the overall management of the organization. Policies may take the form of regulatory tools or of tools meant to guide understandings. Additionally, *procedures* are particular actions directed or shaped through policies. As Richard Titmuss states, policies are “the principles that govern action directed towards given ends” (1974:23); I understand these directed actions as procedures. The research for this thesis revealed that when a policy or practice was reformed, it was possible to use concurrent documentation to situate the change within wider frameworks of conceptualizations of food insecurity and poverty. As well, I understand policies and procedures as social practices, entailing meaning. As Stuart Hall notes, “discourse enters into and influences all social practices” (1992:291). It is in this way that I understand a relationship between the discourses produced by the food banks and their policies and procedures, as discursive practices, reproducing particular knowledge.

This research is an extension and specification of a prevalent theme in poverty relief research that addresses how discourses of poverty are reflected in the practices of poverty relief organizations. Specifically, this research explores this relationship through the investigation of documents collected from 1989 to 2008 by the Olive Branch Food

Bank. These documents showcase an important era in recent British Columbia history, as they were produced during a period of increasing government “downloading⁷”. The materials contained 1391 documents, totaling 3285 pages⁸. A majority of documents, 42 percent, were produced between 1995 and 1997. The documents in this material contain various Olive Branch Food Bank meeting minutes from 1995 to 2007, fundraising planning and promotion material from 1992 to 2007, material from other food redistribution organizations from 1996 to 2003, food bank correspondence from 1992 to 2008, and various other documents. The document organization process is discussed in section 2.3 and a detailed overview of the dataset contents can be found in Appendix 1. Additionally, to become familiar with the day-to-day functioning of the food bank, participant observation was conducted at the food bank prior to the document review. This observation was very helpful in contextualizing the information collected for the discourse analysis.

As demonstrated by the description of the documents, the dataset cannot be considered a complete representation of the Olive Branch Food Bank’s produced and collected material. A bulk of the material was produced within particular years and gaps existed during varying periods of time. An explanation for these occurrences cannot be given, as there are countless possible reasons for them. For instance, it may have been that documents were not produced during certain time periods or that they may have been

⁷ The word *downloading*, as it is used here, is popularly defined as a strategy of ending activities and keeping the money initially used to pay for them. The responsibility for and the costs of the activities are then passed to others (Broadbent 2010). For instance in the case of government, the cost of many social programs were cut from the federal government’s budgets and the programs and costs downloaded to the provinces, then from the provinces to municipalities and from municipalities to community organizations.

⁸ Although the material was enumerated, it should be noted that the numbers should be understood as approximate given the subjective nature of the quantification process. For instance, what constitutes a complete document or under which category a document should be organized was based on my comprehension of the material.

left out of the collection process (see section 2.3 for further discussion). As such, this research is not meant to be a comprehensive history of the food bank in question, but rather an analytical elaboration of particular discourses, understandings, and events identified within the documents along with their relationship to broader understandings of food insecurity and food insecurity relief in Canada.

To complete my research objective I identified pertinent discourses, images, understandings, and constructions relevant to poverty exhibited within the documents, and explored their relationship to contemporaneous food bank practices and policies through correlation and analysis. My research was additionally situated within larger political and economic trends that I argue are reflected within the food bank documentation. My analysis found that several different understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure existed within the Olive Branch Food Bank documents. I argue that the reproduction of particular discourses along with the implementation of certain policies and procedures within the food bank are key processes through which the conceptualization of food insecurity as an issue of the political arena becomes diminished at the individual and community level. It is in this way that the food resources provided by food banks may be comprehended as an outcome of food bank administrators' understanding of food bank users and of food insecurity, or in other words, when it comes to responses to hunger at the food bank, as a food bank users, *you eat what you are*.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions provided the framework for this thesis:

- What understandings of poverty pertaining to food insecurity have been produced within the documents of the Olive Branch Food Bank over the past 20 years?
- What policies and practices of providing hunger relief have been implemented at the Olive Branch Food Bank over the past 20 years?
- Through what processes and motivations did these understandings and policies and practices occur?
- Are larger political, economic, or societal trends reflected in these occurrences?
- What can be concluded about understandings of poverty pertaining to food insecurity and the food insecure in light of the answers to the research questions?

1.5 Literature: Between food and poverty

The literature reviewed for this thesis covered a broad compilation of topics. Many of the studies related to research conducted within housing and homelessness scholarship and within poverty scholarship more generally. As well, much of the research and literature focused on case studies from the United States of America and from other provinces within Canada. Besides work produced by the food bank organizations themselves, I did not come across any ethnographic literature specifically relating to food banks in British Columbia. I did, however, find information regarding the extent of food insecurity within the province, especially related to poverty rates, low-income, and welfare. Within Canada, there is literature about food banks, both produced by food bank

organizations such as the Food Banks Canada as well as by academics. Much of this literature concerns statistical information, policies and practices, such as hamper and food distribution, hours of operations, and the overall structure and history of Canadian food banks. Information regarding the history of food banks within Canada often sought to situate this development within economic and political trends. This information was useful in order to compare and contrast the Olive Branch Food Bank with other Canadian food banks. Beyond statistical and demographic information, I found little Canadian literature pertaining to the understandings of food bank users by food banks as well as the relationship between those constructions and food relief practices.

I have included an overview of selected relevant literature explored in preparation for this research so that the reader may be better equipped to engage with this thesis.

Although the following topics are divided under headings, I recognize the interrelationship between them in the formation of understandings of the current state of food insecurity within Canada. These understandings are addressed under the following headings:

- 1.5.1 Approaches of poverty and relief practices
- 1.5.2 Society and hunger relief organizations in Canada
- 1.5.3 The depoliticization of hunger and food insecurity
- 1.5.4 Shifting Canadian discourses of food insecurity
- 1.5.5. Canadian's international and domestic rights-based understandings of food
- 1.5.6 Understandings of food bank donations and users
- 1.5.7 Community food insecurity
- 1.5.8 Neoliberalism: Individualism and community

1.5.1 Approaches of poverty and relief practices

To understand how the notion of poverty as it relates to food insecurity has changed within the context of the Olive Branch Food Bank, it is first necessary to understand in a more general fashion how we come to conceptualize poverty and how our understandings relate to our responses and actions. Sociocultural anthropologist Bruce Knauft argues that the “collective structures of cultural logic” restrain and direct the lives of individuals (1996:106). In this way our daily behavior may be understood as mediated by both social structures and societal knowledge. This concept of sociocultural life is advantageous in the exploration of the relations between cultural understandings and actions. A useful and prominent example of this relation documented in poverty relief scholarship is that between individualized constructions of the homeless and the corresponding dominant industry practices that emphasize individualism and as such seek to resolve homelessness through strategies of self-reform (Lyon-Callo 2003). The conceptualization of homeless individuals as deviant is another prevalent public discourse of poverty. As this understanding is produced and reproduced through public discourses of homelessness, such as media and government policies in which deviance is emphasized, many individuals perceive people who are homeless in this way (Mathieu 1993; Chamberlain & Johnson 2001). Michael Gilsean argues that behavior associated with disease, such as conflict oriented or dysfunctional behavior, creates an “us” versus “them” framework⁹, where those classified as “them” become stigmatized and pathologized, (2002) conflating homelessness with medical conditions (Lyon-Callo 2003). Consequently, homelessness has become medicalized and society’s responses to

⁹ It should also be noted that this “us” versus “them” framework concurrently encourages understandings of the homeless as a unified population. In reality, however, Canada’s unsheltered population is composed of a diverse group of people (Hulchanski 2009).

people who are homeless are couched within this understanding. Thus, a primary response to homelessness is medical treatment, such as continuum of care models, which focus on treatment as a prerequisite for accessing affordable housing. It is in this way that understandings of poverty may be understood as participating within the production of responses to poverty.

1.5.2 Society and hunger relief organizations in Canada

Food banks play a critical role in responding to food insecurity in Canada and, consequently, also play a decisive role in societal understandings of food insecurity. Literature reviewing the history of food banks within Canada provided a great deal of information for understanding the development of this role.

Literature reviewed explored the relationship between hunger relief organizations and society at large. A number of studies investigate the relationship between increases in hunger and food insecurity and the decline of the Canadian social security net, including welfare programs (Klein & Pulkingham 2008; Wallace, Klein, & Reitsma-Street 2006; Riches 2002; Power 1999; Curtis 1997). Poverty relief efforts within Canada have changed several times over the past century. At different times, the responsibility has rested in varying degrees on communities, the church, and the federal and provincial governments. For instance, in 1927 a significant shift in poverty relief occurred within Canada. Before this time the responsibility of aiding those living in poverty rested within the community and the church. However, the 1927 Old Age Pension Act set the precedent for provincial and federal cost share programs (Osborne 1985) and

consequently some responsibility shifted to the government, specifically the federal government.

Another shift in poverty responses occurred during the 1990s as an outcome of the economic downturns occurring during the 1980s. The time period between 1981 and 1982 has been described as the “worst economic downturn in half a century” (The National Council of Welfare 1995). In response, the federal Liberal government made a commitment to reduce the fiscal deficit and to help the recovery of the private sector by means of a free trade agenda. At the same time, the government cut funding from social services, reducing unemployment benefits and applying stricter eligibility conditions for social security programs (Larid 2007). It was during this time that the country experienced the beginnings of dramatic increases in hunger (Bloom 2005).

Moreover, in 1995 the federal government terminated the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) and replaced it with the Canada Health and Social Transfer plan (CHST), effectively changing the structure of the monetary support transferred to the provinces for social assistance programs. The new plan froze monetary expenditures to that of the previous year. Consequently, yearly fluctuations in required spending could not be addressed. Within CAP the federal government specifically allocated money for medicare, post-secondary education, and welfare and social services; however, CHST contained a block grant, leaving spending decisions up to provincial governments. Within many provincial budgets, welfare and social services spending decreased. The replacement of CAP represents another shift in addressing issues of poverty. Today, with the exception of Employment Insurance and the Canadian Pension Plan, the provinces are responsible for the provision of social programs. It is in this way that the removal of

CAP effectively eroded the national standard of social assistance that had previously existed (Hogg 1996).

The termination of CAP had lasting effects on the practice of social assistance in British Columbia. As Dean Herd, Ernie Lightman, and Andrew Mitchell note, the loss of a national standard along with the increased provincial monetary spending flexibility opened up the space for “local solutions” (2008). In BC, changes in welfare practices began during the mid 1990s, when the New Democratic provincial government began to reform welfare by cutting assistance rates and tightening eligibility rules. This trend continued under the Liberal government. In 2002, welfare reform included further cuts to rates, the introduction of rules that required applicants to job search for three weeks prior to their application being processed, the removal of earning exceptions, and welfare time limits for assistance for some recipients (Klein & Long 2003). As discussed, cuts to welfare and social services are intimately linked to increases in poverty and food bank use.

The rapid increase in nongovernmental food relief programs, such as food banks occurred concurrently to the provincial and federal government social service funding cuts of the 80s and 90s (Tarasuk 2005; Teron & Tarasuk 1999; Davis & Tarasuk 1994). In 1982, the first Canadian food bank was started in Edmonton, Alberta. Between 1989 and 2006, food bank usage grew by 100 percent in Canada (Fawcett & Scott 2007). Food banks now exist in every province and territory, totaling 884 in number with 2,906 affiliated agencies serving 794,738 individuals each month (Food Banks Canada 2010a). Although increases in food insecurity in Canada cannot be blamed on a single societal phenomenon, the decreases in welfare availability and the decline of the social security

services are held largely responsible for accelerating increases in Canadian hunger. The decrease in government spending on social services together with the increase in food banks are key processes through which today's hunger relief has become understood as predominantly the responsibility of the community. Presently, charitable food programs are considered by many to be an integral and necessary resource in Canadian communities (Teron & Tarasuk 1999; Theriault & Yadlowski 2000).

1.5.3 The depoliticization of hunger and food insecurity

Responses to hunger and food insecurity are dependant on societal understandings of hunger and food insecurity. As Tarasuk and Davis note, "it is important to recognize that the way that a problem gets defined or typified shapes responses to it" (1996:72). For instance, the recognition of a rights-based understanding of food, which intrinsically situates food insecurity within a political context (Levoke 2006), may direct hunger relief within the realm of government responsibility. However, if hunger and food insecurity do not exist within a political understanding, the expected role of government may in response be limited. As Tarasuk and Davis also suggest, an "awareness of the possibility of a response or 'solution' to a problem influences the recognition of a problem and contributes to the eventual definition of it" (1996:72). For instance, the proliferation of charitable food organizations is repeatedly cited as having a profound effect on the public perceptions of food insecurity, one that is often criticized as being devoid of political understandings (Day 2007; Rock 2006; Riches 2002; Power 1999; Curtis 1997).

Hunger, as a matter of charitable concern, is another prominent understanding of food insecurity within contemporary Canada. The institutionalization of food banks is

frequently cited as a key process through which this understanding developed (Riches 2002). The founding of the Canadian Association of Food Banks in 1985, now Food Banks Canada, marks a prominent starting point in this institutionalization (Richies 2002). As well, Food Banks Canada's National Food Sharing System firmly established its affiliation with corporations and big businesses. Through this partnership, they became the exclusive distributor of food donations made by large food companies, such as Kraft, Campbell Soups, and Quaker Oats (Food Banks Canada 2010b). Its subsequent partnership with Canada's national rail companies—CP Rail and Canadian National—allowed Food Banks Canada to transport food throughout the country. The implementation of these actions is argued to be significant factors in the institutionalization of food banks within Canada (Riches 2002). Further, the 28 year establishment of food banks within many Canadian cities means that countless Canadians have never known a Canada without food banks and food bank users. These factors are integral to the processes through which the public understands food insecurity and hunger. Today, food insecurity is often understood as referring to the need for food rather than as a problem of inequality, access, and income (Curtis 1997). These processes underline the critical role that food banks play in forming societal understandings of food insecurity and hunger within Canada.

1.5.4 Shifting Canadian discourses of food insecurity

At present, food insecurity in Canada is formally defined in reference to the United Nations' 1996 definition of food security. People are considered to be food secure when they “have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious

food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2002). Therefore, by the most basic definition, food insecurity exists when individuals are not able to access food that meets the requirements of food security.

This definition, however, is a product of 40 years of consideration, being first discussed at the 1974 World Food Summit (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2002). Three main shifts in the understandings of food security are discussed within the history of its current definition. The first paradigm shift, occurring between 1974 - 1985, extended food insecurities global and national focus; the nascent World Food Summit 1974 definition was primarily concerned with national food supplies and self-sufficiency, whereas later definitions took also into consideration both individual and household food security. This change brought to the table notions of individual entitlement, food supply, and household food allocation (Maxwell 1996; Sen 1981). A second prominent shift, occurring after 1985, was a movement away from a “food first perspective”, where food related decisions are considered in response to food as a primary and immediate need, to that of a “livelihood perspective”, where food related decisions are understood as made in the long-term (Maxwell 1996). For instance, one might save food and choose to be hungry in the present to avoid being hungry in the future. Lastly, the final shift, evident in discussions by many food security authors post 1974¹⁰, changed the means of measuring food insecurity. Initially food insecurity measurement techniques involved predominantly objective and quantitative indicators.

¹⁰ See Maxwell 1996:159 for a comprehensive discussion of the prominent researchers concerning this shift.

Measurement indicators were then expanded to include subjective and qualitative evaluations as well.

Understandings of individual and household food insecurity make up the primary levels of food insecurity discussed within this thesis. Important refinements in defining these levels of food insecurity were developed by Kathy Radimer in the 1990s. Radimer identified four definitional categories used in current understandings of individual and household food insecurity, namely quantity, quality, psychological acceptability, and social acceptability (Anderson 1990; Radimer 2002). Quantitative dimensions calculated the sufficiency of energy and nutrition. Qualitative dimensions measured the amount of food in regard to feelings of deprivation, limited food choices, or regularity of meal patterns. For instance, participants may be asked whether they eat less than they think they should eat due to insufficient money (Kendall, Olson, & Frongillo 1995). Psychological dimensions dealt with the anxiety and stress associated with food supply and with meeting caloric and nutritional needs (Anderson 1990; Radimer 2002). Lastly, dimensions of social acceptability related to the methods of acquiring food (Toronto Public Health 2006). Socially unacceptable means of acquiring food may include stealing, eating from the garbage, or getting food from charities. Radimer's four dimensions have become a primary approach for determining food insecurity at individual and household levels. Further, they have become important in guiding questions about the causes and origins of food insecurity (Anderson 1990).

1.5.5. International and domestic rights-based understandings of food in Canada

In this thesis I discuss how understandings of food insecurity produced at food banks relate to the political arena and rights-based frameworks. As such it is salient to situate these understandings within the larger Canadian rights-based discourses of food insecurity. Historically, Canada has recognized the right to food through affirmations at the international level in covenants, conventions, and declarations. Canada's role as a signatory on many international treaties brings to light the complexities and contradictions of the Canadian political stance on food insecurity (Riches, Buckingham, MacRae, & Ostry 2004). In particular, Canada has participated in the international Food Aid Conventions since 1967. In 1976 Canada ratified the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which in Article 11 attests that:

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate *food*, clothing and housing, and to the *continuous improvement* of living conditions. The States Parties will *take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right*, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 1976, emphasis added).

In 1992 Canada ratified the International Convention of the Right of the Child, guarantying provision of adequate nutritious foods for children (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 1993). Canada has also recently signed numerous declarations that regard food as a basic human right (Riches, Buckingham, MacRae, & Ostry 2004) including: 1) the World Declaration on Nutrition, signed in Rome in 1992,

which declared Canada's "determination to eliminate hunger and to reduce all forms of malnutrition" (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 1992); 2) the World Declaration on Social Development, signed in Copenhagen in 1995, which in Commitment 2B, states a commitment to focus "efforts and policies to address the root causes of poverty and to provide for the basic needs of all. These efforts should include the elimination of hunger and malnutrition; the provision of food security" (United Nations 1995); and 3) the Declaration on World Food Security, signed in Rome in 1996, following which Canada created the Canadian Action Plan for Food Security (1998) in which Canada made a commitment "to reduce by half the number of hungry and undernourished no later than the year 2015" (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2007). Furthermore, within this document, Priority 1 states that "the right to food reiterates Canada's belief that this right is an important element in food security and underscores the need to better define the meaning of this right, and the actions required to implement it" (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2007). Canada has also signed commitments declared in the World Food Summit in Rome in 2002. As well, for the last ten years Canada has been one of the top ten countries making donations to the United Nations World Food Programme (World Food Programme 2009). Given these pledges, one might think that the Canadian government would be proactive in reducing domestic food insecurity and hunger. However, these treaties are not self-executing (Robertson 1990), requiring legislation and policy change at all levels of the government. To this day, neither the Canadian Bill of Rights (1960), the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), nor any other domestic legislation specifically acknowledges food as a right (Freeman & van Ert 2004). In this way it is argued that Canada has not taken any action

in consideration of or in reaction to the treaties it has ratified (Day, Brodsky, Young, & Schroeder 2008) and Canada has been criticized for failing to implement the *ICESCR* content at the domestic level (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 2006). Indeed, the federalist nature of Canada requires intergovernmental co-ordination and consequently makes the implementation of international law cumbersome (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights 2001). As well as the fact that no process exists for government review and implementation of international committee recommendations, the signing of international commitments, as Shelagh Day states, is seemingly understood “as the end rather than the beginning of an ongoing process that requires constant self-critical assessment and a constant willingness to assign resources and political capital to making rights real” (2007:215).

1.5.6 Understandings of food bank donations and users

The literature available regarding Canadian perceptions of food donations within the food bank system is not extensive, but what has been researched opens to view some interesting understandings of the emergency food relief system in Canada. Canadian researchers have identified discrepancies between preferences for and ascribed meanings of food between food secure and food insecure individuals. For example, Melanie Rock, Lynn McIntyre, and Krista Rondeau found that food secure individuals often associate Kraft Dinner with feelings of comfort while food insecure individuals ascribe to it meanings of discomfort (Rock, McIntyre, & Rondeau 2008). Valerie Tarasuk and Joan Eakin have investigated the symbolic and supplementary role often played by food at food banks. They argue that as food banks cannot always adequately deal with food

insecurity, often only being able to briefly supply hunger relief, the giving of food may be construed as a symbolic gesture. They also note that food distribution, understood as supplementary, decreases the value assigned to quality and amount of food (Tarasuk & Eakin 2003).

Canadian food banks users are discussed by food bank organizations. For instance, Food Banks Canada provides demographic information calculated and published yearly in the publication *HungerCount*. Information on food bank users are collected in relation to age, gender, family status, living arrangements, income, and government supports, such as pensions and social assistance benefits. Beyond food bank provided demographic statistics, little information was located regarding food bank users and their contributors; this thesis seeks to fill this gap.

1.5.7 Community food insecurity

The concept of *community* is increasingly associated with notions of food insecurity, particularly in community food security movements. Within the social sciences, the concept of community is both widely used and often vaguely defined (Hamilton 1985). Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing state that the three most widely employed definitions include “common interests between people”, “a common ecology and locality”, or alternatively “a common social system or structure” (2000:61). In the last few decades, concepts such as “community consciousness” and “community development” have become increasingly common (Rapport & Overing 2001).

Within the scholarship of food insecurity, the notion of community plays a key role in two ways: first, in reference to relief of hunger through community involvement,

and second, in reference to food insecurity existing at the community level. The first notion of community appears frequently in regard to organizations, such as food banks, that seek aid in hunger relief by collecting or gleaning food from the community. This notion is also applied to food relief programs set up by communities, such as community kitchens or community gardens. Although both of these kinds of organizations have the potential to expand food security within households by directly providing some food resources (Gottlieb & Fisher 1996), the latter is occasionally thought of as being able to provide more lasting food security through local community development (Tarasuk 2001; Friendly 2008).

The concept of *community food insecurity* involves a critique of existing food systems and addresses food insecurity from the point of view of overall community need. The community food insecurity movement emerged and was explicated over the last 30 years mainly in response to the global expansion of the food market and the decline of regional food systems (Allen 1999). The concept of community food security broadens individual and household food security to the level of the community and incidentally problematizes larger food systems (Winne 2005). It is defined as a “condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance, social justice, and democratic decision-making” (Hamm & Bellows 2002). Community food security is also often understood as an alternative strategy to food banks and other charity models, because of its focus on lasting and participatory solutions (Tarasuk 2005; Friendly 2008). Moreover, community food security emphasizes environmental sustainability through sustainable farming and transportation practices (Christensen & Neil 2009). Food

security at the community level usually involves community control of the food system and includes concern with individual access to the local food system, in contrast to access to the global food system (Tarasuk 2001). Consequently, hunger as a concern of community food security is understood to be a result of deficient community control over the food supply. The increasing participation of community organizations within poverty and food insecurity relief, both through community resource redistribution as well as community localization of food production, plays a critical role in forming our concepts of food insecurity and hunger, particularly within discourses of responsibility. It is argued that food production is increasingly becoming commoditized and globalized, resulting in the depoliticization of food insecurity (Riches 1999) and, at the community level, producing individuals who are less knowledgeable, skilled, and empowered about their food and the food system.

1.5.8 Neoliberalism: Individualism and community

Neoliberal policy reform in Canada is often taken to be a key factor in increasing income disparity (Harvey 2005; Coburn 2004) and food insecurity (Riches 1999). Although the tenets of neoliberalism are extensive, an emphasis on the autonomous individual is commonly cited as a fundamental tenant of neoliberal discourse (Raphael 2001). As earlier noted, it is common to individualize the poor in discussions of poverty relief strategies in Canada, and many scholars argue that the individualization of those living in poverty is partially an outcome of neoliberal discourses (Kingfisher 2002; Lyon-Callo & Hyatt 2003). As John Harris notes, poverty is increasingly understood as “the outcome of the behavior by those who are affected by it, and they may be judged

adversely because of it, and thus it has to be eliminated to maintain social functionality. Poverty is a kind of a social aberration rather than an aspect of how the modern state and a market society functions” (Harris 2007:3). In short, as a characteristic of individuals, poverty is estranged from class structures and power relations. Additionally, Malia Green notes that much anti-poverty documentation is imbued with neoliberalist language. Green argues that this process gives poverty a state of agency and consequently the ability to externally impact individual’s lives. Poverty becomes represented as “an evolving entity that must be ‘attacked’ rather than as a consequence of social relations” (Green 2006).

A second tenant of neoliberalism involves the idea that the government should withdraw from social programs with the understanding that the market is best positioned to provide affordable and efficient services (Palley 2005). As a result of policy reform intended to decrease social program spending, a variety of community organizations have developed in Canada to fill the gaps left in the decreasing social safety net. As George Pavlich notes, “where once only the radical critic championed (say) releasing the ‘mentally ill’ from society’s asylums into the ‘community’, now treating such ‘clients’ in community-based programs is the norm... In short, as welfare states roll themselves back to expose their recent neo-liberal inclinations, so community control emerges as a mode of regulation whose time has (again) come” (Pavlich 2001:56).

Some authors argue that these community organizations, formed in response to neoliberal actions, inevitably do little to counter the hegemonic negative forces of neoliberalism, instead reproducing them. Lynda Cheshire and Geoffrey Laurence’s research on Australian community organizations formed in reaction to neoliberal agrarian reform found no actual shift in the mode of governing or the destabilization of the

hegemonic institutions; rather the increase in community run organizations complemented by the inclusion of “community” in government discourses became a venue through which individuals were further persuaded to be responsible for themselves (2005). Cheshire and Laurence argue that through neoliberal discourse, individualism and community are brought together. With a similar understanding, Nikolas Rose calls this expanded use of the concept of community to describe various sectors of society, from community development programs to community policing, “governing through community” (1999). In this way, the emphasis on individualism and community responsibility, within both the community as well as the government, illuminates processes through which neoliberal policies are reflected within nongovernmental poverty relief organizations.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

This research draws from theories that endeavor to understand the underlying discursive processes through which the construction of human knowledge is created, responded to, and acted upon. In particular, this thesis seeks to understand the processes of the construction of poverty and food insecurity knowledge in Canada along with the relations between such constructions and the practices responding to them.

The use of critical theory is fundamental to this conceptual framework. Critical theory acknowledges the social and historical construction of experience and argues that such factors are determinants of and determined by social organization (Lincoln & Guba 2000). This theory is valuable to this research as it provides a lens through which to explore constructions of poverty as occurring through cultural, spatial, and temporal

means. As Joseph Lewandowski argues, “disembedded from their sociohistorical and cultural contexts, concepts such as ‘poor’... are little more than empty abstractions” (2008:29). In this sense, how people come to perceive themselves and others as poor or as not poor can be attributed to personal understandings of what poverty is and what it is to be poor or not poor. These constructions may be formed through a mixture of processes, many of which are discussed within the scholarship of anthropology and the social sciences (Kingfisher 2007; Lyon-Callo 2003; Osberg 2000; Susser 1996). Individuals may come to understand particular meanings of poverty through public discourses such as the media, government documents, or academic papers. They may form their conceptions through life experiences or through the perceived life experiences of others. Importantly, individuals will come to their own understandings of poverty based on their interactions with their environment, including their class, gender, racialized, historical, or social identity.

This is not meant to insinuate that poverty does not exist or that it is simply a subjective experience. I also understand poverty to be a reality or a social fact for individuals, regardless of how they themselves or others perceive their situation. However, definitions and understandings play a large role in who may qualify as living in poverty (Osberg 2000) for the purpose of social assistance and related matters. Notwithstanding these socially, historically, and culturally constructed definitions, there exists a social fact that some people do not have enough food, sufficient nutrition, adequate or appropriate housing, or access to necessary resources to live a healthy life. The individuals who fall within the scope of this social fact may or may not fall under the socially, historically, and culturally constructed definitions. In Canada, although there is

no official measurement of poverty, the federal government has developed five different measures of income cutoffs or income lines to calculate the number of people who are considered to be living in poverty (deGroot-Maggetti 2002; Ross, Shillington, & Lochhead 1994). As for determining eligibility for provincial social assistance, poverty measures vary.

I understand myself as an individual whose perspective is shaped by my social experience. As such, the assumption that completely value-free research is unattainable, since research takes place within a space ubiquitous with privileged perspectives, (Harding & Noberg 2005) also frames my understanding of my research and findings. Thus this research is offered as my interpretation of a set of events and happenings. I am an embedded researcher, a product of power relations and as such must recognize and be clear about my biases and agendas (Fonow & Cook 2005). This theoretical framework is informed by an understanding of positionality, which recognizes knowledge as a product of conceptual schemes (Henwood & Pidgeon 1995). Consequently, I understand my research findings to necessarily involve partial, embodied, and particular perspectives (Rose 1997).

1.7 Significance

This thesis contributes to the advancement of knowledge by providing an historical and contemporary discourse analysis of documents provided by an established food bank in Pembrey. It displays how constructions of food insecurity relate to economic, social, and political understandings. As noted, the extensive research in anthropology on homelessness has shown how images and constructions of the homeless

change over time and how those images and constructions influence policy and practices geared toward those who are homeless. As my research examines how these shifting discourses and constructions also influenced the policies and practices of providing food for those who are food insecure, it will provide a new perspective for understanding the relationship between public discourses and poverty relief. In the vein of the work of Vincent Lyon-Callo and Susan Hyatt, I suggest that this research will additionally expose processes through which poverty and food insecurity becomes naturalized within public discourses (2003). Lyon-Callo and Hyatt emphasize the importance of research that makes “visible the concrete programs and policies that have been used to create a single narrative in which poverty and inequality are made to seem the natural and inevitable upshots of evolutionary process, rather than the conscious and planned outcomes of a very deliberate set of human interventions” (2003:177). Further, as argued by Graham Riches, as discourses of food insecurity and policy remain ambivalent regarding a rights-oriented framework at the provincial and federal government levels, the exploration of food insecurity needs to occur at the local community level as well (1999).

Further, the Olive Branch Food Bank coordinator had hoped that the material made accessible through the digitizing stage to this research could be of assistance when approaching policy advisors and government personal, since much of the material had not been viewed since its initial collection. As such, this research also provides a community service through knowledge mobilization. Through the course of this research, over 3000 pages of documents were scanned and organized, creating a virtual archive for the food bank. As such, this research provides and makes accessible historical information about a key player in hunger relief in Pembrey.

Ultimately, this research project will contribute to the production of knowledge in that by writing my thesis I am conducting a discourse analysis of the Olive Branch Food Bank documentation. Hopefully this thesis will operate as a tool from which to evaluate both past and future programs and strategies aimed at addressing poverty and hunger relief. As well this thesis provides new understandings of the ways in which food banks fit into discourses of British Columbia's social reforms within the last 19 years. In this way, a desired impact of the project is that the information obtained be used to affect decision making at a community level and bring new ideas and challenges to the public and to policy considerations surrounding poverty and food insecurity that are presently taking place at various levels within the city of Pembrey and across Canada. To aid in this ambition, research findings will be made available to the food bank, to policy makers, academics, and the general public through publications, conferences, and presentations.

1.8 Overview of the thesis

In Chapter 2, *Methods*, I situate and depict the Olive Branch Food Bank's locality and describe how this research was conducted, including recruitment, methods of data collection, and organization. Additionally, I discuss my positionality to this research and the primary ethical concerns raised during the research agenda. Lastly, I discuss the methods used in the discourse analysis, both for textual and image documents.

In Chapter 3, *Understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure*, I discuss the understandings of food insecurity and food insecure individuals identified through the document analysis. The discourses were established based on prior engagement with

poverty scholarship as well as observations based on the context and perceived intention of the texts. The categories discussed include an individualized and immediate understanding of food insecurity and the food insecure, systemic inequalities, differential deservedness of food bank users, and community membership.

In Chapter 4, *Policies and procedures at the Olive Branch Food Bank*, I describe three generalized policies and procedures of the Olive Branch Food Bank identified through the document analysis. These policies and procedures were not directly articulated within the documents, but alternatively were conjectured through various actions and responses to events. Additionally, I relate these policies and procedures to the dominant understandings of individualism, the deserving poor, and community participation discussed in Chapter 3. Further, I situate them within processes through which these discourses and practices remove the potential conceptualization of food as a right and food insecurity as political. The categories include a prioritized system of responses to food insecurity, utilitarian influenced policies, and community participation and responsibility.

In Chapter 5, *Conclusions, discussion, recommendations, and further research*, I summarize my findings through an exploration of the entwining of my various observations and provide my concluding analysis. I additionally provide recommendations based on my findings and conclusions. These recommendations include both idealized policy reform as well as tangible actions that can be implemented at the Olive Branch Food Bank and at Food Banks Canada. I lastly provide recommendations for further research based on various questions opened to view through this thesis.

Chapter two:

Methods

This chapter provides an overview of the specific research area followed by a description of how this research came to be conducted at the Olive Branch Food Bank. I then discuss the primary ethical considerations pertinent to this research as well as my positionality. Following this, the process through which the research was conducted, including preliminary meetings with the Olive Branch Food Bank administrators, agreements and conditions of the research, as well as my participant observation, data collection, and the quantification of the material are described. Lastly, an overview of the methods used to analyze the documents and derive conclusions is given.

The data required to carry out this research was acquired through the investigation of a large quantity of documentation provided by the Olive Branch Food Bank. This documentation included correspondence and statistical data from the Olive Branch Food Bank and other food banks. A large portion of the documentation was material on the subject of fundraising projects and meeting minutes. The document collection dates from 1989 and included documents produced up to and including 2008. A descriptive discussion of the documents is provided within this chapter and a detailed overview is located in Appendix 1.

2.1 Research Context

The Olive Branch Food Bank was started in the early 1980s as a branch of a local church. Similar to most food banks in Canada, the Olive Branch Food Bank began as a

temporary strategy to address hunger in the city; however, the temporary need never disappeared and as hunger within the city grew, so did the food bank. Although its establishment may have been a response to an emergency situation of hunger, according to their website, the Olive Branch Food Bank's goal is to aid in meeting the immediate nutritional food needs of food bank users while working towards long-term solutions to hunger and poverty.

The Olive Branch Food Bank is open year round as the demand for its services, for the most part, remains steady, increasing slightly in the summer months. Currently the food bank feeds approximately 7000 persons per month. To access the food bank, individuals are required to show a personal ID such as their Social Insurance Number or a Driver's License. The food bank is open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm each week, excluding the week following the distribution of Social Assistance cheques, when the Olive Branch Food Bank is closed. Hampers are distributed to families on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and to singles and couples on Thursdays. The food bank has a few paid staff but overall depends largely on the assistance of volunteers. Of the individuals involved with the operation of food bank, 98 percent are volunteers. Approximately thirty volunteers are at the food bank daily.

The Olive Branch Food Bank is the central food bank for the city and the surrounding region, periodically redistributing food to 18 other emergency food organizations. Some of food that is redistributed arrives in the region through the National Food Sharing System coordinated by Food Banks Canada. Food Banks Canada is "the national charitable organization representing the food bank community across Canada" (Food Banks Canada 2010c). To accommodate the redistributor role, the Olive

Branch Food Bank owns a warehouse to store and sort food. Food is distributed throughout the region based on the number of individuals served at each food bank.

The Olive Branch Food Bank gives out hampers to individuals and families once a month. Each hamper includes enough food for approximately three days. Four general types of hampers are used, namely, single hampers, couple hampers, family hampers, and street hampers. Specialty hampers are also available for individuals with specific dietary needs and desires such as diabetes or vegetarianism. Hampers are assembled in advance, except for family hampers, which are tailored to the number and age of the children. Some food choice is available to families, as parents may select food that they do not want from a set list of basic food groups and categories. According to food bank staff, single and couple hampers are pre-packed due to their high demand and the time required for packing them. In the case of single, couple, and street hampers, no choice is given regarding food. Street hampers are comprised of foods that do not require cooking and are easy to prepare. Food is also selected based on the ease with which the packaging may be opened, for instance, pop-top cans are provided rather than cans that require a can opener. Occasionally household items such as laundry detergent and cleaning supplies are available and are given out at the discretion of the hamper interviewer. Hampers are also available to those who volunteer 15 hours a week and can be received on a weekly basis. This is the only means by which an individual may receive more than one hamper a month from the Olive Branch Food Bank.

Although the Olive Branch Food Bank has been in operation for 30 years and has grown substantially in terms of the amount of food distributed as well as in the number of individuals assisted, there have been periods of food shortages. At times, food shortages

are dealt with through the restriction of food distribution to certain categories of food bank users (i.e. single, couple, men, etc.). Additionally when a food shortage occurs, food bank administrators increase requests to the public for donations, usually through media announcements. In this way, the local media is a critical partner of the food bank regarding communication to the public.

The administrators of the Olive Branch Food Bank actively participate in the provincial and national food bank organizations. According to Food Banks Canada, each level of the Canadian food bank structure plays a particular role in fighting food insecurity in Canada (Food Banks Canada 2010d). Food Banks Canada, at the national level, supports its members by sharing food provincially, developing and maintaining national partnerships with food corporations and transit services, as well as leading research and discussion surrounding food insecurity in Canada. Each of the 10 provinces has a provincial organization in charge of sharing information and food distributed from Food Banks Canada with their provincial food banks. They also administrate provincial membership and represent provincial food banks at the national level. At the regional, city, and community levels are the affiliate members of Food Banks Canada. The role of these organizations, the actual food banks, is to provide direct service to Canadians, to provide demographic information to provincial and national organizations, and to run local fundraising campaigns. Although the Olive Branch Food Bank is considered an affiliate member, the food bank does take on a regional food redistribution role. The administrators of the Olive Branch Food Bank have also been involved at provincial and national levels as board member and representatives.

2.2 Recruitment

As the goal of this research was to explore constructions of food insecurity and food insecure individuals within Canada, conducting it with the aid of a Canadian food bank was a fitting research strategy. The Olive Branch Food bank was an ideal site for the study due to its location, size, length of operation, and role within the region.

To begin recruitment, I approached the Olive Branch Food Bank's Food Bank Coordinator and the Pastor/Administrator of the Church and arranged a meeting. During the initial meeting, the preliminary research agenda was proposed and I inquired as to the possibility of conducting my research with the Olive Branch Food Bank. The research agenda was positively received and, during the meeting, it was brought to my attention that over the past 20 years the food bank had acquired a vast amount of documentation, much of which had not been looked at again since its production and collection. It was suggested that these documents might be of use to this research. After discussions with my supervisor regarding the possibility of conducting this research through a discourse analysis of the documents, we decided that this opportunity would possibly lend itself to the incorporation of an historical element in the thesis. We believed that the data collected from the food bank might be investigated with regards to concurrent political, economic, and social shifts.

A follow up meeting was arranged with the Olive Branch Food Bank representatives and the use of the documents was further discussed. Concerns regarding privacy, confidentiality, and the right to read for factually accuracy of the produced text were discussed. The ethics application process was also discussed including the steps that were to be taken to secure confidentiality, such as the omission of names and other

identifying features from the thesis write up. In exchange for the use of the material, it was agreed that the documents would be scanned, creating a digital archive to be returned along with the documents. The food bank administrators suggested this task in case of damage to or loss of the original documents. It was also suggested during this meeting that time be spent at the food bank so that I could understand its day-to-day operations. I agreed that this would be a beneficial course of action as it could allow me to become familiar with various terms, locations, and activities that might be discussed within the documents. As such, a participant observation component was added into the research proposal.

2.3 Primary material collection

After receiving ethics approval¹¹ from the Human Research and Ethics Board, I began participant observation. Food bank administrators initially guided recruitment for the participant observation. They suggested individuals with whom to spend time based on elevated roles and experience at the Olive Branch Food Bank. Participant observation was conducted with various employees and volunteers. Prior to each instance of participant observation, I reviewed the research and consent forms with each individual. I completed the observation by either sitting with participants or following them around the food bank as they completed their ordinary daily duties. The goal of the observation of the food bank volunteers and staff was to learn their roles and responsibilities so that I would be more familiar with the general operation of the food bank. This step of the

¹¹ Ethics approval was granted on September 3, 2009 by the Human Research and Ethics Board, protocol number 09-281

research proved to be very important to the discourse analysis as many specific terms used by food bank workers and volunteers were also used within the documents.

My first day at the food bank was spent learning about the interview and intake procedures used by the food bank. Here, individuals seeking hampers are entered into the computer system and, if receiving a family or special dietary needs hamper, are asked about their food preferences and needs. Those allowed to select food preferences circle foods they do not want on a list provided by the interviewer. It is at this stage that the relevant forms are filled out, new food bank users are registered, and hamper orders are written up and passed to the hamper packing area. My next visit was spent in the food receiving and break down area where collected food is weighed and stored and if needed, broken down into smaller quantities, as in the case of large bags of sugar. Food donated by the public arrives in blue bins. Food donated by business and corporation often arrives in bulk on wooden flats. Forklifts are used to move much of the food around.

The last area where participant observation was conducted was the hamper packing area. Here, forms received from the interviewers are collected and hampers are given out. Hampers for individuals classified as either a single, a couple, or living on the street are pre-packed and stored in a large bin. Hampers for families or those with special dietary needs are packed using the forms prepared during the interview with food bank users. Hampers are packed with the help of a template outlining quantities and types of food to be given. The hamper area works much like a grocery store. Hamper packers walk about isles stocked with food, selecting and packing the food into bags or boxes. Food is then distributed through a window dividing the public and private areas of the food bank. Numbers given out during the intake are called and the receiver of the hamper

comes to the window and is passed the hamper. If items requiring refrigeration are available, such as butter, they are added to the hamper at this time.

Following participant observation, document collection from the food bank began. Documents were taken to my campus office and scanned and converted into PDF files. The digital copies were named both with a title and numerically. The titles given to the documents reflected their contents. The numeration system, which preceded the title, was of my own design, created specifically to reproduce and respect the original assembly of the documents as well as to increase the ease of locating documents. Documents were also digitally filed according to folder or binder name. Each document title was also identified with a date when it was available. After the documents were scanned and cataloged, they were returned to the Olive Branch Food Bank. A copy of the files stored on a USB key was also given to the Olive Branch Food Bank.

To get a detailed and quantifiable understanding of the material, the documents and pages were tallied and lists were produced based on the year of production and the type of document. In this way the number of documents included within the material was determined. Although the goal of this step was to identify the quantitative nature of the material, it should be noted that the process required innumerable subjective decisions. For instance, whether or not to classify a binder of hamper statistics collected daily over the course of 3 years as a single document or as many individual documents required personal choices regarding the filing and enumeration system. Overall, 1391 documents were discerned, totaling 3285 pages covering a time period from 1989 to 2008. The greater part of the documents, 46 percent, were produced between 1995 and 1997 (see Table 1).

Table 1 Percentage of documents for each year

Year document produced	Percentage of total / actual number of documents	Year document produced	Percentage of total / actual number of documents	Year document produced	Percentage of total / actual number of documents
1989	> 1 / 1	1996	21 / 297	2003	3.2 / 44
1990	0 / 0	1997	17 / 238	2004	1.3 / 18
1991	0 / 0	1998	3.9 / 54	2005	6.1 / 85
1992	> 1 / 4	1999	6.2 / 86	2006	6.7 / 93
1993	1.8 / 26	2000	4.6 / 64	2007	3.5 / 48
1994	1.8 / 25	2001	4.1 / 58	2008	> 1 / 2
1995	8 / 112	2002	5 / 70	unknown	4.7 / 66

The documents were additionally organized into six broad categories: fundraising documents, meeting minutes, documents produced by external food redistribution organizations, documents produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank, correspondence documents, and media documents (see Table 2). It should be noted that some documents were included in more than one of these categories, for example, meeting minutes from a fundraising committee may have been included within the categories of fundraising documents, internally produced documents, as well as meeting minutes.

Table 2 Broad categories of documents

Document type	Total number of documents	Total number pages	Percentage of total documents	Percentage of total pages
Fundraising documents	419	742	30	19
Meeting minutes	540	933	39	24
Externally produced documents	528	969	38	25
Olive Branch Food Bank documents	988	2077	71	54
Correspondence documents	224	331	16	9
Media documents	63	81	5	2

A more specific categorical breakdown was also conducted and 63 groups identified, including but not limited to: documents produced for public consumption; documents produced by various levels of external organizations, for instance Food Banks Canada, provincial organizations, or local organizations; meeting minutes from different committees; as well as different types of correspondence, for instance, government, other food banks, or public correspondence. A detailed breakdown can be found in Appendix 1.

The quantification of the material demonstrates the variability of document types collected by the Olive Branch Food Bank. However, as the processes through which the documents were collected are unclear, its ability to speak to the potential completeness of the material remains limited. For instance, the years where few or no documents were collected could reflect years where few or no documents were produced and, consequently, few were accumulated. On the other hand, the years with few or no documents could reflect years where documents were not kept or never made it to a paper copy and, consequently, were not accumulated. For example, variable use of printers, fax machines, computers, and email by some individuals may be responsible for the discrepancy in document accumulation during different time periods. In general the documents should be interpreted through these understandings, as a complete document set is unknowable. However, it is more likely that certain kinds of documents were produced yearly, such as certain committee meeting minutes and therefore appear to be missing. For instance, Olive Branch Food Bank staff meeting minutes make up the most complete set of meeting minutes from a single committee. In total 167 such documents were accumulated totaling 368 pages. The documents begin in 1995 and end in 2007. However, within this time period, no documents date from 1999, 2000, or 2004. It is to

be expected, as the Olive Branch Food Bank remained open during these years, that staff meetings occurred and thus that the production of staff meeting minutes occurred as well. It is in this way that the material may be understood as potentially incomplete.

Additionally, as there is no way of knowing what documents are missing from the materials, it should be noted that there exists the possibility that alternative discourses, or discourses missing from the documents were produced elsewhere. For instance, the administrators of the food bank may play an advocacy role addressing systemic inequalities or produce a rights based discourse of food insecurity, even if the documents do not provide evidence of such occurrences. Further, findings are limited in regards to the ability of the documents to capture the completeness of communication acts. For instance meeting minute documents do not record conversations word for word and cannot capture all forms of communication. For instance the documents ability to record hand gestures, facial expressions, and other forms of thought and verbal expression is limited.

2.4 Methods of data analysis

Data analysis began with a brief preliminary review of the documents. The objective of the preliminary review was to discern themes or discourses in which to situate the research inquiry. As Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy note, “the aim of discourse analysis is to identify (some of) the multiple meanings assigned to texts” (2002:74). A detailed review of the discourse analysis is provided shortly.

Aforementioned, I understand a discourse as a collection of statements that provide a way of representing a specific type of knowledge about a subject (Hall 1992:291). Within the document review, the discourses identified presented ways of knowing about food insecurity and the food insecure. The statements identified that collectively made up particular discourses included, but were not limited to: descriptions or images of food bank users or their perceived needs; descriptions of why individuals required food bank resources; advertising and fundraising statements presenting reasons to donate to the food bank; and descriptions of food insecurity and hunger. These statements were also often associated with prominent events, such as provincial or federal elections, Olive Branch Food Bank building relocations, food shortages, policy reforms, or fundraising events. Statements that made up discourses of the food insecure and food insecurity were also recognized through observed repetition of specific constructions of poverty identified through my previous reviews of poverty scholarship (Wasserman & Clair 2010; Kingfisher 2008; Lyon-Callo 2003; Bullock, Wyche, & Williams 2001), for example, the construction of food bank users being represented as poor due to personal failings or features, or poor due to factors of systemic inequalities. Statements regarding hunger relief strategies were also recognized in the initial material review, for instance, the construction of food insecurity as requiring immediate attention through food redistribution or as a community problem requiring community participation.

Following the preliminary review, the documents were examined a second time taking detailed notes, paying particular attention to the identified statements and descriptions. Notes were taken and ordered chronologically. Specific attention was paid to the motivations of identified statements and their overall production of discourses.

Description of policies and procedures were also identified as producing representations of food insecurity and the food insecure. For instance, the identification of a policy and the resulting implementation of the procedure that excluded certain individuals from hamper redistribution were noted in regard to both the processes prompting this action, the potential implementation of a procedural change, and what understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure were produced through the action. In this way, the situatedness of statements constituted another focal point. As such, in the previous example, attention would also be paid to the type of document within which the discourse was produced, for instance, in internal meeting minute documents. An essential characteristic of my analysis also involved the assumption that all discourses are historical and consequently must be understood with reference to their context (Meyer 2001). As such, the temporalities of the documents were also noted when ever possible. Subsequently, the notes were coded, and through the use of mind maps and brainstorming, which connected statements, policies, and other observations, the focal discourses of the thesis were determined. In general, the texts and images of the documents were treated holistically, that is, not as individual texts, but as a body of texts, connected through various processes. Within my analysis, this approach was fundamental, as “it is the interrelations between texts, changes in texts, new textual forms, and new systems of distribution texts that constitute a discourse overtime” (Phillips & Hardy 2002:5).

2.4.1 Discourse analysis

In this research project it was important to understand both the document's contents, as well as the processes through which they were produced, as each document was created for a particular audience and under particular circumstances. To accomplish this, the method of investigation employed incorporated theories of critical discourse analysis. The critical discourse analysis notions of anti-realism and constructionism allowed me to understand the documents as versions of a society constructed by participants (Silverman 2006). As such, it was also indispensable to acknowledge the social contexts in which the discourses were produced (Phillips & Hardy 2002). In this way, concepts of power, history, and ideology, considered fundamental within this type of investigation (Wodak 2001), could be discerned, explored, and discussed. As a result, this method proved a valuable tool through which to identify the structural relations that are manifested in the language (Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000). Additionally, although it was key to this research to remain aware of who and what were referenced within the documents, it was equally as important to note who and what were not (Grasper & Apthorpe 1996).

Three specific approaches to critical discourse analysis were employed. First, the discourse was analyzed as a text of linguistic features (Fairclough 1992). This proved favorable in the notation of word use, particularly as words are never neutral (Cornwall & Brock 2005). Second, the discourse was approached as a set of discursive practices, ones that are produced, circulated, consumed, and reproduced within a society. In this way discourse analysis seeks to examine how social phenomena and discourses are constructed (Phillips & Hardy 2002). This concept of discursive practices supported the

investigation of the relationships among government, business, the public, and the food bank in regards to discourse circulation and reproduction. Last, the discourse was approached with an awareness of social practice, as it is through this lens that hegemonic and ideological changes can be observed (Fairclough 1992) along with the processes through which unequal relations of powers are constituted and sustained (Phillips & Hardy 2002). Approaching discourse as social practice was advantageous in identifying the reproduction of discourses within the policies and procedures, as through their implementation, power relations and ideology were reproduced and understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure could be identified.

2.4.2 Image analysis

Although the bulk of the material within the documents was text based, there were some images. The majority of these images supplemented food drive announcements or appeared in media such as newspapers or newsletters. Particularly of interest to this research were the images of food bank users. Within charity advertisements, images of people are frequent (Burt & Strongman 2005) and the images used by the Olive Branch Food Bank were no exception. A category of document that I found especially important to this research was that of images used in advertisements for food bank donations. Advertisements are an elemental source of conceptual frameworks that often goes undetected. As Robert Goldman notes, “ads are so pervasive and our reading of them so routine, we tend to take for granted the deep social assumptions embedded in advertisements: we do not ordinarily recognize them as a sphere of ideology” (1992:1). This powerful understanding of advertisements underscored my analysis of the images of

food bank users produced and reproduced for public consumption by the Olive Branch Food Bank. As such, my analysis of these images attempts to expose various interpretations, understandings, and discourses embedded within the images themselves.

Visual images, like text, require interpretation, as they are the results of socially, culturally, and historically embedded interpretive practices (Heywood & Sandywell 1999). Gillian Rose's analytical methods provided a framework within which to think about the social effects of the images (2001). Rose contends that a primary approach to a critical method of visual interpretation is to first take images seriously. One must think about social conditions, social relations, and social representation. Fyfe and Law argue that "to understand a visualization is thus to enquire into the provenance and into the social work that it does. It is to note its principles of inclusion and exclusion, to detect the roles that it makes available, to understand the way in which they are distributed, and to decode the hierarchies and difference that it naturalises" (1988:1). How are social differences rendered? What is reproduced and what is omitted? Further, Rose notes the importance of considering how does or may oneself and others perceive an image. Rose states that "taking an image seriously, then, also involves thinking about how it positions you, its viewer, in its relation to it" (2001:12).

2.5 Ethical considerations

Although this research qualifies as minimal risk research, as the research agenda did not require involvement that meets or exceeds the possible harms encountered within the everyday lives of the research participants, many ethical considerations were taken into account prior to its commencement.

A principal ethical consideration concerned the fact that many of the documents within the material were produced by people who were not responsible for their accumulation and archival. As such, many individuals unknowingly contributed to this research. The documents included correspondences and letters that often included names and personal information. Here, issues of privacy and confidentiality were prime concerns of both the food bank administrators and myself. Under ideal circumstances, names and identifying characteristics would be removed prior to my viewing the documents; however due to resource constraints, this was not possible. The issue was resolved through my omitting all names and identifying characteristics from texts produced from the documents.

A second principle ethical consideration involved the selection of the individuals with whom I would conduct participant observations. The food bank administrators did the recruitment of participants in light of their knowledge of the structure of the food bank. Concern arose due to the power relations between food bank administrators and staff and volunteers. I did not want participants to feel pressured to participate. To minimize this concern, I discussed the research project and the consent form (see Appendix 3) with each participant, emphasizing that participation was voluntary and that she or he may choose to withdraw at any time without consequences. When participant observation occurred over the course of an entire day, ongoing consent was received. Although power relations could not be completely overcome, I do feel that participants did not feel obligated to participate due to administrative pressures.

2.6 Positionality

For many researchers it is important to reflexively reveal the spectrum of influences, both personal and social, that forms one's knowledge (Henwood & Pidgeon 1995; Wilkinson 1988). Further, as Kim England argues, "reflexivity is critical to the conduct of fieldwork; it induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research question" (1994:244). Throughout my research, beginning with the initial construction of my research question through to the material analysis and conclusions, I have attempted to remain aware of the numerous social relations that have framed and continue to frame my research agenda. Questions like "Why did I decide to conduct this research and through which lenses do I perceive the documents and present my findings?" are important analytical tools by which I try to understand my positionality.

As a white woman from a middle-class background, I approach this research from a position of privilege. I have never been food insecure and in fact always have had food available in excess. In a simple twofold understanding of a society of "haves" and "have not", I am a "have" and in the past I have volunteered with poverty relief organizations, consequently contributing to the reproduction of this dichotomy. In recognizing the role I play in this dichotomy, I struggle to remain conscious of my role in discursive processes. Additionally, I seek to remain mindful of the ways in which my actions as a researcher reproduce concepts of the "other". One tool that I employ is to present my research as an "ethnography of the particular" (Abu-Lughod 1991) or within a framework of personal interpretations. I consider my analysis as initiating conversation about the processes through which food banks portray the food insecure based on the review of particular

material collected within a particular place and at a particular time. Further, the process through which I arrived at my analysis and conclusions should be understood as incorporating other elements of critical reflexivity that have been engaged in throughout the research timeframe. For instance, the role played by discussing my assumptions and conclusions with those with whom I interacted. These conversations continually led me to question my analysis and interpretations and further investigate other possible meanings that might be taken from the material.

2.7 Chapter Summary

Because the Olive Branch Food Bank has played a significant role in food redistribution within the city of Pembrey for over 30 years, it was selected as an ideal location to conduct this research. The material provided by the Olive Branch Food Bank for the completion of this research contained 1391 documents, totaling 3285 pages, and covering a time period from 1989 to 2008.

In research projects such as this, it is important to have an organized agenda and an outlined approach to the methods of analysis. The agenda for this thesis incorporated various stages of data analysis including the quantification of the material as well as preliminary document reviews to identify general themes, followed by a rigorous review with the goal of becoming well acquainted with the material. The methods of critical discourse analysis and image analysis were used in this research project and provided frameworks with which to investigate the texts and images contained within the documents. Assumptions about the situatedness of discourses as well as the holistic nature of the material proved to be of particular importance to my interpretations and

conclusions, as it allowed the materials to be understood as a site of interrelating societal occurrences.

CHAPTER THREE

Understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure



Image 1 Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser poster date unknown

In this chapter I describe the understandings of food insecurity and food insecure individuals identified through the discourse analysis of the Olive Branch Food Bank documents. Overall, within the material one concise and defined understanding of food insecurity did not exist. Rather, descriptions of food insecurity and the food insecure varied according to the type of the document, the source of the text, as well as the purpose of the text. In fact, a single term could be applied differently as the context of the word changed. My analysis of the material also revealed a discrepancy between understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure produced for use internal to the Olive Branch Food Bank, for instance, meeting minutes, and the documents produced for

public consumption, such as in fundraising posters and advertisements. Many of the understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure identified within this chapter were based on my previous engagements with poverty scholarship.

3.1 The individual and the immediate

As aforementioned, contemporary poverty literature describes individualized understandings of poverty as discourses that understand poverty as resulting from an individual's personal deficiencies or behavioral practices (Lyon-Callo 2003). This section discusses various statements and texts produced within the material that contribute to this discourse. Within the texts of the Olive Branch Food Bank, the discourse of individualism is often coupled with a sense of immediacy or an emphasis on the need for providing food resources at once. This additional discourse, through its employment of a sense of desperation, further reinforces the individualized nature of the statements through its reference to short-term solutions to feeding people who are hungry in the present and as such require food in the present.

3.1.1 Reference to physical needs and lack of personal ability

One of the most common understandings through which food bank users are constructed within the documents is within an individualized discourse of food insecurity. This understanding is frequently established through texts that describe food bank users as having physical needs, such as nutritious food or housing, as well as a lack of skills, such as education or job training, required for employment. A good example of the

individualized conceptualization of food bank users is the Olive Branch Food Bank's 1995 vision statement.

The [Olive Branch Food Bank] is committed to the complete care of the whole person and the family around the underprivileged of Greater [Pembrey]. According to our mandate we are first called to look after the physical needs of people, to provide nutritional foods, clean clothing, the right to medical/dental help and recreational activity/enjoyment. We intend to address the lifestyle of the individual and the physical need of the family. (The Olive Branch Food Bank internal documents 1995)

The emphasis on the physical person is salient within this text. People are depicted based on needs for food, clothing, medical care, and recreationally activities. Additionally, the use of the word *lifestyle* further individualizes the subjects, as the word *lifestyle* may be understood as a choice of behavior on the part of the individual (Edgar & Sedgwick 1999). The framing of food bank users as needy without reference to processes that exist beyond the individual, removes considerations of poverty from the perspective of structural inequalities. In this text, there is no reference to the historical, material, or social conditions that may have contributed to food bank use. Needs are positioned within the individual, not as the result of social forces that structurally limit access to some individuals, producing a position of need. Within the materials, only two documents produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank for the purpose of public consumption makes such a reference social forces (see section 3.2).

An extension of this understanding is demonstrated in a document produced in 1996 for a fundraising event for honorary patrons of the Olive Branch Food Bank. A handout for the event states:

As the underprivileged in our community, each person must be empowered to take control of his/her life. [The Olive Branch Food Bank] is committed to: Step One is to provide the basics to survive - food, companionship, counseling assistance. Step Two to provide the necessary programs to promote life and work skills.

(Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser documents 1996)

In this text, the word *empowered* may be seen as coming from a discourse that promotes participation in society and emphasizes the potential social capital of the individual. The location of what requires change, in the form of empowerment, is the control one's life. As Faranak Miraftab argues, when "participation and empowerment are treated as independent of the structures of oppression, and simply processes by which programs foster individuals' sense of worth and esteem", this "inherently de-politicizes the notion of empowerment, often reducing it to individual economic gain and access to resources, and leaving the status quo unchallenged" (2004:242). Within this text, the subject of the needed empowerment and control is the individual and the means through which this is offered is life and employment skills. Again, the underprivileged are identified as lacking skills or abilities. Overall, there is no reference to the underlying reasons why those persons might have ended up in that position.

3.1.2 The legitimacy of the immediate and continuation of food insecurity

Within the documents food insecurity is also set within an individualized discourse through the representation of food donations as an immediately needed resource to combat hunger. The emphasis on the desperate need for food donations for the purpose of feeding people today is a frequent theme, specifically within documents produced for public consumption, such as fundraising posters. Occasionally, food requests are set within the context of the future, yet even in such statements the continued requirement of donations is offered as a solution. As the solution still requires food redistribution, the problem's roots remain located within an individual's hunger.

Many of the texts produced at the food bank can be understood as framing food insecurity through short-term or temporary relief strategies, helping people in the here and now. These texts exist within documents sent to the media requesting donations as well as in posters and brochures advertising food drives. In such texts, emphasizing the immediate and ongoing need for food is used as a tactic to gain awareness of the food bank and its need for resources for both today and tomorrow. For instance, in the following examples, posters produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank emphasize the immediate and ongoing demand for food bank resources. The first text was used to promote donations during the Christmas season while the second was produced to increase public awareness of food donation drop-bins around the city.

...right now, the demand at our food banks is high. The need for food in our communities is critical. (Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser poster date unknown)

Food donations from the people of the [Pembrey] area have meant sustenance, hope and encouragement for thousands of families and individuals with nowhere else to turn. For many, the crisis continues. Your generosity and concern is still needed. (Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser poster date unknown)

Each of these texts emphasizes the immediate need quite literally. Words such as *critical* and *crisis* express the desperate situation of those requiring the use of food banks. Within these texts, the problem of hunger is located in two places. First, it is located in the lack of food donations and, consequently, the lack of resources at the food banks. Second, the problem is located in the actual crisis of hunger, a crisis that may be somewhat alleviated through donations. Throughout these texts, hunger is framed as the source of the emergency, therefore legitimating public concern and accordingly donations. In the second example, the benefits of food redistribution are further celebrated not only for their ability to relieve hunger, but also in bringing *hope* and *encouragement*.

The narrative of the necessity of on-going support is also reproduced by organizations that fundraise on behalf of or in partnership with the Olive Branch Food Bank. A poster produced by a local grocery store in 1995 highlights the enduring need for food bank donations.

Christmas and holidays are months when people think about supporting their local food banks. Food banks operate year round to keep up with the ongoing need for food. (external organization poster 1995)

The following was as a message for a different fundraiser. This text was produced on behalf of many regional businesses in support of an annual food drive in 2002.

The need is real, [name omitted] ... knows there has been a steady increase in the demand for food. Together with [name omitted] ...hopes to motivate people to help fill food bank shelves for the summer ... help fill the need. (external organization fundraiser strategy 2002)

In both of these texts, hunger is described as an ongoing phenomenon, one that, even if food is donated today, will continue in the future. With the assumption of not only hunger in the future, but also increasing numbers of hungry individuals, the need for continual donations to the food bank is validated. In texts referring to the future, that need is often represented and legitimated with statistics. This text was part of a regional food redistribution organization's meeting minutes from 1998.

...it is important to report statistics for keeping the public up to date about the growing need. (external organization meeting minutes 1998)

Acknowledgment of the food bank's unremitting future role requires fundraising and planning. The continual dependence on public participation to fulfill this need is demonstrated at an Olive Branch Food Bank strategy meeting in 1996:

The [Olive Branch Food Bank] is always going to need significant money... we need to secure the donors properly. (Olive Branch Food Bank meeting minutes 1996)

Donations are thought of as existing out there somewhere, in the community or private sector. The goal then is to secure it. At the same meeting, this goal was articulated.

...estimates [that] there is over \$2 Billion dollars of unattached money in [Pembrey]... A long term view is necessary. People need to know what we

are doing, now, in 2 years, in 5 years. (Olive Branch Food Bank meeting minutes 1996)

Although statements such as these involve a long-term vision, they do not offer long-term solutions other than the continued aiding of individuals through the provision of food resources. Within the documents produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank, no texts suggested that a long-term goal was ultimately not to have hunger or eventually not to have food banks. The long-term strategies described in the documents concentrate on future acts of food redistribution, the identical response to food insecurity employed today. In this way, both are short-term and seek to relieve immediate hunger.

The following text, produced by an external food redistribution organization, is a letter of thanks to the Canadian Pacific Railroad for the delivery of food via the National Sharing System. Again the text directly correlates the concern for the continual need of donations. Hungry families receive food, and if in the future, when they are still hungry, they must receive more food:

Food for the hungry is always a concern and your delivery of such product to B.C. is a real boost to our need. Our food banks rely upon the food from across Canada to fill the need in their community. Hungry families in the past and ... in the future, benefit from your support.

(external organization correspondence date unknown)

Once more, within this text, hunger is dealt with through food donations and need is understood as a product of hunger. In this case, the word *hunger* is defined through lack of available food donations. In a similar correspondence document written to the

Canadian Pacific Railroad on behalf of food banks in the province of BC, hunger is additionally understood as resulting from a lack of available donated food resources.

I wish to “THANK YOU” for your support of [name omitted]. We have a significant amount of provincial food bank members that, without you, would be facing critical shortages of food in their communities... We [name omitted], have problems obtaining food as there is no manufacturers here. If it were not for the CP Rail shipping food for us out of Toronto, we would face many problems. (external organization correspondence 2000)

In these texts, hunger is construed as subsisting due to the limited resources at the food bank. This discourse leaves little room for dialogues as to the deeper causes of why people are hungry or the social processes resulting in hunger. In the early 1980s, Amartya Sen challenged the previously held idea that famines were caused by a lack of availability and argued that famines resulted from the lack of access (Sen 1981). Research from the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN has determined that the world produces enough food for all people (2009); hunger arises when people do not have access to food due to various socio-economic conditions. Indeed, lack of manufacturers or lack of transportation of food products could be understood as a matter of access to food. However, this understanding distracts from the reality that there is an abundance of food in Pembrey. The problem is one of unequal access and distribution. The critical food shortages mentioned did not occur within the general population; they occurred at the food bank due to insufficient donations. The lack of manufacturers in the region did not

prevent non food bank users from accessing food, only those who use the food bank services or who face other barriers to access, such as an inadequate income.

It is in this sense that I see the term *hunger* as signifying that which results from a lack of availability while the term *food insecurity* as highlighting unequal distribution and lack of access. Food insecurity exists when individuals are “uncertain of having or unable to acquire” enough food (Nord, Andrews, & Carlson 2003). Many scholars of food security assert that the word *hunger* must be defined within a social context (Radimer, Olsen, & Cambell 1990). However, the use of the word *hunger* in the previous examples fails to do this and as such dissociates the word *hunger* from a discourse of access to resources prior to the symptom of hunger itself. In the cited texts, hunger becomes an experience of individuals caused by a lack of food, regardless of the preceding processes responsible for the lack. The emphasis on the individual within public discourses on food insecurity has remained constant since the mid 1980s (Anderson & Cook 1999), so it is not surprising that the discourse is so prevalent within documents at the food bank.

An explanation for the previously discussed texts is that food bank administrators understand their role as providing immediate hunger relief and not addressing the larger structural inequalities. However, the production of such texts must be recognized as contributions to public understandings of food insecurity. These statements produce discourses of food bank users as individuals requiring food due to their personal deficiencies, a portion of their hunger resulting from inadequate community donations to the food bank. Although it may be incorrect to believe that the production of statements that do not make reference to processes of food insecurity beyond that of the individual are evidence of the ideological blindness of the food bank administrators, I argue that

these texts themselves provide a certain way of knowing or representing food insecurity and the food insecure. Further, the lack reference to structural inequalities consequently also limits the ways in which food insecurity and the food insecure may be understood.

3.2 The role of systemic inequalities within food bank discourses

A second discourse of food insecurity relates food insecurity to systemic inequalities¹². This understanding, although not as prevalent within the material as that of the individualized discourse of food bank users and food insecurity, is an alternative and well establishes discourse within poverty scholarship (Riches 1997). Within the material, only two statements produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank for public consumption could be seen as contributing to this alternative discourse. However, additional examples did exist in documents produced by both external organizations as well as in documents produced internally to the Olive Branch Food Bank, for instance within meeting minutes and correspondence. In these texts, the relationships between political, economic, and social processes are recognized as affecting the ability of individuals to access institutions and resources and, consequently, as playing a role in one's hunger and food insecurity. Accordingly, those requiring food bank services as well as the general existence of food banks are understood as products of systemic processes.

¹² I use the word systemic, for instance, as in systemic inequalities, barriers, or processes, in reference to broader aspects of the society that influence people's lives, such as economic, political, or cultural trends. Examples identified in the Canadian literature on poverty include systemic forms of discrimination such as racism or sexism (Raphael 2004), systemic barriers to housing such as a lack of affordable rental opportunities (Bryant 2003), or systemic inequality within the health care system such as the distribution of doctors in rural areas (Shah, Gunraj, and Hux 2003). Although this word occasionally is used in contrast to individualism, I understand both as processes of the wider system that effect peoples lives.

Within the material, the first text produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank for public consumption was part of a handout and information package given at an honorary patrons fundraising campaign to promote monetary donations in 1996.

It is a sad but true that the need for the [Olive Branch Food Bank] services continue to grow. As our society suffers the embarrassment and ignominy of job cut backs, fewer work opportunities, reduced incomes, etc., more and more people are being forced to use the services of the [Olive Branch Food Bank] simply to meet basic living requirements.

(Olive Branch Food Bank information package 1996)

The second text within the material produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank for public consumption was part of an advertising campaign to bring in food and monetary donations the following year. In reference to the increasing numbers of children using food banks, it is stated in the brochure that:

They're children from families just like yours. Innocent bystanders caught in an economic downturn, their parents victims of cutbacks and lay-offs

(Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser brochure 1997)

In these texts, the hunger of food bank users is positioned within an economic discourse, specifically involving job loss, reduced incomes, or possibly corporate downsizing. These statements are significantly different from an individualized understanding of food insecurity, as the causes of food insecurity are related to processes external to the individual and the individual's behavior, choices, skills, or abilities. However, these texts do not have a specific or direct reference to other forms of systemic processes, for instance, those of the political arena. Although it is possible that the

cutbacks may be referring to government actions, as the downloading of social services and cuts to welfare programs may be understood with the same terminology. Even taking this into account, what the texts do not address are the political ideologies leading to cutbacks and layoffs, for instance, neoliberal policies of reducing government involvement within the economic and market systems or individualized discourses of personal responsibility and accordingly decreasing eligibility and accessibility to social services. Overall, these texts locate responsibility primarily within a narrative of economic fluctuations and not in relation to political ideologies and deliberate courses of action. I argue that the exclusion of the political arena from a narrative of the causes of food insecurity diminishes the possibility of discourses of government responsibility for the production of hunger or responsibility to prevent, reduce, or solve hunger. As Graham Riches argues, although hunger may be an outcome of unemployment and insufficient income or welfare, it also exists due to the failure of Canadian provincial and federal governments to acknowledge and implement the human right to food (1999).

Although the previous texts were the only examples contributing to this discourse produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank for public consumption, other examples did exist within the material. As noted, the materials included many documents produced by other individuals and organizations, many of whom are also involved in food redistribution within Canada. The following text, produced for public consumption by Food Banks Canada, was printed in 1998 in a nationwide fundraising campaign facilitated by food banks across the country.

Daily, many people join line ups at community based food banks to receive bags of groceries. The people who use these food banks are people

without adequate incomes. It's that simple. There is no food shortage in Canada; there is a job shortage and insufficient social programs. It's that complex. (Food Banks Canada national fundraiser campaign 1998)

There is an obvious difference between the previous Olive Branch Food Bank text and this Food Bank Canada text. Again the latter makes reference to economic factors such as income and job shortages. However in this text, the insufficiency of social programs is also noted. Consequently, the users of food banks are situated in larger economic contexts and more directly within political contexts. Additionally, the mention of sufficient food within Canada links food insecurity to the issue of access. It is salient to note when and how economic and political processes are related to poverty within such statements, as without this connection it becomes difficult to offer solutions in a manner that challenges structural inequalities and access to resources (Harriss 2007).

Other than the previous three texts, no other documents within the material produced for public consumption relate food insecurity to systemic processes. However there are instances within internal documents produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank where this relationship is established. Within the following four texts, food bank administrators make direct correlations between political processes and food insecurity. This statement from an administrator's report from the Olive Branch Food Bank's 2003 Annual General Meeting reads:

We cannot deny the serious trend taking place during this last year when the government cuts have increased the dilemma of the less fortunate. The Government believed they had to take this tack to save the economy and to right the Provincial ship but why, at the expense of the poor? There are

no clear answers but it is obvious that the plight of the poor has increased dramatically and we are one of the organizations in this city who are called to come alongside. (Olive Branch Food Bank meeting minutes 2003)

At the same meeting, another food bank administrator wrote in his annual report:

At times I don't look forward to what faces everyone in 2003 as government polices are neglecting the needs of the most vulnerable in society (Olive Branch Food Bank meeting minutes 2003)

Both these texts make a concise and clear correlation between government action and increasing need or use of the food bank. Moreover, they directly contradict the analysis and conclusions offered within the earlier discussed Olive Branch Food Bank texts.

Both of these texts demonstrate that food bank administrators do understand the relationship between food insecurity and political ideologies. A significant distinction then, between these two quotes and the earlier texts, is that the former texts were produced for public consumption with the goal of increasing donations, while the latter were produced solely for internal use. In this regard, although a definitive answer explaining the discrepancy between these two discourses within the material cannot be given, it is possible that an understanding of the food bank's primary goal of food redistribution is relevant. Perhaps the Olive Branch Food Bank's dependence on local businesses and the community for many of its resources discourages critiques of political ideologies within publicly consumed material. Support for this theory can be drawn from researchers who argue that within the food bank system, not only do many food bank

administrators and staff wish to remain apolitical, but their volunteers and donors do as well (Riches 1986; Poppendieck 1999).

This suggestion is reflected in a letter to a local grocery store operator from a food bank administrator in 1996. Although the text acknowledges government cut backs as responsible for individuals in need of Olive Branch Food Bank services, the strategies offered revolve around food redistribution.

Our immediate needs are two-fold. One we need to raise \$60 000 to keep the facility operating for the clients who are in need of our services (due primarily to government cutbacks) Two our cupboards are becoming quite bare and we are in need of the following items: ... (Olive Branch Food Bank correspondence 1996)

Within this text, no suggested action is offered that would challenge or critique political actions. Not only does the short-term response, food redistribution, and the long-term response, expanding food bank operations, maintain the status quo, moreover they both reproduce and reinforce the food bank system as the single response to food insecurity.

Within the material, only one example produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank suggests alternative responses to government actions. The following text is from staff meeting minutes in 1995.

Social services is making some major cutbacks. [Name omitted] is feeling they need to make a stand to represent the people we are to help. Feb Bill C76 will terminate the right to income. BC is going to make great cut backs in crisis grants. (Olive Branch Food Bank meeting minutes September 1995)

Again, this text demonstrates recognition of the relation between government actions, specifically cuts to social services, and increases in food insecurity and the need for food bank services. In this particular text, a food bank administrator recognizes the need for action beyond that of food redistribution. It is unclear from the Olive Branch Food Bank material whether or not, or through what means, a *stand* was made.

Overall, according to the last four statements, recognition and understanding by Olive Branch Food Bank administrators of the relationship between the Canadian political context and food insecurity is apparent. However, according to the material, this understanding is not reproduced and communicated within texts for public consumption. An example of this process is apparent in an Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser from 1993. For this fundraiser, the material contained 33 pages of documents. These documents included government, business, and personal correspondences, fundraising brochures, fundraising information posters, meeting minutes, media news releases, and a newspaper clipping about the event. The fundraising event involved the local fishing community donating their “extra” fish to the Olive Branch Food Bank. Several local businesses and community members were involved including fishing businesses, marinas, hotels, theaters, and many more. Prizes via monthly draws were offered to the individuals who donated fish. Within all of the documents collected, there is no mention of reasons for the existence of food banks or the existence of food insecure individuals. For instance, the brochure produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank to advertise the fundraiser includes information regarding how the fundraisers works and how it will help. “Food for the poor” is given as the answer, noting that the “1991’s Fishery put close to 6000 lbs. of salmon into the food hampers”. As well, information about what the

individuals donating the fish will get in return is provided. Similarly, the media release announcing the fundraiser stated:

The Foodbank Fishery provides an important source of protein for the foodbank clients, especially at this time of year when donations usually decline but foodbank clients are still hungry. (media announcement 1993)

Again, the food bank is cited along with those using the food bank services. There is no information given regarding the origins of food insecurity, only its existence is noted.

This trend is present in all of the documents within the material produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank for this fundraiser. Even within the documents of the material that are not produced by the food bank, for instance, an article clipped by the food bank from a regional newspaper regarding the fundraiser, there is no mention of the sources of food insecurity within the region, again only the existence of the “city’s less fortunate” is mentioned.

3.3 The food insecure and community membership

Although no direct definition of the word *community* is provided within the Olive Branch Food Bank documents, the word is frequently used to describe the local and regional areas where food is collected and distributed. The word *community* is also used to establish a sense of belonging and association. This sense of belonging extends to both individuals donating food as well as those who would be receiving food from the food bank. This use of the word is demonstrated in the following texts.

...the way and means in which to feed hundreds of families who are struggling to make ends meet, to those in our community who are on small

pensions, the handicapped and the children that go along with these people. (Olive Branch Food Bank correspondence 1994)

This is a chance for the tourism industry to help the people in our own community at Christmas. (external organization media release 1999)

Support your community by participation in a hike for hunger. (external organization fundraiser poster 1996)

From our perspective the BC sharing program is a reflection of all that is good in our communities, allowing willing and eager donors to direct their concern for their less fortunate neighbors through the direct distribution of nutritional BC products thereby creating jobs. (Olive Branch Food Bank correspondence 1998)

Please join us to kick-off one of the biggest community-wide food bank drives ever, and help us make this a happy and healthy Christmas for our [Pembrey] neighbors who depend on the [Olive Branch Food Bank] and all of us who support it. (external organization fundraiser poster 1999)

Within these texts, everyone exists within the community; food insecure individuals as well as those able to provide resources for the food bank are all part of *our community*. These discourses appear to produce sentiments about the similarities between the individuals in need and the individuals able to donate. The use of the word *neighbors*

further illustrates this premise. This discourse is prevalent within the documents produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank as well as those produced by organizations that fundraise on its behalf. The hunger and food insecurity described within these texts does not exist in some distant location; it is knowable, close to home, and real. These texts construct the food insecure as community members, existing within *our community*, the same community in which potential food bank donors live.

The only options of food relief provided in these texts exist within the community as well, and consequently I argue detach hunger from larger political and economic structures. The reasons for individuals' food insecurity are not extended beyond their descriptions as those on *small pensions* and *the less fortunate*. The processes leading to one's less fortunate status are disregarded, as no reflection is provided regarding the causes and consequences of hunger. Overall, the discourse of community membership is used as a tool through which to legitimate the request for food donations as a response to immediate hunger.

3.4 Categories of the deserving poor

Within the documents of the Olive Branch Food Bank, food bank users are frequently divided into categories. These categories are produced in internal documents, such as meeting minutes, as well as in external documents, such as fundraising advertisements. The categorization of those living in poverty is neither new nor uncommon and is frequently noted within poverty scholarship (Spicker, Leguizamón, & Gordon 2007). For instance, it is evident in 18th century British Poor Law to establish eligibility criteria for social assistance benefits within the colony of Canada. Whether or

not to categorize diverse groups of people by reference to only a single similarity, such as gender, ethnicity, or age, should be approached with caution. Within poverty scholarship, the creation of such categories is understood as both functional and problematic, depending on the level of differences exemplified in the formation of groups and the purposes for those distinctions. When evaluating measures of equality and inequality, Iris Young argues that distinguishing groups allows for the identification of the underlying causal social structures (2001). Similarly, Alisse Waterston explains that it is through “naming, classifying, and defining” of groups that allow them to mobilize, represent, resist, and be heard (1999:5-6). However, Waterston additionally points out that in an exaggerated context, where difference is emphasized, “the other is born, objectified, and perceived as exotic, strange, frightening” (1999:6). As well, similar to the use of the word *community* in the Olive Branch Food Bank documents discussed above, the production of groups necessitates inclusions and consequently creates groups of exclusion (Kingfisher 2007).

Within the documents of the Olive Branch Food Bank, the creation of categories is likely representative of many factors. Categories of people are occasionally used to delineate services, as discussed in Chapter 4. The categories used are also part of the reproduction of general categories used in everyday life, such as gender and age. How the categories are employed, however, may come to represent understandings of those referenced, or not referenced, within the groups. For instance, in the case of the Olive Branch Food Bank, occasionally categories are used to generalize food bank users, even if all users do not actually belong to that category.

3.4.1 Families

Within the documents of the Olive Branch Food Bank, the category of family is frequently employed in advertisements requesting donations. In many examples, the word *family* is used in a way that would suggest all food bank users fall into the category of a family, even if singles and couples are assisted as well.

Your donation will go to the nearest participating food bank and will benefit families in need in your own community. (external organization fundraiser brochure 2003)

Take steps to make a difference by joining [name omitted] and [name omitted] in a hike to collect food for families in need. (external organization fundraiser poster 1996)

Help a family in need ... all food will be delivered to the [Olive Branch Food Bank] for distribution... together we can help a lot of families in need. (external organization fundraiser poster 2006)

The [Olive Branch Food Bank] provides an essential service to thousands of families in our community. (external organization fundraiser poster 2006)

Help music feed a family. (external organization fundraiser poster 2000)

In these texts, families are highlighted and although the texts do not directly exclude single food bank users, they do not acknowledge them as using the Olive Branch Food Bank services or as potential recipients of the donations. The emphasis on family within documents used to promote donations suggests that certain categories of food bank users are understood as more likely to encourage donations, perhaps due to beliefs that they are more deserving. Moreover, the use of the word *families* to represent all food bank users is perhaps employed to generate sympathy from the community and consequently donations.

In the following text from 1995, the additional—and exclaimed—information describing food banks users deliberately segregates families and children from other food banks users:

This Christmas the [Olive Branch Food Bank] is opening their hearts and pantry to well over 1600 clients who will find themselves in need. These are mainly families with children ! (external organization fundraiser poster 1995)

Similar to the previous texts that refer to families in general to describe all food bank users, this text is framed with an assumption that food insecure families are more deserving. The distinction of families and children from other food banks users produces this understanding through two means. First, the distinction connotes an assumption that some people prefer to donate goods mainly or only to certain categories of people. Second, once the distinction is established, the conclusory and empathetic nature of the next sentence encourages the idea that some food bank users are actually more deserving than others.

3.4.2 Children

Beyond families in general, children are additionally highlighted within the Olive Branch Food Bank documents. In many fundraising advertisements, children are specifically noted.

Hungry Children need our help... Fact: Poorly nourished children suffer increased susceptibility to infection, disease, fatigue, difficulty with concentration, poor growth and development. Adults experience similar effects. (Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser poster date unknown)

Children going without food is a community problem, and it requires a community solution. (external fundraiser documents 2000)

Each of these texts emphasize children as recipients of food donations provided by the food bank. Images of children were also contained within the documents. Children are often understood as more deserving of charity or more likely to appeal to charity donors (Burman 1994). In regards to the images, picturing children is a popular theme within charity advertisements as such pictures evoke feelings of innocence and of being deserving of care, protection, and security. Through the image of a child, the viewers may reflect on their own capacities and obligations as an adult (Holland 1992). As one food bank administrator stated during an annual staff meeting:

Children are the innocent victims and we have to protect them at all costs.

(Olive Branch Food Bank meeting minutes 2003)

An additional example produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank in 1996 sets up a direct comparison between children and other food bank users,

practically requesting that the observer make a distinction among the deservingness of food bank recipients. In this example, a brochure, the outside or front image (Image 2) features a middle-aged man hunched against a brick wall.

The header of the brochure poses the question:

If you think this is the typical face at the food bank... (Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser document 1996)

As you open the brochure, you see the image (Image 3) of young children standing against a chain-link fence, perhaps outside a school. The inside header reads:

...then think again. (Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser document 1996)

The food bank's acknowledgement of the use of a stereotype is demonstrated through its reference to the "typical face" and its desire to challenge it. Clearly then, the child is presented as the standard food bank user. Images such as this make sense only because the images employed are common representations and discourses (Rose 2001), the former image being an archetypal homeless man, and the latter, poor children. It is in this way that images produce and reproduce understandings of food banks users. Observable objectives of this brochure are to inform the public of the demographics of food banks users or perhaps to provide a breakdown of the different categories of food bank users. Accordingly there must be motivations behind distinguishing different categories of food banks users. The fact that both the children in the image are females and the incorrectly assumed "typical face at a food bank" is a male arguably situates these images within discourses of the gendering of poverty.

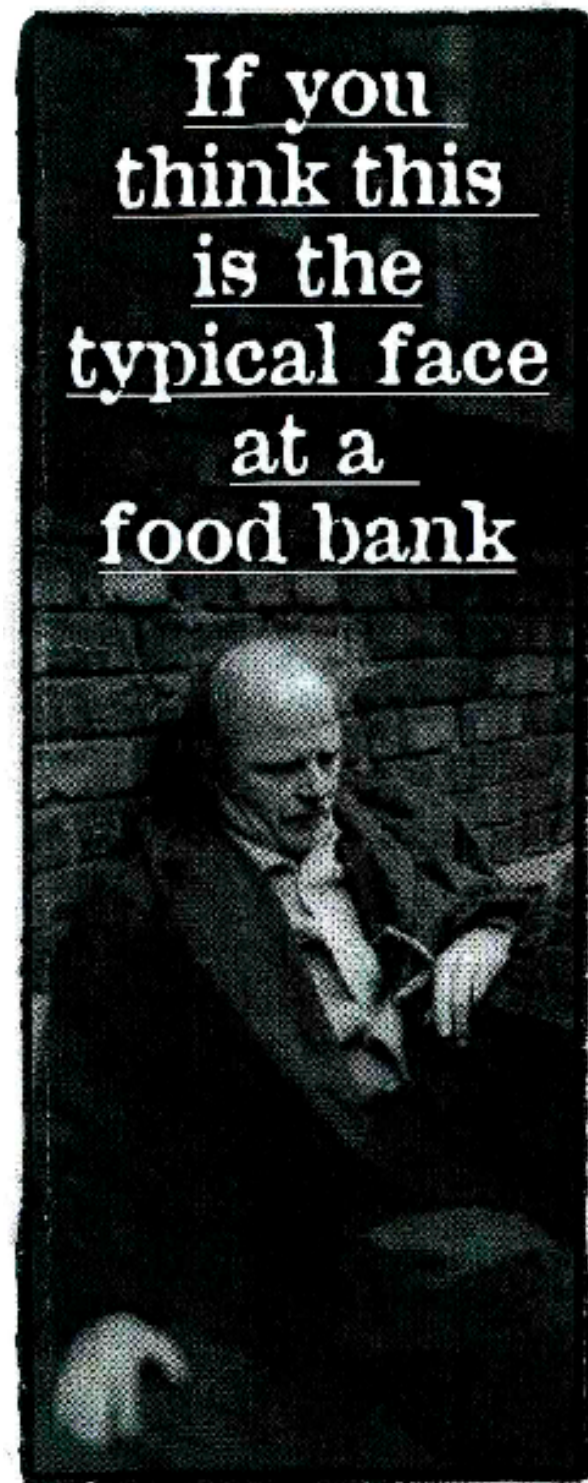


Image 2 Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser document 1996



Image 3 Olive Branch Food Bank fundraiser document 1996

In Canada, women, regardless of age, are more likely to experience poverty than men (Lee 2000). It is possible that the images of female children were used to even further distinguish the deservedness of food bank users, while also reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes of dependent and vulnerable women and girls.

Moreover, the man sitting against a wall is inactive and tired looking. He only occupies the space at the bottom of the page, and even his gaze is downward. He looks as if he is unwilling to participate in society or has made the choice not to do so. The categories of “employable” and “able-bodied” are commonly used to distinguish the undeserving poor (Westhues 2003). By contrast, the two young girls stand staring forward, making direct eye contact with the viewer. They stand on the outside of the fence, enlisting the viewers’ help. The picture evokes feelings of innocence on behalf of the children as well. Patricia Holland notes that, as “the symbol of common humanity, a child may be the bearer of suffering with no responsibility for its causes” (1992:157).

An interpretation of this image suggests that the food bank’s administrators, to some extent, have a particular understanding of worthiness or neediness when it comes to feeding people or perhaps only that they believe the public has such understandings and that this brochure might increase donations. The brochure suggests that children are the deserving poor, while implying that the homeless man is not as worthy or deserving. A motivation behind the representation of food bank users in this way might very well include increased feeling of responsibility to donate. Perhaps the brochure seeks to gain support from people who might not give to the food bank if the food is going mainly to older men who are homeless—and perhaps not as deserving. Yet another possible interpretation could be drawn from the brochure’s highlighting of children. A motivation

could be to suggest that many children also live in poverty—perhaps countering to some, the assumption that the social welfare system takes care of families—since they represent deservedness. Public responsibility for the poor is regularly extended only to those considered needy and deserving, categories usually based on notions of vulnerability or helplessness (Caragata 2003).

3.5 Conclusions

Although various understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure are produced within the documents of the Olive Branch Food Bank, a common theme is the production of discourses that disembody food insecurity from larger political and economic contexts. In this regard, perhaps most evident are the individualist discourses, where words such as *self-help* and phrases such as “empowered to take control of one’s own life” facilitate discourses that locate poverty within the individual. Often coinciding with this understanding, discourses of the immediacy of hunger, furthermore detach hunger from a systemic discourse concerning unequal access, again locating food insecurity within a discourse of an individual’s insufficiency of food. The acknowledgment of economic factors in two of the documents within the material illustrates a recognition of factors beyond the individual, but perhaps does not go far enough to situate food insecurity within the political arena. The use of certain categories of food bank users within documents produced for public consumption opens to view constructions of deservingness and neediness, both through direct comparisons between categories of food bank users and the highlighting of particular categories of users. The production and reproduction of particular discourses within documents for public

consumption is an important location to explore societal understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure as these discourses are presented as ways of knowing about Canadian food insecurity. Further, the exclusion of some discourses limits ways in which food insecurity might be understood. For instance the exclusion of a relationship between food insecurity and political action within documents for public consumption demonstrates this point. As such, this example additionally represents a key location at which to examine the processes through which particular discourses become included or excluded within documents for public consumption.

CHAPTER FOUR

Policies and Procedures at the Olive Branch Food Bank

This chapter describes three general policies and procedures of the Olive Branch Food Bank identified through the document discourse analysis. These policies and procedures were not directly articulated within the documents, but are conjectures identified through various actions and responses to occurrences. They were demonstrated through particular events occurring at a specific time as well as through overall trends in food bank operations. The policies described in this chapter were additionally selected in support of my conclusion: that the reproduction of certain discourses are key process through which the conceptualization of food insecurity as political becomes diminished at the individual and community levels.

Moreover, the policies and procedures I discuss within this chapter demonstrate reciprocal relationships with certain understandings of food insecurity and food banks users discussed in Chapter 3, that is, the individual and the immediate, systemic inequalities, community membership, and the differentiation deservedness of food bank users. This reciprocal relationship is based on the view put forth in this thesis, that food banks policies and procedures are mediated by food bank administrator's understandings of poverty, while at the same time, reproducing those understandings.

4.1 Malleable hamper eligibility

Similar to many Canadian food banks, the Olive Branch Food Bank's resources are determined by supply, and consequently, policies concerning access must be

structured and regulated. Within the documents, situations are described where resources become exceedingly limited and priorities are established in regards to frequency of assistance and level of assistance to some food bank users. In this section I discuss how policies of prioritizing need are employed at the food bank by means of the understandings of differential deservedness of food bank users discussed in Chapter 3.

As noted in Chapter 2, those who receive the food bank hamper services may do so once a month. Each hamper is intended to contain enough food for three days. As an individual enters the food bank to obtain a hamper, their identification is recorded into a computer as a means to track overall food bank use as well as their frequency of use. This procedure additionally prevents individuals from receiving multiple hampers in a month.

4.1.1 Expansion of hamper service eligibility

The Olive Branch Food Bank documents reveal that initially the food bank structured its hunger relief efforts on providing food for families. Single men who approached the food bank were directed to other poverty relief organizations within Pembrey. In 1994, this policy was changed following appeals from other poverty relief organization within the city. These organizations requested that the Olive Branch Food Bank widen their services to include serving single persons, as they themselves did not provide emergency food hampers. In a letter written to the Olive Branch Food Bank it was stated:

We are wondering if you would consider widening your focus on serving families to include single persons. Many of these people are also in great need of emergency food. As you know, the [name omitted] is not a food

bank and cannot offer single people the food which you are able to provide to families. (external correspondence to the Olive Branch Food Bank 1994)

Following this request, the Olive Branch Food Bank began providing food to single individuals as well.

4.1.2 Food shortages and eligibility

Although the Olive Branch Food Bank has expanded its eligibility for food hampers, the documents reveal that priority remains on families and children. As discussed in Chapter 3, the understanding of food bank users as categorical and classifiable based on deservedness of food is a prevalent discourse within the documents of the Olive Branch Food Bank. My analysis demonstrates how these understanding are reproduced within the food bank policies and procedures that employ categories of food bank users as the means through which to differentiate the hamper services of eligibility and food selection.

The starkest differentiation of hamper services based on the categorization of individuals was demonstrated in an instance of food shortages. Food shortages occur when there are insufficient resources at the food bank to provide a monthly hamper to all individuals requesting assistance. In such events, choices are made regarding the hamper service. One policy that has been implemented in the past at the Olive Branch Food Bank is to limit food to some individuals. Individuals denied assistance are determined based on the same categorization structure discussed in Chapter 3, namely sex, family status, age, and ability to work. For instance, in a survey completed by the Olive Branch Food

Bank in 1999, the food bank administrators were asked whether they ever limit food by gender. In response, it was stated that food limitations only occur if the food bank ran short of food and in such a case they would prioritize families with children. An implementation of this policy occurred earlier in 1996 when food resources were described as being in “critical condition”. Meeting minutes for that time period revealed the decision to refuse food assistance to single males and perhaps females as well:

Effective Monday - singles males will be cut off.

Single hampers based on supply and demand.

We will not serve singles for the rest of the week because of the shortage.

(Olive Branch Food Bank staff meeting minutes 1996)

This decision was made one day and enacted promptly. In this instance, eligibility was initially determined by sex and lifestyle, for instance, not having children, however, soon after further subcategories were implemented, including income, age, and ability to work.

Discourses of the deserving poor depend on understandings of behavior and ability as determining factors of poverty. As such, the conceptual framework of differential deservedness holds individuals accountable for their understood categorized behavior. For instance, those considered able to work are habitually denied inclusion within the category of deserving poor; their unemployment understood as an outcome of personal characteristics, such as laziness (Westhues 2003). A statement from the Olive Branch Food Bank’s 1996 meeting minutes illustrates this point by specifically excluding singles deemed able to work from the hamper service.

It was stated that at this time no singles (that are able to work) can

receive a hamper. (Olive Branch Food Bank staff meeting minutes 1996)

Within statements where eligibility and worthiness are tied to commitments to the labour market, individuals are assessed “directly related to their capacity to sell their labour power as a commodity in the market place” (Riches 2002:659). As structural issues such as income, educational, and employment opportunities are ignored, this discourse contributes to an individualized understanding of poverty. In contrast, food bank user may be considered deserving of a hamper if the individual’s capacity to work was somehow limited:

Singles are to be cut out - families are priority - low income, senior, unemployable, handicapped. (Olive Branch Food Bank staff meeting minutes 1996)

Single seniors or unemployable or handicapped singles would appear to deserve food as their capacity, or possibly lack of capacity, is understood as preventing them from working. The inclusion of low-income singles within the deserving categories is interesting. Perhaps, low-income singles deserve food because they do indeed engage within the workforce. Food bank administrators do recognize that many of their food bank users are employed yet do not to make enough money to adequately provide for their immediate needs.

As the food bank administrators hold the responsibility for eligibility criteria at the food bank, they are in the position to decide who will receive food and who will not. This administrative power was dramatically confirmed at a subsequent meeting.

The [Olive Branch Food Bank] has the right to prioritize. (Olive Branch Food Bank staff meeting minutes 1996)

The authority to make decisions regarding hamper eligibility is understood to rest solely with the administrators. Volunteers who interview food bank users prior to hamper distribution are not allowed to make comparable decisions. This policy was articulated following the change in hamper eligibility.

...[We] need to make volunteers aware that they cannot make decisions in reference to assessing clients' need for food and fulfilling request unless instructed by [names omitted] specifically. (Olive Branch Food Bank staff meeting minutes 1996)

This text suggests that volunteers on occasion may not strictly follow the rules, applying their own assessment of food bank users needs.

Policies and procedures such as these are understood as fundamental to the functioning and continuation of the food bank. However, they concurrently undermine the needs of food bank users. As food distribution is dependent on the supply itself and with those who make the decisions regarding it, food is detached from need. As such, when the food bank is short of food and people are turned away, they are left without any entitlements to food. Without a sense of entitlement to food, it becomes difficult to situate that need within a discourse of right to access, as supply is the determining factor of food distribution. If access to food is not considered an entitlement, distribution may be construed as a privilege, allocated by those in control of food resources. This process is demonstrated through procedures that occurred the week following the removal of singles' eligibility for food hampers. At an Olive Branch Food Bank meeting, it was stated that the food bank director:

...has decided to make an attempt at giving the singles something. (Olive Branch Food Bank staff meeting minutes 1996)

In this text, the distribution of food may be, in essence, viewed as a symbolic act. As Valerie Tarasuk and Joan Eakin note, when food is given as a symbolic gesture, the ability of food bank users to negotiate food allowances cannot exist, as their need is not the determinate for food provisions (2003). In some respects, the majority of food bank provisions may be understood as dissociating food distribution from need, as the overall needs of users are not generally met. But beyond this, the policy to prioritize some food bank users at the expense of others further substantiates this dissociation. In this way, the Olive Branch Food Bank's initial family oriented focus persists. Families' needs are understood as particularly deserving, likely stemming from the fact that families are equated with children. From the perspective of anti-poverty advocates, the malleability of the charity run hunger-relief sector is a point of harsh criticism, specifically in regards to criteria for eligibility. This criticism predominates in the fact that food bank users have no legally enforceable rights to food (Poppendieck 1994). If food bank users are not entitled to hamper services, those denied assistance have no grounds on which to appeal the decision and are unable to seek legal recourse.

I argue that the fact that at the Olive Branch Food Bank certain people are removed from eligibility when food resources are limited is a reflection of food bank administrators' strong senses of stratification on the basis of relative deservingness of different food bank users. Importantly the relationship between understandings and actions may be conceptualized as reciprocal, as the understandings are not only reflected in the choices made in regards to who will receive food, but are reproduced within their

practice and procedures. As such, the action that physically turns some people away can also be understood within the discourse of differential degrees of the deservingness of food bank users. Moreover, as each food bank implements its own policies regarding food distribution and eligibility, the inconsistency among food banks further undermines food bank users needs and possible understandings of their right to food.

At the Olive Branch Food Bank, food, constructed as a privilege, is presented as a conceptual framework for understanding food insecurity to both the food insecure, through food bank redistribution practices, and to the staff, volunteers, and the public, who witness these practices. Constructed as a privilege, food is detached from a rights framework, as an ineligible individual within the private hunger-relief sector has no legal grounds through which to challenge that ineligibility. The processes that disengage food from a rights framework are important, as the way in which food insecurity, as the problem, is understood shapes responses to it (Tarasuk & Davis 1996). For instance, a rights framework to food, Charles LeVoke explains, “calls for accountability and places a significant amount of responsibility on government to protect its citizens against hunger” (2006:91). Consequently, I argue that food bank discourses that decrease the ability of food to be understood as a right are critical processes through which the conceptualization of food insecurity as political is diminished at the individual and community level.

4.2 Policies with utilitarian concerns

A second set of policies implemented by the Olive Branch Food Bank may be identified and grouped based by their underlying framework of utilitarianism. The central

tenet of utilitarianism is that actions may be considered right or wrong based on the extent to which they promote aggregate happiness or unhappiness in the greatest number of individuals. Further, utilitarianism understands aggregate happiness within a long-term context based on consequentialism, where the consequence of actions is the sole factor for determining the right action (Warburton 2004).

Policy influenced by the utilitarian idea of the "greatest good for the greatest number" is routinely implemented within practices of food distribution at the Olive Branch Food Bank. This includes giving small amounts of food to many people, standardizing food hampers, as well as occasionally denying eligibility to some so that others may have food now and in the future. The prioritizing of some individuals over others seems to demonstrate that food bank administrators strive to achieve a morally good outcome rather than simply fulfilling moral rules—the consequentialist outcome being the ability to provide food for the achievement of the greater good, even if at the expense of some. If there is a rule mandating supplying food to needy individuals, then fulfilling moral rules would entail removing the need from as many as possible and, the rule would apply equally to all individuals. This would underwrite the idea that each individual has a right to food. I argue that through consequentialist policies food is further conceptualized not as a right but rather as a privilege, additionally eroding the possibility of the public perception of hunger as political.

As noted, the Olive Branch Food Bank gives out food on a monthly basis and the food given is approximately enough for three days. According to the procedures described within the documents, the administrators do not perceive the food hampers as fully satisfying the needs of food bank users, but rather as supplementing them. The

desire to maintain food bank operations for those in need in the future likely underlies this understanding and procedure. As such, food then is distributed in a manner not intended to completely fulfill the food needs of food bank users. This is demonstrated through their policies that limit hamper food quantities as well as distribution to one hamper per month per person or family. Further, the documents reveal that needs exist beyond what is provided by the food bank. This is seen particularly in discussions of the need for increased vigilance surrounding abuse—real or perceived—of the system. For instance at the Olive Branch Food Bank, during a time a food shortage and heightened eligibility requirements, suspicion towards food bank users appeared to increase.

Interviews need to tighten up - the principle parents will need to bring in their Welfare stub (or some other kind of proof) stating the amount of children they have. The ... apartments are all adult buildings, so people claiming children who live in those building would more than likely be trying to get more food then they are eligible for. (Olive Branch Food Bank staff meeting minutes 1996)

During this instance of limited food supplies, having children became a means through which eligibility to food increased. Pretending to have children, even if one does not, with the hope of receiving more food, clearly demonstrates that the needs of some food bank users are not being met.

The assumption and/or expectation that hampers are not meant to completely meet food bank users' needs may be understood as a response to limited resources. Nevertheless, the choice could be made to supply all the food that an individual needs—although who determines that need would require additional consideration. Janet

Poppendieck notes that the amount of food given to users of emergency food organizations “is determined by some mysterious alchemy of the total amount of food available to the pantry” and “the ideas of adequate quantity held by its founder, directors or board” (1999:212). If a method of distribution were employed where individuals first served received enough food to relieve their food insecurity, the food supply is liable to run out more quickly at the expense of a few individuals being provided with “sufficient” and/or “adequate” food. However, those provided with food would have their needs completely met and today could be food secure.

The Olive Branch Food Bank food distribution policies allow the maximum number of people to be provided with some food both today and in the future. In this way, the policy may be understood as employing the utilitarian idea of increasing the happiness to the greatest number of individuals over time. The distribution of resources through the method of limiting the amount and frequency of food to those still in need of more food, so that additional individuals—or perhaps more deserving individuals—may receive some food as well, both today and in the future, demonstrates the desire to achieve a morally good outcome rather than simply fulfilling moral rules.

A similar procedural approach employed at the Olive Branch Food Bank is demonstrated in the policy to standardize hampers for single and couple food bank users. The standardization of single and couple hampers means that as a single or a couple enters the food bank, they do not receive an interview unless they have certain dietary concerns, such as diabetes. Since singles and couples hampers are pre-packed, no choice is given to those food bank users in regards to food selection. In comparison, when a family enters the food bank, or an individual on behalf of a family, they are given an

interview and a list of available foods from which to pick from. This policy to standardize hampers was implemented in 1996 as noted during meeting minutes at that time.

Single and couples draining food supply--pre-made hampers a possibility. (Olive Branch Food Bank staff meeting minutes 1996)

Single hampers are now pre-packed. (Olive Branch Food Bank staff meeting minutes 1996)

Beyond preventing singles and couples from *draining* the food supply, the decision to pre-pack singles and couples hampers was also implemented to decrease the amount of time spent interviewing and packing. Currently, no alterations are allowed to the contents of pre-packed hampers. The policy of standardizing and pre-packing single and couple hampers meant that more individuals could receive hampers and more hampers could be packed in less time. If every individual who entered the food bank had an interview and was allowed to select the foods he or she desired, the entire time a hamper took to process would be vastly increased. Overall, more individuals can be helped at the expense of certain individuals forgoing choice of food. The use of the word *draining* to describe the use of the food supply by singles and couples perhaps also demonstrates an understanding that others are not receiving their fair share. Again, providing some food to many individuals, rather than more—potentially enough food—to fewer individuals, likely underpins this procedure.

It is quite possible that the entire hamper packing process might be organized only to ensure efficiency; on the other hand, the process may also be guided by utilitarian presuppositions of aggregate happiness within a long-term context based on

consequentialism. As noted, a consequentialist framework is one where the consequence of actions is the sole factor for determining the right action. This can be illustrated by many of the eligibility policies described within the material: limiting choice to some to expedite the hamper distribution process so that more individuals may be fed in the long-term, removing eligibility to some individuals during occasions of food shortages so that the more may be fed in the long-term, and limiting food in general so that more may have some food. In each instance, the long-term consequences determine the greater good: that of aiding more people. In the case of decreasing access to hampers, the removal of some from eligibility becomes a factor by which to determine the greater good. When single individuals are removed from eligibility due to shortages today, the procedure is based on the assumption and/or belief that it is best for the most (deserving) people in the long run, so that the food bank does not run out of food and have to close. Perhaps situating restricted eligibility within a discourse of the deserving poor may make this policy less problematic to implement.

Based on the policies and procedures described, a utilitarian framework may be applied to understanding the distribution of food at the Olive Branch Food Bank. However, as a utilitarianism framework determines what is right or wrong based on consequentialism, it leaves little or no room for discussion of the entitlement to food. Food understood as a right is always a right, regardless of consequence. Food as a right also automatically situates food within the political arena, since a key role of government is the obligation to protect, fulfill, and respect rights (Rideout, Riches, Ostry, Buckingham, & MacRae 2007; Levoke 2006). Food distribution subject to eligibility criteria determined by a utilitarian framework disembods it from a context of rights.

Denying an individual access to food on the basis of eligibility criteria intrinsically contradicts the notion of an individual's right to that food. The policies described, are, through their very existence, presented as options in understanding food insecurity and the food insecure. As such, the distribution of food operates in ways that undercut the possibility of understanding food security and insecurity within a framework of rights

4.3 Community responsibility

An important extension of the discourse of community membership, described in Chapter 3, is the way it is used to promote the collection of resources at the Olive Branch Food Bank. Within the documents, many texts that locate food donors and food recipients within the same community are used as a justification for community participation in the provision of food resources for the food bank. As demonstrated in the food bank's internal and external documents, the discourse of community responsibility can be understood as an essential source through which food insecurity is constructed as a matter of charitable concern.

In some Olive Branch Food Bank texts, the construction of food as a community responsibility may be understood as implicit. However, in others this construction is perhaps direct and unconcealed. An example of the former use of the word *community* is demonstrated within texts produced by a local food redistribution organization within which the Olive Branch Food Bank was a partner. Within this text, a correspondence between the provincial government and the non-profit sector, the increasing concern on the part of the non-profit sector with the government's downloading of social programs in Pembrey is described as increasing community responsibility. In this text, the notion of

community responsibility for providing food insecurity relief is noted, more it would seem, as an observation and an opportunity to discuss new government relations rather than as a criticism or an issue to be met with disapproval.

With the shift to greater community responsibility for social services and programs, the interdependence between government and non-profit sector is more apparent. There is a need for community-based social planning that has the capacity to gather information and facilitate the process of community problem-solving. We welcome the discussion around developing systems for communication and access between your staff and the charitable service providers, and around the possibility of exploring models of partnership between the charitable sector and your Ministry.

(external correspondence 1997)

In this text, the notion of community responsibility is used to describe the *shift* that charitable service provider's understand as occurring to social service programs within the province. The letter was written to build partnerships with the government so that community organization may be better positioned to provide services for the food insecure. The text seems to not only acknowledge the existence of community responsibility but also a commitment to work with it.

The notion of community responsibility is also produced within documents for public consumption. This construction of community responsibility is perhaps direct and unconcealed about its goal of promoting aid and resources for the food bank. This text, produced by a business fundraising for the Olive Branch Food Bank in early 2000, not only locates hunger within the community, but also straightforwardly locates the

responsibility to provide food for food insecure community members within the community.

Children going without food is a community problem, and it requires a community solution. (external press release document 2000)

In this text, community signifies more than simply membership in that community; it suggests responsibility for others because they are also community members. The problem of hunger is not only located within the community, but the community must also solve the problem through community-based solutions, such as food drives and food donations. The same press release, directly preceding the previous text, states:

Hunger impacts even the most affluent of communities and a concentrated effort is required to ensure that impoverished families are getting properly fed. (external press release document 2000)

In this text, hunger is described as ubiquitous, affecting all communities. The emphasis on *even the most affluent communities* could be understood as implying that no one is free from the responsibility of providing food for the hungry, as even those most wealthy of communities, seemingly untouched by hunger, are still impacted.

Another document produced for public consumption for fundraising purposes for the Olive Branch Food Bank employs a similar technique to promote donations from the community. The following text was used for a local food drive campaign in the summer of 2002:

Especially at this time of the year, food banks are at an all time low and pressure on families is at an all time high. This is a result of school lunch programs not available during the summer and decreased donations due

to summer vacations and other summer activities. (external fundraising document 2002)

This text has several connotations. First of all, the association between hunger and lack of school programs locates the source of hunger within the community. Further, decreased donations and increased hunger are blamed on summer vacations and summer activities or, in other words, on a lack of community participation. Consequently, the hunger faced by the food bank users is framed as a food problem that can be addressed by food donations. In this way, the community is located as a source of the problem of hunger as it is not adequately supporting the food bank.

4.3.1 Community absorption

The Olive Branch Food Bank and the organizations that fundraise on its behalf are only one of the participants responsible for the construction of food insecurity as a matter of community concern within Pembrey. Similar to many cities within Canada the effects of neoliberal political and economic ideologies are reflected in increasing reliance on the private or non-state sector for poverty relief. Political agendas that decrease federal and provincial spending and relocate responsibilities to lower levels of government and the private sector situate systemic problems within communities while making it easier for higher levels of government to deflect blame and deny responsibility (Powers 1999). The trend towards the downloading of social services leaves many communities with increased poverty and food insecurity and, as a result, many private organizations take on the role of providing poverty relief.

This process is demonstrated within the Olive Branch Food Bank documents in relation to the absorption by the food bank of the BC Sharing program that had been cut from the provincial government budget in 2001. Initially a government-run program, the program began in 1997 under the government of the New Democratic Party of British Columbia. The program was implemented as part of the Buy BC Program. BC Sharing was created to increase the nutritional quality of food resources at food banks, increase the purchasing of BC agricultural produce, therefore creating jobs, and facilitate awareness of the benefits of buying local agricultural produce. BC Sharing benefited food banks as community members purchased vouchers at the till of participating grocery stores. All the money raised from the sale of the vouchers was used to buy British Columbia agricultural products for British Columbia food banks. Food Bank administrators across the province raved about the program, calling it “fantastic” and stating that it had helped them to provide foods that met the standards of the Canada Food Guide. In a letter to a provincial MLA from an Olive Branch Food Bank administrator regarding the BC Sharing program, it was stated:

...from our perspective the BC sharing program is a reflection of all that is good in our communities, allowing willing and eager donors to direct their concern for their less fortunate neighbors through the direct distribution of nutritional BC products thereby creating jobs. (Olive Branch Food Bank correspondence 1998)

By 1998, the BC Sharing program had raised 1.3 million dollars, with \$312,000 of that total going to food banks within the region of the Olive Branch Food Bank. Although anti-poverty groups criticized the government’s involvement in supporting food

banks, arguing their attention should instead be focused on increasing social spending (Keating 1998), overall BC Sharing was received as a positive way to benefit many members of the community (Communications Branch: Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security 1999). By 2001, 2.4 million dollars had been raised within the province for food banks. That year, the British Columbia Liberal Party came to power. Following a fiscal review of government funded advertising programs, the announcement was made that the Buy BC program, including BC Sharing, was too expensive considering the provincial deficit and would be ended. Following the announcement, meeting minutes from the Olive Branch Food Bank stated:

Cabinet decided to withdraw funding from the Buy BC Program. They want someone to take over and continue to run the program. We need to salvage this program. [Name excluded] is focusing energies on this very important issue. (Olive Branch Food Bank meeting minutes 2001)

Eventually, Food Banks British Columbia agreed to take over the BC Sharing program and the provincial government transferred the logo rights to the organization. In a letter to an Olive Branch Food Bank administrator, the government reassured food banks of their *commitment* to their work. Food Banks British Columbia was provided with \$50,000 of transitional funding for the program. In a letter written from a government representative to Food Banks British Columbia wishing them luck with the initiative, it was also stated that:

The work that you do has and continues to make a significant contribution to the lives of others throughout this province. The BC Sharing component of the BUY BC program is only a small part of this,

but we think it remains an important part and we look forward to this program's continued success. (external correspondence 2001)

The letter also contained the reminder that:

No further funding for this purpose will be forthcoming from the Province. (external correspondence 2001)

The BC Sharing program is a good example of both community and government promoted community participation and responsibility concerning food insecurity issues. The foundation of the government run program depended on community participation, as it required the community members to buy vouchers for local food banks, and in the end, Food Banks British Columbia became responsible for the entire program. Today according to the Food Bank British Columbia website, BC Sharing is owned, operated, and supported by Food Banks British Columbia (Food Bank British Columbia 2010).

In this example, the government implemented a program that relied on community donations and in this way can be seen as promoting an understanding of food insecurity as a matter of charitable concern utilizing community participation and responsibility. The fact that the program continues to be run after the government cut the program demonstrates the absorption of such programs by privately run community organizations. Overall, the program offers options to the community for addressing food insecurity through participation in food redistribution. However, the emphasis on community participation and community solutions effectively disembeds food insecurity from the political arena. Policies such as these distract attention from the root causes of food insecurity. Lack of donations is the problem and the solution—food drives. Effectively, community responses such as these tend to reproduce social inequalities

rather than reduce them. Graham Riches points out that both community fundraising drives and media sponsorships play an integral role in “socially constructing the issue of food poverty as a matter of charity and not politics” as well as helping to “shape the public perception of food banks as acceptable and necessary social agencies” (Riches 2002:653). When food banks are perceived as acceptable and necessary agencies, questioning the root causes of food insecurity that create the need for food banks is pushed aside.

4.4 Conclusion

The generalized policies and procedures of the Olive Branch Food Bank discussed in this chapter form discursive relations with the understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure discussed in the previous chapter. I argue that these discourses reflect and influence the actions, decisions, and overall food bank management. By analyzing these discourses and their application in the actions, decisions, and overall management of the food bank, opened to view is a site to explore the depoliticization of food insecurity and hunger at the local and community level. The malleability of eligibility of food bank hamper services fosters the understanding that food is a privilege and consequently diminishes any notion of a right to it. In addition, policies that prioritize the moral outcome rather than the moral rule further this process, as a partial fulfillment of a moral right is not consistent with the idea of a moral rule. Lastly, the role played by both government institutions and food banks in situating food insecurity within the community serves to legitimate poverty relief as a matter of charitable concern. Understood as a community responsibility, systemic root causes of food insecurity are ignored and,

through food charitable redistribution, reproduced. In general, the discourses, policies, and procedures explored within this chapter erode and distract from potential consideration and engagement of food insecurity issues within a context of the political arena, effectively depoliticizing food insecurity at the community and local levels.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion, discussion, recommendations, and further research

5.1 Conclusion and discussion

Canadian social scientist researchers have frequently pointed out the necessity of understanding food banks and the conceptualization of food insecurity as political in relation to the institutionalization of food banks and their collective interaction with federal, provincial, and corporate bodies. However, a comprehensive understanding of this role must also engage with discursive practices at the community and individual levels. Food banks, as the source through which hundreds of thousands of Canadians receive temporary relief from hunger each month, offer a wealth of insight in this regard. Their role within communities and their interactions with both the food insecure and the food secure make them valuable locations through which to explore this discourse. At this level, understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure are produced and reproduced within their discourses, understandings, and texts and in the implementations of their policies and procedures. This study demonstrates that a common characteristic of many of the understandings produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank is their ability to distract from a conceptualize of food insecurity as a political issue.

Although many understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure can be found within the materials provided by the Olive Branch Food Bank, four frequently occurring understandings were selected for analysis. One of the most common discourses through which food bank users are constructed within the documents is that of an individualized understanding of food insecurity. This narrative is frequently established

through texts that describe food bank users solely through their deficiencies in physical needs, such as inadequate nutritious food or housing, as well as lack of skills, such as the education or job training required for employment. This understanding is also established through texts that described food bank users as requiring empowerment, control, and self-help. Consequently the lack of resources is located within individuals, not in the processes that limit access to resources for some individuals and as such these texts establish the need for food assistance as independent of systemic structures, barriers, and oppression. Throughout many of these texts, immediate hunger is framed as the problem that needs to be addressed and charitable food redistribution is offered as the solution. Even in texts where hunger is seen as a long-term future problem, the act of continued donations is offered as the solution. Moreover, the problem's roots remain located within an individual's hunger and not the systemic processes leading to continued food insecurity and consequently hunger. This discourse leaves little room for dialogues as to why people are food insecure or the social processes resulting in hunger, such as unequal access and distribution of resources.

While an individualized understanding of hunger predominates, an understanding of the relationship between food insecurity and systematic inequalities was not completely absent from the material. Within the documents produced for public consumption by the Olive Branch Food Bank, two examples of this discourse existed. In these texts, the hunger of food bank users was positioned within an economic discourse, particularly job loss, insufficient incomes, and downsizing. This discourse is significantly different from the individualized understanding of food insecurity discussed above as the causes of food insecurity are related to processes external to individuals and their

behavior, choices, skills, or abilities. However, it should be noted that the texts did not have a specific or direct reference to other forms of systemic processes, for instance, those relating to the political arena. Although the texts did refer to cutbacks, which might implicate government actions, as social service downloading and welfare cuts can be understood with the same terminology, the texts did not address the political ideologies that guide cutbacks and layoffs. Further the texts offered an understanding of food insecurity as a product of naturally occurring economic fluctuations rather than deliberate human action. Again, this exclusion of a political dialogue from a narrative of the causes of food insecurity diminishes the possibility of discourses of government responsibility for the production of food insecurity, its prevention or reduction, and ultimately for a solution.

Although no other documents produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank for public consumption related food insecurity directly to systemic processes, there were instances within internal documents where food bank administrators made direct correlations between existing and increasing hunger and government policies and actions. The incongruity within the material between these two types of documents, those for public consumption and those for internal use, point to the possibility of a distinction between how the Olive Branch Food Bank administrators want the food bank to be perceived publicly and what their personal ideological beliefs are regarding food insecurity. While an unequivocal explanation for the discrepancy between these two types of texts within the material cannot be given, the Olive Branch Food Bank's dependence on local businesses and the community for many of its resources potentially influences how they construct the texts produced for public consumption.

A third discourse produced regarding food insecurity and the food insecure within the material was that of community membership. Although there was no text which directly clarified the meaning and scope of the word *community* within the Olive Branch Food Bank documents, the word was used both to describe the local and regional areas where food was collected and distributed as well as to imply a sense of belonging and association. This sense of belonging was extended to both individuals donating food as well as those who would be receiving food from the food bank and signified an understanding of a similarity between them. For instance, the word *neighbor* was also frequently used within the same texts. This narrative was present within both the documents produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank as well as those produced by organizations that fundraised on their behalf. In general, these texts appeared to express an understanding of hunger as knowable, close to home, and real. Within these texts, the only options for food relief provided also existed within the community, that of food redistribution. In this way, the basis for people's food insecurity was not extended beyond the borders of the community to larger systemic processes. Consequently, the discourse of community membership may be understood as detaching food insecurity from influential political and economic structures as well.

The last understanding of food insecurity and the food insecure demonstrated within the material is the understanding that food bank users are divisible into categories of neediness and deservedness. These categories are produced within internal documents such as meeting minutes as well as external documents such as fundraising advertisements. Although the categories reproduced general divisions used in everyday life, such as gender and age, the ways the categories were employed represented

understandings of the food bank users in regards to the allotment of resources. The categories were occasionally used to delineate services provided by the Olive Branch Food Bank, for instance, single individuals receive a different hamper service than those with children, who fall in to the classification of a family. Furthermore, a single category, one that did not represent all food bank users within the food bank's own classificatory system, was frequently used to generalize all food bank users. A prominent example found within the material was the use of the word *family*, which was often employed to describe food bank users even if single individuals were assisted as well. Within many of these texts, the use of the descriptor *family* to promote donations suggests that certain categories of food bank users are understood as more likely to encourage donations, perhaps due to the belief that they are more deserving. Children are additionally highlighted within the texts and images of the Olive Branch Food Bank documents. As children are often understood as more deserving of charity or as more likely to appeal to charity donors, their emphasis again likely represents understandings of worthiness or neediness concerning feeding people. It is also possible that food bank administrators believe that the public may have such understandings and consequently the use of children within advertisements might increase donations.

Within the discussed understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure produced within the documents of the Olive Branch Food Bank, a common theme is the detachment of food insecurity from larger political and economic contexts. Overall few of the documents produced for public consumptions made direct connections between food insecurity and hunger and the numerous systemic and structural processes that create barriers to the access of resources. The lack of this engagement within the material

likely represents food bank administrators' concerns and desires that the food bank be seen as a neutral or unaligned member of the community. This conclusion is supported by the contradiction between documents produced for public consumption and those for internal use, where an association between food insecurity and the political arena, specifically government action and policy, was directly made. As noted, the food bank's dependence on local businesses and community members for the majority of their resources perhaps partially influences their outward political neutrality, as this stance may better facilitate their long-term goals of resource collection and providing immediate relief from hunger. In fact, much of the success of food banks is made possible through their seemingly apolitical stance. As Janet Poppendieck notes, it is their "broad political and social spectrum that gives emergency food much of its staying power" as it is through these means that they attract "people who want to avoid politics altogether and people whose political ideas would not endorse a larger role for government or a downward redistribution of wealth" (1999:309). However, the existence of internal documents that make direct correlations between food insecurity and political action establishes that food bank administrators indeed understand food insecurity as political. As such, the processes that mediate the reproduction, or lack of, particular understandings within documents produced for public consumption represents a critical location for further research.

Since humans, as cultural beings, understand the world through their daily interactions with each other and the environment, food banks play an elemental role in how food insecurity and the food insecure are understood. The fact that on a daily basis countless individuals interact with Canadian food banks means they are consequently

exposed to a myriad of understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure. By providing the public with an understanding of hunger as located in the lack of food donations rather than in structural inequalities and unequal access to food, the food bank effectively diverts attention from the conceptualization of food insecurity as political. Discourses such as the ones described naturalize food insecurity and dissuade alternative narratives. As Michel Trouillot astutely observes, “the unthinkable is that which one cannot conceive within the range of possible alternatives, that which perverts all answers because it defines the terms under which the questions were phrased” (1995:82).

Additionally, the policies and procedures described within the documents of the Olive Branch Food Bank were analyzed regarding their implications for understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure. Three generalized policies and procedures were identified from the document analysis. These policies and procedures were not directly articulated within the documents, but were alternatively inferred through texts in reference to particular events occurring at specific times as well as through overall trends in food bank operations.

The first policy and procedure identified and discussed within this thesis concerned the malleability of hamper eligibility. The documents described situations when food resources were limited and priorities were established in regard to frequency of assistance and level of assistance. According to the documents, for the most part hampers were distributed once a month to all who requested one; however, during an instance of food shortages in 1996, a stark differentiation of hamper services was implemented. At this time the choice was made to refuse hamper services to some individuals. The individuals denied assistance were collectively understood through

categories, namely those classified as a single or a couple and, at one point in time, the category of male. In this way, the relationship between understandings of food insecurity and the policies and procedures implemented at the Olive Branch Food Bank may be conceptualized as reciprocal, since the choices made in regards to who would receive food not only reflected their understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure but additionally reproduced them. The procedures implemented during the food shortage may be perceived as representing understandings of the food insecure: that is, that people are divisible by categories and that when it comes to food, deservingness may be applied unequally to those categories. Although policies and procedures such as these are understood as fundamental to the continual functioning of the food bank, they concurrently undermine the needs of food bank users. The physical exclusion of some food bank users from eligibility demonstrates that need is conceptualized in regards to a limited supply of food as well as to those who are most deserving of that limited supply. As the food bank is operated through the decisions and judgments of the administrators, those who are food insecure have no right and/or entitlement to the food bank's resources. As such, access to food is effectively detached from need for some food bank users, as at the food bank, their need is not a justification for access. Moreover, without an overall understanding of need as a justification for food, food becomes detached from an understanding of a rights framework and as discussed, as a right, food is inherently political. As Charles Levkoe explains, through a rights framework, food "becomes a profoundly political matter, one that enables questions to be raised around the quality and justice of its production, distribution and consumption" (2005:91).

According to some scholars (Riches, Buckingham, MacRae, & Ostry 2004; Dowler, Turner & Dobson 2001), taking a rights based framework to food insecurity within Canada is suitable for many reasons. As Abigail Friendly explains:

First, human rights are an important part of the Canadian legal and political landscape and already shape the way many government policies and programs are developed and delivered. Second, Canada has undertaken international obligations to recognize and implement the right to food... Third, Canada remains food insecure despite its wealth of human capital, natural resources and industrial infrastructure (2008:15).

However, guarantying rights to food requires political will on behalf of both the government and civil society (Rocha 2007). Consequently the ways in which food insecurity is understood at the individual and community levels plays an important role in policy formation and government action.

The second observation identified through an analysis of the documents revealed a collection of policy and procedure decisions that appeared to have an underlying framework of utilitarianism, as they all sought to produce outcomes of the greatest good for the greatest number of individuals. The application of this ideology was demonstrated in many practices of food distribution, such as giving small amounts of food to many people, the standardization of food hampers, as well as occasionally denying eligibility to some so that others may have food now and in the future. For instance, the prioritizing of some individuals over others potentially demonstrates that food bank administrators strive to achieve a morally good outcome rather than simply fulfilling moral rules or general principles—the outcome being the ability to provide food to some, perhaps

perceived as the more deserving, food bank users now and in the future, at the expense of others being turned away. As well, the expectation that hampers will not completely meet food bank users' needs may be understood as following the same framework, since the method of limited food distribution allows the maximum number of people to be provided with some amount of food both today and in the future. Lastly, the decision by the Olive Branch Food Bank administrators to standardize hampers packed for singles and couples further demonstrates a utilitarianism approach to food bank policies. This procedure means that more individuals can receive hampers daily at the expense of certain individuals—singles and couples—forgoing choice of food, as once a single and couple hamper is packed, no food changes are allowed. Indeed, the entire hamper packing process may be understood as organized simply to ensure efficiency; although on the other hand, the process may be guided by utilitarian presuppositions of aggregate happiness within a long-term context based on consequentialism. As noted, a utilitarianism framework determines what is right or wrong based only on the consequences or ideas about what the consequences might be. These policies and procedures, through their very existence, are presented as discourses for understanding food insecurity and the food insecure to all those who observe them—food bank users, staff, volunteers, food donors, and beyond. As such, distribution of food operates in ways that undercut the possibility of understanding food security and insecurity within a framework of rights, again detracting from the possibility for the public to perceive hunger as political.

The final policy discussed within this thesis concerns the understandings produced within the Olive Branch Food Bank documents of the community membership

of the food insecure. As noted, within many of the documents produced both for internal use and for public consumption, the notion of community membership is evoked to assert community participation and responsibility for feeding the food insecure. In these texts, the word *community* signified more than simply membership in that community, but also a responsibility of the community for the food insecure community members. In these texts, the problem of hunger is not only located within the community, the community is also offered as the location within which to solve the problem through food drives and food redistribution. As noted, one slogan used to promote food bank donations illustrates this point clearly: *Children going without food is a community problem, and it requires a community solution.*

The understanding of community responsibility and community solutions was also demonstrated through the decision of food bank administrators to absorb a government program that promoted food bank donations when it was eliminated due to budget cuts. The fact that the program, through the efforts of BC food banks, continued to exist after the government withdrew funding again contributes to an understanding that feeding hungry people in one's community is the responsibility of community members. The production of discourses of community participation and responsibility are part of the process through which hunger becomes legitimized as a matter of charitable concern. Further, by shaping public perception and legitimating food banks as an acceptable response to food insecurity, this discourse distracts from questioning root causes of food insecurity that create the need for food banks in the first place. Lack of donations becomes understood as the problem and the solution—food drives—a responsibility of

the community. Moreover, community responses such as these tend to reproduce social inequalities rather than reduce them.

Reproduced within these discourses are understandings of food insecure Canadian individuals as hungry due to their lack of skills and empowerment and as requiring immediate and long-term hunger relief assistance from the community. Analyzing these discourses and their application in the actions, decisions, and overall management of the food bank reveals processes through which food insecurity and hunger become depoliticized at the local and community levels. As Vincent Lyon-Callo and Susan Hyatt emphasize, it is fundamental to unmask the “concrete programs and policies that have been used to create a single narrative in which poverty and inequality are made to seem the natural and inevitable upshot of evolutionary processes, rather than the conscious and planned outcomes of a very deliberate set of human interventions” (2003:178). As food banks play a fundamental role in the production of understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure, their interactions within society are elemental locations to explore these discourses, since it is through their reproduction that understandings of food as a right are undermined and concurrently frame food as a privilege. When access is understood as a privilege, food insecurity is removed from a discourse of social justice and systemic barriers to resources.

Indeed, organizations such as the Olive Branch Food Bank are part of larger political and economic environments and their actions are products of their positioning within those larger environments. Although not the focus of this research, it is obvious that the existence and continuation of the Olive Branch Food Bank is directly related to government political and economic policies rooted in neoliberal understandings of the

roles of the state, the government, and the individual. In particular, it is important not to underemphasize the discursive dimensions of neoliberalism that, “much more than simply a set of political policies and economic practices ... are also discursive means for conceptualizing and imaging the world in particular ways (Lyon-Callo & Hyatt, 2003:189). For example, contemporary discourses of individualism, so prominent within the neoliberal conceptualizations, clearly produce particular understandings of personal responsibility, accountability, and initiative. Within poverty scholarship these understandings are regularly discussed as producing an individualized understanding of poverty as well as of the responsibility for removing oneself from poverty. Food bank discourses of self-help and self-empowerment and policies that justify eligibility for food based on perceived ability or inability to work most certainly find foundation in neoliberal conceptualizations of the individual. Additionally, processes that are evident through this research include government policies of social spending cuts and the resulting relocation of poverty relief to the private sector. These actions inevitably leave communities with increasingly poor community members. For instance, this research directly discussed government actions that promoted community responsibility through encouraging British Columbians to purchase food banks donations.

5.2 Recommendations

Although I acknowledge the importance of encompassing trends within the food bank actions and undeniably comprehend them as fundamental process of the conceptualizations of poverty within Canada, I took my investigative direction from Lyon-Callo and Hyatt. As these two anthropologist state:

To both understand and work against neoliberalism, it is imperative to also engage with community members in exploring the subject-making effects of dominant discourse and to unmask how such discourse produce particular ways of thinking about and acting in the world that then come to seem inevitable and beyond the power of human intervention (2003:199).

Consequently, it is with this understanding that I situate my recommendations. Lyon-Callo and Hyatt's notion of "subject-making" is significant to the framework of this research, as I argue that the Olive Branch Food Bank, through the understandings of poverty produced by administrators and reproduced within their policies and procedures, circulate particular discourses of food insecurity and the food insecure. In the words of Lyon-Callo and Hyatt, these discourses can be understood as "subject-making" and consequently as producing "ways of thinking". As such, my recommendations are aimed at challenging the ways of thinking outlined in this research and seek to offer alternative narratives about Canadian food insecurity and the food insecure.

Therefore when Graham Riches poses the question:

How... do we ensure that the complex and interrelated issues of hunger and food insecurity become the subject of informed democratic debate and that the right to food finds expression not only in international declarations and domestic legislation but also, and meaningfully, at the level of the household and the local community? (1999:206).

I reply by pointing to the daily personal interactions and community engagements at food banks across Canada as a critical site where these discussions must occur. Additionally,

as concluded by this research, at least at the Olive Branch Food Bank, these discussions are not only failing to occur, but also are being discouraged from the possibility of occurring. Indeed, the structure of food banks within Canada is that of a stratified institution with local food banks providing different services and solutions from those provided by the provincial and national food bank organizations. However, the importance of daily interactions in the formation of our societal and cultural knowledge cannot be underemphasized, especially in regards to social change. As Arturo Escobar notes,

to understand contemporary social movements, one must look at the micro-level of everyday practices and their imbrication within larger processes of development, patriarchy, capital and the State. How these forces find their way into people's lives, their effects on people's identity and social relations, and people's responses and "uses" of them have to be examined through a close engagement and reading of popular actions (Escobar, 1992:420).

Of course, an ideal solution would be a return to the era of history when the Canadian federal and provincial governments had a stronger commitment to financial support for social services as well as to the improvement of social programs and the provision of sufficient assistance to those in need. These mentalities were once evident as demonstrated within the introduction to the Canada Assistance Plan (1985):

the Parliament of Canada, recognizing that the provision of adequate assistance to and in respect of persons in need and the prevention and

removal of the causes of poverty and dependence on public assistance are the concern of all Canadians, is desirous of encouraging the further development and extension of assistance and welfare services programs throughout Canada by sharing more fully with the provinces in the cost thereof.

However, the changes to the Canadian Health and Social Transfer marked a salient shift in how the federal government addressed social services and responsibilities towards them. As was stated in 1995, “the federal budget speech of February 27, 1995, marked a giant step backward in Canadian social policy. Followed through to its most likely conclusion, it would dismantle a nation-wide system of welfare and social services that took a generation to build. Sadly, the policies of the 1990s would take us back to the 1950s” (National Council of Welfare 1995:6). Although, it is argued that CAP did not achieve all that the provinces desired in regard to poverty alleviation, it did increase the quality of life and well-being of millions of Canadians and twenty years after its creation, it was hailed as “part of the fabric of life in Canada” (Osborne 1985:paragraph 155). Such a restoration may be the ideal in addressing matters of food insecurity in Canada. However, such a change would require a major shift in macro Canadian politics. Other ideal scenarios might include adequate income security policies and housing security policies (Rock 2006), lower food costs, more graduated taxes, and the redistribution of wealth.

From the other side of the table, part of the continual problem of hunger can be blamed on the existence of food banks. Although founded as an emergency response to the problem of increasing hunger, they play contradictory roles in the landscape of

Canada: they are both an option for many hungry Canadians and yet, as Ben Carniol argues, a way of deflecting “attention away from the responsibilities of government towards the disadvantaged” and creating “the illusion that something effective is being done about hunger and poverty” (2005:138). In this sense, a solution may be the fading out of food banks, in the hope that this would bring about an increased realization that food insecurity is an escalating experience for many Canadians, one perpetuated through current government and economic ideologies and practices. However, as Janet Poppendieck notes, “few critics have seriously recommended shutting down the kitchens and pantries” and “emergency food clients certainly don’t want them to be closed, although many look forward to a day when they, personally, will not have to rely on them” (1999:309).

Indeed, the desire for transformative politics in response to the many political, economic, and societal trends witnessed in our world today tends to ignite the call for change from above. However, as Gibson-Graham argues, mobilization and resistance do not have to exist only at the global scale, but should additionally involve the opening of “the local as a place of political creativity and innovation” (2002:54). In this sense, food banks are an ideal location through which to open the local as a “place of political creativity and innovation”, since they are crucial sites, as this thesis concludes, for the production and reproduction of discourses of food insecurity and the food insecure. Importantly, this location offers a site where the many individuals who engage with food insecurity may be included in such creativity and innovation: food bank administrators, staff, volunteers, food donors, and food bank users.

Many Canadian food banks, such as the Olive Branch Food Bank, are geared primarily to short-term relief strategies, their relief of hunger temporary, their services required repeatedly, and overall, their actions apolitical. Furthermore, as demonstrated by this thesis, their apolitical construction is facilitated through their own production of discourses. Within this understanding of food banks, a comparison might be made to Maxine Molyneux's distinctions between strategic and practical interests, where the former refers to interests derived from frameworks of unequal relations or social positions and the latter derived from tangible experiences and conditions (Moser 1989). Molyneux notes that practical interests "do not generally entail a strategic goal" nor "themselves challenge the prevailing forms of subordination even though they arise directly out of them" (Molyneux 1985:233). This description outwardly rings true in the work of food banks such as the Olive Branch Food Bank, as their apolitical status is rarely associated within long-term strategic goals. However, an important critique of this paradigm highlights the ways in which it reproduces dichotomies (Stephen 1995) such as, in the case of food banks, long-term and political and short-term and apolitical. As such, highlighting food bank's short-term solutions may not permit an analysis of their intrinsic political nature. As Graham Riches stated in 1986, during the rise of Canadian food banks, their very existence is political (1986). Consequently, following in the analysis of Lynn Stephen, if strategic and practical are understood not as a dichotomy, but instead as points on a continuum, food bank hunger relief strategies, even when addressing short-term practical food needs, can be understood as fundamentally political. In this way, the short-term strategies of food redistribution, a central focus of most food banks, therefore, must become a focus through which to harness the political nature of food banks;

consequently then, their actions can also entail long-term strategic goals. In short, the very existence of food banks may be understood as providing a particularly important and unique location to politicize food insecurity; perhaps partially counteracting the role their existences play, as many Canadian food bank researchers note, in the depoliticalization of food insecurity.

As a goal of this thesis is to reveal the processes through which food banks promote apolitical understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure at the community and local levels, recommendations must address means through which to politicize those understandings. As discussed, the understanding of food as a right is fundamental to this process, since food as a right is inherently political. An analogy to the Canadian healthcare system is useful to demonstrate this point. For many, health care is perceived as a right within Canada¹³. If I thought I was seriously ill, I would go to a hospital emergency. If I were turned away from the emergency room, given my understanding of my right to that service, I would consider this action to be a violation of my right to healthcare. Further, since in Canada, a right to healthcare is understood as a responsibility to be upheld by the government, if I were turned away because the emergency room had no doctors, or lacked the necessary resources to treat me, I would fittingly hold the provider of those resources, the government, responsible. If the same rights based understanding of food were to exist, if I were unable to access food through my own means, I would look to the government to uphold their understood responsibility to provide me with access to food. In such a model, I would understand food insecurity as

¹³ Whether or not health care in Canada is a legal right or a perceived right is debated (See the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (2002), Chapter six: The health care guarantee in *The Health of Canadians – The Federal Role*). Regardless, this analogy is acceptable, since in respect to food, it is an *understanding* of food as a right that is diminished through food bank discourses, policies, and procedures.

a political issue. With a rights understanding, an individual's inability to access food would be an issue of social justice; whereas at a food bank, where food is constructed as a privilege, there is no structure available to address the food bank's accountability or responsibility for providing food.

The question then is: With limited resources, how can the construction of a right to food and, in tandem, a political understanding of food banks be produced? This is a difficult question, especially if, as Janet Poppendieck notes, one of the reasons for the survival of food banks is their ability to enlist "the efforts and contributions of people who are never going to become advocates for a stronger public safety net or a major redistribution of income (1999:309). In the case of the Olive Branch Food Bank, an initial way to politicize food insecurity to all who interact with the food bank would be the inclusion of a direct rights based discourse concerning food insecurity within the texts of the food bank. Such a discourse is already used explicitly at some food banks in Canada. For instance, the philosophy listed on the website of The Stop Community Food Center in Toronto is:

We believe that healthy food is a basic human *right*. We recognize that the ability to *access* healthy food is often related to multiple issues and not just a result of low income. At The Stop, we've taken a holistic approach to achieve real change in our community's access to healthy food. (The Stop Community Food Center 2010, emphasis added)

In this text, two important discourses are contributed to. The first emphasizes that food is a human right. The second highlights the complexity of the issue of food insecurity, one that goes beyond insufficient income to numerous other issues effecting access. A

similar text could be included in the Olive Branch Food Bank's mandates and mission statement or on posters or in handouts available on site. With the inclusion of a rights based understanding of food, when people are turned away due to insufficient resources, they might perhaps feel as if their rights are being violated. As well, when individuals decide to donate food to the food bank, they may do so knowing that they are fulfilling an important political role by helping to prevent a food insecure Canadian's rights from being violated.

Additionally, as noted, the means through which food banks collect food is an important location for the production of understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure. As demonstrated at the Olive Branch Food Bank, discourses of individualism and community responsibility are dominant themes within the advertisements and press releases produced to promote food collection. As such, it is within these documents that alternative understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure need to be represented. Larger systemic processes must be referenced in regard to their relationship to the increasing numbers of food insecure Canadians. Importantly, these processes cannot be displayed as natural fluctuation of the economy, but must be represented as products of deliberate political and economic agendas. Although community responsibility is an attractive framework for the promotion of food bank resources, it concurrently produces discourses that detach responsibility from political and economic ideologies. Indeed, the construction of food insecure individuals as community members is a powerful discourse and makes hunger seem genuine and knowable. But situating the responsibility for hunger solely within the community conflates that responsibility with culpability for its existence. The processes that have led to and continue to propagate

food insecurity in Canada, although they may be present within communities, are propelled by larger forces. Racialization and gender inequality, systemic inequality in resources and institutions, neoliberal ideologies and their reflected political and economic policies, cannot be detached from a discussion of food insecurity within the documents produced by food banks. Discourses of self-help and self-empowerment need to be situated within larger frameworks of access to resources, institutions, and services. Indeed, individuals may require support in regard to increasing their job related skills; however, framing hunger solely as a result of an individual's lack of skills mitigates discussions as to how certain groups and individuals become disadvantaged in educational systems and the workforce and how that then can result in food insecurity.

Considering the role of food banks in producing understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure, the inclusion of such discourses in their documents could play a central role in assisting people to see food insecurity as a political and social policy issue. Fulfilling their role as political advocates may seem an intimidating task or perhaps even a negative one for food banks, but if their goal is to actually prevent hunger for future generations of Canadians, producing and reproducing a rights framework as well as noting the systemic inequalities predicating food insecurity could play a powerful role in shaping public perception of food insecurity. As Graham Riches argues, “the human right to food is critical to any debate about eradicating hunger in a country that continues to lead the world on the Human Development Index¹⁴” (1999:209).

Food Banks Canada, through their ability to provide resources to Canadian food banks, must also contribute to this shift in understanding, particularly as they are aware

¹⁴ In 2009, Canada sat fourth on the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme, 2009)

of the limited resources of food banks and of the restrictive nature of their charity statuses. Although they already provide many resources consisting of templates, sample letters, and outlines created as guides for food bank representatives to engage in increasing awareness and discussion around food insecurity with government representatives, an example of one such document is included in Appendix 4, they must also, as demonstrated by this research, provide materials with which food banks could engage in rights based and social justice discourse with their staff, volunteers, donors, and food bank users. Lastly, media representations of food banks must also engage within these discourses. The education system could additionally be employed as a constructive tool through which to reconceptualize food insecurity as political among Canadian youth.

5.3 Further research

As with much anthropological research, this study provoked more questions than it answered. My recommendations for further research have three central foci: the first concerns the general public's knowledge of food banks; the second involves food bank users' understandings of themselves and of their engagement within understandings of food insecurity; the third concerns the discrepancy between the internal and external document discourses relating food insecurity to systemic processes.

My knowledge regarding food bank operations grew vastly through this research. In particular, I was startled to learn about the frequencies with which food insecure individuals could access food bank services as well as the potential malleability of eligibility of food bank services. In the past, I have donated resources to food banks in

other parts of Canada and participated in community food drives. However, during each of these events I never considered the processes through which individuals would eventually receive my donations. My first recommended direction for further research began through reflection of this line of thinking. While initially learning about the operations of food banks I reflected on how little I knew about their operation, policies, rules, and regulations during my previous engagement as a food donor. As such, and in a similar vein found within the conclusions of this thesis, I query the understandings of food insecurity and the food insecure within the general public. I believe a very important research agenda would be that of investigating the public's perception and knowledge of food insecurity, the food insecure, and food banks. Of particular interest within these sub-categories, would be the investigation of public knowledge of food banks. Through discussions with fellow students and peers throughout this research, it has become apparent to me that many individuals who have never visited a food bank know very little about how the food is actually distributed. For instance, many with whom I spoke were equally as surprised as I initially was to find that frequency of food bank use is limited to once a month. In relation to my research findings, I believe the investigation of the general public's understandings and knowledge of food banks would positively contribute to discussions concerning rights to food and the political frameworks of food insecurity at the community level.

The second direction that I think further research should take would be to investigate the personal understandings of food bank users in regard to their food bank use and the current system of community food redistribution in Canada. As MacRae argues, the participation of a diverse group of people in food insecurity policy work at the

community level is a key element in building food policy in Canada (as cited in Riches, 1999). Similar to the research of Lyon-Callo that disclosed processes through which homeless shelter users, through institutional discourses of individualized fault for their homelessness, discursively began to reproduce and embody these understandings (2003), I propose that a similar research agenda within the food bank system would be helpful. Research could be directed to the processes through which food bank users understand themselves within the system. I believe this research would be particularly beneficial as a supplement to the knowledge produced by my research regarding the discursive power of food bank discourses.

Lastly, the incongruence in the material on which my research is based between the existence of internal documents that make direct correlation between food insecurity and political action and the documents produced for public consumption where no correlation is made, points to a key location for further research. Research should be conducted on why these discrepancies exist and how to overcome them. Is it really the case that food banks can increase the amount of the donations they receive by downplaying or failing to address the larger systemic sources of food insecurity? Are there ways to maintain or increase levels of donations while still educating the public about causal factors? Potentially, an investigation of these processes may provide a better comprehension of what lies behind the decision made by food bank administrators to reproduce certain discourses of food insecurity and the food insecure rather than other alternative ones. Ultimately such research might help to support the recommendations that I make in section 5.2 concerning the ways in which food bank discourses should construe food insecurity and the food insecure.

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Appendix 1 Detailed breakdown of documents organized by year

Year docs. prod.	All fund. docs.	All meeting minutes docs.	All Docs. prod. for public con.	Docs. prod. by other FRO	Docs. prod. by the OBFB	All coro. docs.	All media docs.
1989	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
1990	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1991	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1992	4	0	2	0	3	2	0
1993	24	0	6	0	23	2	1
1994	17	1	2	0	21	13	3
1995	50	28	6	10	101	9	4
1996	39	77	12	57	173	19	1
1997	31	34	14	6	201	14	4
1998	12	9	3	17	14	21	6
1999	22	17	5	18	23	24	2
2000	31	26	4	15	40	25	24
2001	5	45	0	10	40	4	3
2002	13	33	2	11	46	5	2
2003	8	25	3	2	33	5	1
2004	4	13	0	0	18	3	0
2005	38	32	3	0	68	11	0
2006	58	21	7	0	77	38	6
2007	34	12	3	0	45	20	4
2008	0	2	0	0	2	0	0
Unknown	29	0	10	11	39	9	0
Total	419	375	82	157	968	224	81

Legend:

- docs. - documents
- prod. - produced
- fund. - fundraising
- con. - consumption
- coro. - correspondence
- FRO - food redistribution organizations¹⁵
- OBFB - Olive Branch Food Bank

¹⁵ Food redistribution organizations include local, provincial, and national food bank organizations, soup kitchens affiliated with shelters, community gardens, and community food redistribution networks.

All fundraising documents include:

Fundraising material correspondence to the public, government, and other food redistribution organizations, documents produced for internal and external use, media releases, and meeting minutes from fundraising committees produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank, organizations working on behalf of the Olive Branch Food, and independently by food other redistribution organizations and individuals.

All meeting minutes include:

Meeting minutes produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank and by other food redistribution organizations.

All documents produced for public consumption include:

Fundraising material, media, and newspaper releases produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank and other food redistribution organizations.

Documents for other food redistribution organizations include:

Correspondence to public, government, and Olive Branch Food Bank, documents produced for internal and external use, meeting minutes, and press releases produced by other food redistribution organizations.

Documents produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank include:

Fundraising documents, government, public and other food redistribution organization correspondence, documents produced for internal and external use, news releases, and meeting minutes produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank.

All correspondence documents include:

Correspondence to and from the Olive Branch Food Bank with the government, public, and other food redistribution organizations, and correspondence to and from other food redistribution organizations with the government and public.

All media documents include:

Media releases (radio, newsletters, magazines, and newspapers) produced by the Olive Branch Food Bank and other food redistribution organizations and media clippings collected by the Olive Branch Food Bank.

Appendix 2 Staff and volunteer consent form

You Eat What You Are: Constructions of Poverty and Responses to Hunger

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *You Eat What You Are: Constructions of Poverty and Responses to Hunger* that is being conducted by Eleanor Carlson.

Eleanor Carlson is a graduate student in the department of Anthropology at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further question by email at ecarlson@uvic.ca or by mail at:

Department of Anthropology
University of Victoria
P.O. Box 3050, STN CSC
Victoria, B.C. Canada
V8W 3P5

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in a Masters of Anthropology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Margo Matwychuk. You may contact my supervisor at mmatwych@uvic.ca or (████) █████.

Purpose and Objectives

This purpose of this research is to investigate how shifting discourses, images, and constructions of poverty, specifically those pertaining to food insecurity, influence the policies and practices of providing food relief in █████. I have asked the █████ to participate in the project because of their long-time participation and experience in providing food relief in █████. As such, the objective is to explore this relationship historically through a review of documentation owned by the █████.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because it will contribute to the advancement of knowledge by providing a historical and contemporary study of a low-income oriented food program in █████. To date, research conducted on relationship between public discourses and poverty relief have mainly focused on housing programs. However, within the area of food relief organizations and assistance strategies, little research has been conducted and where it has, it seldom looks at changes over time. As such, my research promises to bring new ideas and challenges to the public and policy considerations surrounding poverty and food insecurity that are presently taking place at various levels within the city of █████ and across Canada

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because as a staff and/or volunteer member of the [REDACTED] you are intimately involved with food relief in the city of [REDACTED]. Your contemporary as well as historical expertise will contribute greatly to this project.

What is involved?

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include interviews concerning the historical documents reviewed as a primary component for this research as well as questions concerning your daily activities at the [REDACTED]. Procedures will involve organizing a time and location convenient to your schedule and workday. The method of investigation will involve an approximately one hour semi-structured interviews concerning the material as well as your daily activities at the [REDACTED].

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including time commitments obligated to the interview.

Risks

There is an unlikely, though possible social risk and/or harm if you participate, such as possible loss of status, privacy and/or reputation. However, if you are concerned of this risk with respect to any data you have given, you may withdraw any responses to questions you have answered. Please see next answer.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation will be entirely voluntary and you will be free to withdraw from the interview, decline to discuss specific issues, or to request that certain responses be used only in ways that will not permit identification or to request that interview data not be used or retained. All such requests will be respected. If you withdraw from the study, data collected from you will be destroyed and not used in the study unless you give your written permission for it, or some part of it, to be retained. All data that is collected will be destroyed after the required five-year retention period. Note that if I destroy your information but I obtain the same or similar information from another subject, I may, at my discretion, use the same or similar information, but it will not be attributed to you.

On-going Consent

If for any reason an interview must stop and be rescheduled for another time, or the interview continues for an extended period of time, you will be reminded that your participation is voluntary and that they have to right to withdraw at anytime without consequence.

Anonymity

Should you agree to participate and should the project use information directly from an interview with you, the project will identify you by a pseudonym, your position, and the date of interview. This is the only personal identifying information that is to be collected. However, if you request anonymity concerning your position, I will identify the source of data in a manner that ensures such anonymity to your satisfaction. If no such method can be devised to your satisfaction, then I will not use the data provided by you.

Confidentiality

It should be noted your confidentiality as a participant is limited due the nature and size of the sample from which participants are drawn and as such it may be possible to identify individual participants as well as the source of particular data collected during the research. As such, your anonymity will be protected through the following means. You have the right to withdraw information at any time during the project. Any instances where your anonymity becomes an issue will be dealt with either through the removal of the information or an alternative measure held to your standards. Options may include the use of pseudonyms or the changing of identifying information and features.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected. Any hard copies of data will be stored in a filing cabinet in an office at the University of Victoria. Electronic data will be stored on my personal computer and/or on a memory stick or external hard drive that will remain locked on campus when not in use. Only I will have access to any raw data or interview transcripts.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include a contribution to the advancement of knowledge by providing a historical and contemporary study of a major low-income oriented food program in [REDACTED]. As well as examining how these shifting images and constructions influenced the policies and practices of providing food for those who are homeless or living in poverty, this research will provide a new perspective for understanding the relationship between public discourses and poverty-relief. Additionally, the facts, information, and data obtained through your participation will be essential assets when approaching policy advisors and government personal, since they will constitute first-hand, primary documentation concerning how political and economic shifts impact the community. As such this research promises to bring new ideas and challenges to the public and policy discussions and debates surrounding poverty that are presently taking place at various levels within the city of [REDACTED] and all across Canada.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways. My final thesis write-up will be presented at my masters defense and following approval will be available through the University of Victoria' library system. The

information you provide may be included in project reports, including publications and presentations.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include myself as well as my supervisor Dr. Margo Matwychuk. Please refer to the beginning of consent form for contact information.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date: _____

Participant Contact Information:

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date: _____

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix 3 Letter of Understanding to food bank

Elly Carlson - Department of Anthropology
University of Victoria
P.O. Box 3050, STN CSC
Victoria, B.C. Canada
V8W 3P5

Letter of Understanding

Thank you for your interest in my research project. As my project will involve interviews, in particular with [REDACTED] staff and representatives, my research proposal requires the ethics approval of the University of Victoria Tri-Council on the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. I will submit this Letter of Understanding along with my application for ethics approval. This document has been created so there will be a common understanding about the research project, and the [REDACTED] role in it. Prior to my conducting interviews with [REDACTED] representatives or staff I will provide a consent form specific to the interview to the proposed interviewee for consideration.

This purpose of this research is to investigate how shifting discourses, images, and constructions of poverty, specifically those pertaining to food insecurity, influence the policies and practices of providing food relief in [REDACTED] asked the [REDACTED] to participate in the project because of their long-time participation and experience in providing food relief in [REDACTED]. As such, the objective is to explore this relationship historically through a review of documentation owned by the [REDACTED].

Confidentiality relating to the identity of persons identifiable through the document review will be a priority and protected through the following means: 1) Documents which are scanned electronically or photocopied will have the names of individuals removed or blacked out; or if that is not possible, the documents will be kept in a secure location. 2) During discourse analysis, through the omission of all names and identifying information, confidentiality will be protected. In any instance where an individual interviewed or observed requests to remain anonymous, pseudonyms and/or changing of identifying information and features will be employed.

As discussed in previous meetings, the [REDACTED] will provide access to historical documentation so that this research may be completed. The data reviewed will be made into a digital library so that it may become accessible to the [REDACTED] after the data review is completed, interviews

with senior administrators may be necessary if further clarification or understanding is required of the data collected.

The second component of my research will be participant observation of employees and volunteers working at the [REDACTED]. This component is necessary to understand the data that I will be working with and prepare myself to better utilize the information made available by the document review. This work will occur throughout the time period of data collection. I will spend time learning the particulars of numerous positions including: intake worker, interviewers, hamper packers, shipping and receiving personal, break-down bulk personal, warehouse personal, and sorting and inspecting personal. Participant observation will take place at the participant's workplace, the [REDACTED]. The workings of the organization at present are not, however, the focus of my research. These observations will be used solely to provide context to facilitate my understandings of the documents reviewed.

As the [REDACTED] will provide the written data necessary for this research project, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] or their replacement, if one or the other no longer are with the [REDACTED], will have the right to review the final document for accuracy of the description of the data provided through the document review. I will forward any draft report or article text based directly on this data so that the reviewer can verify its accuracy. The reviewer will be given two weeks to verify accuracy. If a response is not given within two weeks, I will assume the accuracy of data. This right is additional to any right to review that will be set out in the consent form relating to any personal interviews with [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

As this research project is a component of my master's thesis, it will be necessary for me to draw on the factual data as background information and as the basis for my analysis and conclusions. The objective of the analysis is to address the master thesis' research question, which is to investigate how shifting discourses, images, and constructions of poverty, specifically those pertaining to food insecurity, influence the policies and practices of providing food relief in [REDACTED]. It will be made succinctly clear in any texts resulting from this research that all analysis and conclusions made regarding the factual data are my own and not those of the [REDACTED].

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate in the research.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date: _____

Appendix 4 Food Banks Canada: Suggested election questions

Retrieved from the Food Banks Canada website:

<http://foodbanksCanada.ca/main2.cfm?id=10718687-B6A7-8AA0-6C892091CBBD3493>

Sample Questions for Elected Officials or Election Candidates

Municipal

- If elected to Council, will you provide support for the programs food banks provide, and for social programs that fall under municipal responsibility?
- Will you pressure Council to act as a strong voice for action on increasing food security and reducing hunger at the Provincial and Federal levels?
- Do you agree that the level of hunger in our municipality is not acceptable?
- If elected, what are you prepared to do to assist in the fight against hunger?

Provincial

- Several provinces have set in motion ambitious poverty reduction strategies. Does your party have a plan to address hunger and poverty in our province?
- Welfare incomes in this province are far below the poverty line. What will you do for people with disabilities, and for people in general, living on social assistance?
- If elected, what will your party do (or, what is your party doing) to enable welfare recipients to enter the workforce successfully? How will your party ‘make work pay?’

Federal

- If elected, what will your party do to safeguard low-wage earners from hunger?
- How will your party ensure that there is enough money for social programs? Where will this money come from?
- What is your party’s platform on child care in Canada?
- What is your party’s platform on affordable housing in Canada?
- If elected, what will your party do (or, what is your party doing) to enable welfare recipients to enter the workforce successfully? How will your party ‘make work pay?’